

West Stormont's

Auld Times



Festive Edition December 2022



A winter scene. Somewhere between Perth & Birnam Wood. Allegedly.

If you can't immediately identify the location, turn to Page 8 . . .



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The West Stormont Historical Society
The current postal address of the Society is:
c/o Church House
MURTHLY PH1 4HB
www.wshs.org.uk
Email: weststormontsec@gmail.com

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For centuries, thanks to John Knox and his ilk, Christmas was the red-headed stepchild of holidays in Scotland.

Yesterday was Christmas Day, in respect of which Scotland stood where and as she has stood since the Reformation. With the exception of Scotland, Christendom from the east of Europe to the west of America, kept holiday yesterday, in commemoration of an event which is nearly two thousand years old. Labour laid down its work – tools; the Exchanges were shut; the millions of Christendom, in their first place went to their churches, and then to their enjoyments, because it was Christmas Day – with the solitary exception of Presbyterian Scotland.

Perthshire Advertiser 26th December 1872

Ne'erday wis anither maitter . . .

Mssrs Menzies & Sons having sold the Bankfoot Linen Works to Mssrs Gellatly & Mackenzie, Dundee, the new firm took possession of them on New Years Day, changing the name of the establishment to the Airleywight Linen Works. On Friday evening, they entertained the workers and friends of the old and new firms to tea in the large wareroom of the works. The company numbered upwards of 200. During the evening, a band under the leadership of Mr Robert Mackenzie of Stanley marched through the village, which was lighted up with flambeaux at various places. About half past ten o'clock, the greater part of the company reassembled in the wareroom, where they heartily engaged in dancing until far in the morning, to the stirring strains of violins played by Mssrs Thomson of Bankfoot and James Paton of Murthly.

Perthshire Constitutional & Journal 8th January 1873

Sadly, we have to note the passing this year of several Society members:

Alistair Godfrey (Luncarty) Countryside ranger, passionate botanist & unflagging recorder, who last spoke to us about the Woods of Lord Lynedoch.

Miss Lena Ritchie (Bankfoot) A Founding member (and centenarian) who gave many years of unstinting 'backroom' support to the Executive Committee.

Jim Todd (Bankfoot) Former tourist officer in Pitlochry, head of Visitor Services for Perthshire Tourist Board, and the quiet guiding hand behind the Beatrix Potter Garden in Birnam.

"... for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

George Eliot

WHAT DID MILLWORKERS DO?

THOMAS HUXLEY

Looking back to the time when there were mills at Cromwellpark, we may think of the people working there as all mill workers: people working in the mills in a general, unspecified way. However, from the 1841 Census, we learn that the workers themselves chose to be more specific; chose to give their type of employment a different name.

Agricultural labourer, carpenter, mill wright, mason, retired stone breaker, black smith, apprentice ironmonger, bleachfield mechanic, apprentice slater, carter and farmer, ploughman, farm servant, , retired dairymaid, forester's assistant, wood cutter, wood carter, assistant house keeper, domestic house maid, employed at home, general servant, grocer, beetler of cloth, bleacher, bleacher operative, linen cloth bleacher, linen factory worker, bleachfield manager, foreman bleacher, canvas weaver, cotton factory worker, cotton piecer, cotton preparer, cotton roller, cotton spinner, flax winder, linen cloth bleacher, linen yarn handler, linen power loom weaver, power loom linen tenter, power loom starcher, linen weaver, linen winder, linen warper, yarn bleacher, yarn bundler, yarn packer, dresser, dressmaker, drawer, watchman bleachfield , fishing tackle maker, Secession minister and teacher, writing master and finally, such splendid distinction!: private gentleman

It would be interesting to learn whether a linen warper was paid more than a weaver, because, presumably, the warper had the crucially important task of threading the longitudinal yarn from a bottom roller onto which the woven cloth was wound as it unrolled from the top roller holding the unwoven warp yarn. Also of particular Interest was that one person described himself as a *watchmen bleachfield* as I have often wondered whether pilfering was a problem during hours of darkness at bleachfields. It would have been so easy to pick up a piece of cloth lying out on the grass.

The fishing tackle maker in 1881 was James Malloch, 22 year old son of Joseph Malloch, aged 60, perhaps an ancestor of the Malloch from whom I bought a rod when I came to Perth 50 years ago.

Several years ago, I tried to trace the names of mill workers from one census to another, to see whether some mill workers appeared to have increased their income by moving jobs. But as I did not know what each type of work was paid, I gave up the attempt.

MAKE—DO AND MEND

JENNIFER MCKAY

In a box of family memorabilia: old photos, press clippings and the like, I came across a World War II Ministry of Information pamphlet, “Make Do and Mend”. Notice the alliteration making the wording easy to remember and that the title is an order; all very “Keep Calm and Carry On” in style. Other examples of the genre were, “Freedom is in Peril Defend It with all Your Might” and “Your Courage, Your Cheerfulness, Your Resolution Will Bring Us Victory”, slogans which some found patronising.

The “Keep Calm and Carry On” material was never used. The plan had been to display posters in the event of invasion. How this was to be achieved in the face of a German advance is anyone’s guess. When an invasion did not transpire in 1939, the two million plus posters were pulped to make new paper, there being an acute paper shortage. One of the few surviving original posters came to light in a second-hand bookshop in 2000 and that was the first most people had heard of “Keep Calm and Carry On”.

The “Make Do and Mend” pamphlet was published in 1943 by the Board of Trade. Aimed at women on the “home front”, its purpose was to encourage and instruct them in ways of reducing the use of fabric. Fabric went first to make military uniforms and equipment such as tents and tarpaulins; civilian clothing was not a priority.

Hugh Dalton, the President of the Board of Trade, and previously the Minister for Economic Warfare in Churchill’s national government, wrote the foreword. He thanked his readers for accepting the rationing of new clothes, which had been introduced in 1941. Had they been given a choice? He explained that rationing clothes had helped in the war effort by saving shipping space and materials.

The aim of the Make Do and Mend campaign, he wrote, was to get the “last possible ounce of wear out of all your clothes and household things”. The pamphlet covers: storing, cleaning, pressing, destroying moths, mending and renovating clothes and household linen. There was an Advisory Panel, “a body of practical people, mostly women”, whom he also thanked.

The pamphlet has five sections:

- * To Make Clothes Last Longer

- * The “Stitch in Time”
- * Washing and Ironing Hints
- * Turn Out and Renovate
- * Unpick and Knit Again

A comprehensive index includes headings such as: ankle socks from old stockings; blouses from oddments; corsets, to alter; hats, care of; lace, to launder; plus-fours, old, uses for; skirts, baggy; trouser legs, to mend; waistcoat, renovation.



A few quotations from the pamphlet’s 31 pages will give a flavour of its wartime language, mindset and expectations:

“Mend clothes before washing them or sending them to the laundry, or the hole or tear may become unmanageable.”

“See that the wardrobe door shuts tightly, to keep out dust and moth.”

“When did you last wash your shoe brushes and polishers? Clean equipment will always give better results.”

“Now that rubber is so scarce your corset is one of your most precious possessions.”

“Allow yourself the extra minute for getting into your best

gloves the proper way – that is, fingers first and thumb last. Impatient tugs are fatal to well-fitting skin gloves.”

“Collect as many clothes of the same material as you can to wash together so as to save soap.”

“Old dress shirts. Wash all the starch out of dress shirts and adapt them to everyday use or cut them up for the children. The best portions from really worn linen shirts can be made into men’s handkerchiefs.”

The government was at pains to involve everyone in the war effort on the home front. Morale, it was hoped, would be boosted by patriotic activities like knitting socks for servicemen and darning the family’s disintegrating woollens.

Ours was a patriotic and practical family. My grandmother knitted socks for servicemen “for the duration”, in the parlance of the time. Someone, probably my mother, parted with 3d, equivalent to about £5.00 today, for this publication. I suspect they learned little from it. Frugality and good care of clothes was in their DNA. It is also unlikely there were any old plus-fours or spare starched dress shirts in the tightly closed, moth-proof wardrobe.

The Ministry of Information also produced black and white “Make Do and Mend” films which were shown with the Pathé newsreels at cinemas. One film shows a prim middle-class family of four agonising over their clothes coupon allowance, as well they might. In 1941, this ration was expected to provide for one new outfit per year. By the end of the war the annual ration or points, as they were known, barely stretched to a coat. In the film, advice is delivered by old clothes dancing to a jolly tune. The upbeat voiceover shares hints on how to make do and mend. Mother’s epiphany comes when she realises that she could unpick the seams of her wedding dress and use the fabric to make a nightdress.

Another film features a “Make Do and Mend” fashion show hosted by Harrods. Did the general public take this messaging seriously? The lady MC, with impeccable newsreel diction announces, “Here is Mrs Quilty on her way to the bathroom. Her dressing-gown is made of patches of fabric and the lining was once a dust sheet. Her pyjamas are made from fabric found in the attic, probably her great grandmother’s valance.” How many folk in West Stormont would have identified with Mrs Quilty? How many of them even had a bathroom in the 1940s? Next on the podium was Mrs Clark. “And here is Mrs Clark. Her frock is made from her husband’s old plus-fours and half a yard of new material.” The MC goes on, “There is little use for dress suits these days. Mr Weston’s dress suit did not fit when he was last home on leave, so Mrs Weston has remodelled it as a costume.” The script’s final gem is that every make do and mend garment is an “exclusive”.

Regulations imposed to save fabric had a profound effect on fashion, manufacturing and retailing which endured long after the war ended. The “high street” as we know it and which is fast disappearing before our eyes, only began

to emerge in the 1930s. Its chain stores and uniformity were partly a product of the wartime need for mass production. Over the course of the war, government gradually reduced the volume and types of cloth available to clothing manufacturers and laid down strict rules.

Under the umbrella of “Utility Clothing” also known as “Austerity Restrictions” men’s suits must be single-breasted, the width of lapels was restricted, as were the number of pockets. No garment could have more than 3 buttons. Men’s socks were limited to 9 inches in length. A particularly unpopular imposition was the banning of trouser turn-ups. Questions were asked in the House of Commons! The length of men’s shirts was shortened and double cuffs were not allowed. Braces became indispensable. Most elastic was used by the military, consequently elastic waistbands were banned. Skirts were limited in length and a maximum number of pleats dictated. These government diktats forced manufacturers to produce a limited range of garments which, in turn, allowed them to mass produce clothes efficiently and profitably. The industry has never looked back.

Clothes rationing was draconian. In 1941, the coupon allowance was 66 coupons per person per year. Each type of garment had a value in coupons or points, irrespective of fabric type or quality. Any dress required 11 coupons, a pair of stockings 2, men’s shirts and trousers needed 8 coupons each, women’s shoes 5, and men’s shoes 7. The shopper also had to pay the going shop price. As the war progressed the coupon allowance shrank and by late 1945, after the war had ended, the allowance was a mere 24 coupon for the following 8 months or 3 coupons per month.

In 1945 four and a half million service personnel were demobbed. They handed in their uniforms and were issued with the iconic “demob suit”. The men received a suit, overcoat, hat, a pair of shoes and 90 coupons. The women were given coupons and cash. Clothes rationing finally ended in 1949.

My memories of the 1950s and, indeed, the 1960s are that we practised many of the recommendations in “Make Do and Mend”. I confess to never having washed a shoe brush but I have turned a few collars. The memory of the shortages and strictures of wartime lingered long. My family’s wartime habits of making do and mending stayed with them for life.

Sources:

Make Do and Mend

Imperial War Museum

National Archives (Kew)

English National Heritage



CURLING IN THE LONG FROST OF 1897

MICHAEL LAWRENCE

The villagers of Bankfoot woke up on Saturday 9th January 1897 to a hard frost, a bitterly cold wind, and blinding blasts of snow which continued without intermission for the rest of the day. The blizzard conditions never relented all weekend and it was obvious that not much farm, mill or building work was going to be possible.

On the Monday morning, Jimmy Paton walked gingerly across the frozen dubs on his farm yard at Meikle Obney. Only his cow baillie was working. The grieve and ploughmen were back at home and the single servants were heating themselves by the bothy fire. Jimmy saddled up his horse and headed off for the main road to Bankfoot. The turnpike was empty through Waterloo and at the Coral corner he took the Mains of Airleywight track towards Back Mill. From the high point on the road, he could see Tom Wylie in the field below, straining to release the sluice gates on the ditch running off the Garry Burn.

They greeted each other with a firm handshake, both their thumbs thrust into the web space beyond the forefinger of the other and their little fingers interlocked. "I think we're on", said Jimmy. Tom gave a simple nod and replied "I agree. Alert the brothers".

The sluice gates were only two years old and well greased. The water was soon flowing freely into the adjoining curling pond. Airleywight Curling Club was founded in February 1895 and the new pond on the Back Mill Road was opened on Saturday 10th December on land donated by Tom, just below his walled garden at Airleywight House.

Volunteers had worked through the spring and summer of 1895 to level the ground, remove the grass and weeds, line the bottom with clay and gravel, build a bank around the pond and cover it with thick turf to prevent the end and sides of the pond from being breached. The existing mature trees provided shade from the winter sun. The pond was 60 yards long by 30 yards wide and had enough

room for four rinks. Only a foot of water and a good frost was required for strong ice.

Tom Wylie, always a generous laird, had built a wooden curling hut on the north end of the pond to store the stones of members and provide shelter for players and spectators. There was a veranda attached to the outside of the hut with two wooden benches, and there was a stove inside to boil water for tea or hot toddy.

The frost continued and the club members spent Tuesday 12th and Wednesday 13th preparing the rinks. Four portions of ice, each 42 yards in length by 7 yards wide, were marked off as rinks. On each rink, tees were cut, exactly 38 yards apart. A tee ringer was used to mark the circles and long metal footboards were attached to the ice behind each circle to steady the player as they launched their curling stones.

All was now ready for the first competition of the season which was set for Thursday 14th January and most of the local curling brethren answered the call to arms. This was a points game so that individuals could hone their skills on the fresh ice. David Shaw won with 19 points, Peter McKay was runner up on 17 points and Tom Young third on 15 points.

After the competition, members decanted to The Restaurant on the Main Street in Bankfoot where Mrs Peebles provided a splendid beef and greens dinner washed down with beer and countless drams. Amidst the chat and boasting on the difficulty of the points game, particularly the chap and lie and chipping the winner tests, there was much speculation on how long the cold spell would last.

The curlers' prayers for a long hard frost were answered and the big chill carried on all week and into the next.

Local cup and medal competitions were held at Airleywight and challenge matches were soon agreed with neighbouring clubs.

On Thursday 21st January, Airleywight Curling Club played Stanley Curling Club at the Airleywight pond. The result was an 8 points victory for Airleywight. On the same day, Murthly Castle Curling Club played the Ballathie club on the Meadow Bog Pond. Murthly Castle won the match by 15 points. And on Saturday 23rd January, two rinks from Murthly Castle travelled to the Airleywight pond and gave the home team a sound thrashing by 27 points.

There were plenty of local opponents. Perthshire surpassed all other counties in the number of curling clubs - 82 clubs registered with the Royal Caledonian Curling Club (RCCC) by 1897. This included a dozen clubs across

West Stormont – Airleywight, Airtully, Balgowan, Ballathie, Birnam & Rohallion, Logiealmond, Moneydie, Murthly Asylum, Murthly Castle, Redgorton, Stanley, and Strathord.

And there was also a wide choice of curling venues in West Stormont – Airleywight, Barbers Loch, Birnam, Bishophall, Derry Dam, Glenalmond, Harrietfield, King's Myre Loch, Lynedoch Lodge, Meadow Bog, Moneydie, Murthly Asylum, Patter Loch, Redgorton, Rohallion East Pond, and Tullybelton House.



A view of the old curling pond in Scone by Magnus Jackson.
Courtesy of Culture Perth & Kinross.

Travel to away matches in a neighbouring village was a well-rehearsed routine for all the clubs. The players walked to the rendezvous point, usually a favourite pub or hotel. All were dressed in their top coat, muffler and best hat. A roll call was taken of the skips and the three others in their rink. The spare men and spectators made their presence known. A wagon was loaded with the stones and besoms and the team and their supporters headed off for the match, either on foot or in a convoy of gigs. Most matches were played in the afternoon but evening play by lamplight was also popular.

Once at the host's pond each curler picked out their stones and besom from the wagon. All were expected to help in cleaning the ice of any leaves and other debris and setting out the footboards. The names of the skips were written on a piece of paper and placed in two hats. All gathered round the umpire as the draw was made and the rinks allocated. The number of ends, usually 21, and the rotation of play in each rink was agreed with the umpire. A toss of a coin determined which party had the lead stone on the first end. It went without saying that the

rules of the RCCC applied. And the match began.

Soon the air was punctuated by the roar of the stones over the ice and the constant cry of instructions issued by the skips. Usually matches were played in rinks of four players per side, with two stones used by each player. The object of the curling game, of course, is to glide the team stones as near to the tee as possible, to guard the stones of each team member that have been well laid before, and to strike out the stones of the opponents.

Behind this simplicity were complex tactics and a fine balance of subtlety and aggression. There was constant shouting: "Gie's a guard, Bobby. Get well o'er the hog but not too strong"; "Be gentle, Willie. Just break an egg wi' this ane". And nothing was louder than the skip's strangled yell for their rink to start or stop sweeping a sluggish or speedy stone.

The spare men had an essential job during the match. Each carried a bottle in one pocket and a nip glass in the other and would run from rink to rink treating all the players to a warming dram. On every occasion he would score one for himself to toast the rink and wish every success to one and all. The spare men also reported on the overall progress of the match to each rink.

Monday 25th January was the coldest day of the month and the barometer registered 22 degrees of frost. A points match was played at Airleywight that afternoon and the first prize, a broom presented by James Simpson of Perth, was won by the club secretary, Robert Young.

On Wednesday 27th January, the Perth District Curling Association held a grand bonspiel on the Hillyland Pond in Perth. All the clubs within a 15-mile radius of Perth were invited and 40 clubs participated including Ballathie, Logiealmond, Redgorton, and Stanley. Logiealmond Curling Club had a great day and secured second place to win a silver kettle, presented by the late Colonel Macdonald of St Martins.

The Perthshire Advertiser reported on Wednesday 3rd February that "Frost and snow has prevailed throughout the past week and the farmer is not yet complaining. His work is well forward, and his keep for stock plentiful. Outdoor work is suspended and attention is mainly devoted to shooting, curling and skating".

The mixing and mingling of all the community on the curling pond was a feature of the game. The local laird more often than not built a curling pond or allowed the use of a loch on their land and would join the local farmers, ploughmen, factory owners, tradesmen, wrights, shopkeepers, teachers and parish ministers in a match,

with no social distinction made on the ice or over dinner. All good things must come to an end and from Monday 15th February the weather turned extremely mild and springlike, and the frost and snow disappeared rapidly. The farmers commenced ploughing in earnest and made a start to the planting of their new crops. The mill wheels were free of ice and the builders started digging into their backlog of work. The only people who regretted the change were the curlers who had enjoyed the unbroken spell of frost and were able to play the roaring game with much spirit and enthusiasm almost every day for five weeks.

The annual dinner of the Airleywight Curling Club was held in the Public Hall in Bankfoot on Friday 26th February when 40 members sat down to soup, beef and greens, and plum duff, prepared by Mrs Peebles of The Restaurant. Jimmy Paton, as President, was the master of ceremonies and his croupiers were Peter Whitson and Tom Wylie. A wide range of toasts were proposed and the members drank bumper after bumper to the Queen, The Curlers, The Farming Interest, Mr Tom Wylie, Old Jack Frost, Wives and Sweethearts, Canny Skips, Fair Play on the Ice, Stanes and Guid Brushes, and The Tee – What We All Aim At.

During the evening a Curler's Court was held and four novice curlers were initiated into the mysteries of the curling craft. Once the Court was in session, Jimmy Paton was addressed only as My Lord and all members of the Court referred to each other as Brother. The novices were asked to sit in the ante room until their name was called. One by one the novices filed in to face the Curler's Court. Kneeling before Lord Paton they each pledged "I promise to be a keen, keen curler and will refuse no keen, keen curler. I will not appear on the ice without a besom, I will keep my own side of the rink, and will sweep the rink clean – my neighbour's stone from the score to the tee, and my adversary's stone past the tee". And so, it went on in great solemnity until the pledge was complete. After the declaration of the oath, Lord Paton stated "If you'd be a curler keen, stand right, look even, sole well, shoot straight, and sweep clean". He then shook the hand of the new curler with the Curler's Grip and whispered the secret word of the curling brethren in his ear. As the word was given Lord Paton drew his besom gently across the shoulder of the kneeling new curler exclaiming "Arise, Knight of the Broom". The novice had been made a curler and was now ready to take his place on the ice when cold and frosty weather next called the brothers into action.

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"A desperate affray took place last week at Corrymuchloch in Glenalmond between some Excise Officers assisted by a small party of Scots Greys and a numerous band of smugglers escorting a large quantity of whisky. After an encounter in which several wounds were received on both sides, both parties having had recourse to fire arms, the smugglers succeeded in escaping with the whisky."

Perthshire Courier 13th December 1822

WINTER MEMORIES

MARY DONALD SUTHERLAND

Mary was born on 25th March, 1913 in Murthly Inn. She had the distinction of being the first bairn to be baptised in the new Mission Church. Her father was Alastair Sutherland, the last publican in the village. (The Inn burned down on Friday 13th April 1928.)



Late in life Mary set down some memories in a nine page typed manuscript, "Murthly – Looking Back", covering her school days, being a Girl Guide, various seasonal activities, how recreation and entertainment centred around the Asylum etc. The following notes are her recollections of winter.

There was always lots of snow in winter, the trains had snow ploughs attached to the front. The village snow plough made of wood shaped like a "V" with slats and pulled by a large farm horse made going to school an adventure. During winter farmers donated vegetables to the School, soup was provided for the pupils, some having walked many miles to attend. The soup was served in lovely coloured bowls and may have cost one penny..

The men spent many happy hours Curling, and when the news came through that Carsebreck (between Perth and Dunblane) was frozen over, they downed tools and off they went to compete with stones, brooms, a large flask of Bell's and praying the iced would hold. There was a Railway Halt at Carsebreck and all trains stopped to let the curlers off who had travelled from near and far.



The Asylum had a Curling Pond. Mrs Bruce (Senior Doctor's wife) skated round pushing a chair with skates attached . The children were all given a turn. It was a wonderful sensation, one of the delights of Winter Wonderland.

Winter was the time for Entertainments for the patients at the Institute (Asylum) and invitations were extended to some of the villagers including us. Dances were held the rule being that the patients were the partners for the first half of the evening. They then withdrew and the dance continued as normal. There was always a Christmas Party, there I saw my first Christmas Tree and Santa Claus.



From the Front Page:

Winter Scene, a Village on the Way from Perth to Birnam Wood is by Charles Towne (1763–1840) and was painted in 1822. It hangs in Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery.

Towne was well known in the city and across Lancashire and Cheshire for his landscapes and portraits of individual horses and dogs. Although he is known to have lived also in Manchester and London, there is no record of him having visited Scotland. He did, however, paint to commission and may in this instance have had a Scottish client. Presumably, not a very satisfied one . . .

Towne anticipated Landseer by some decades with his 'Monarch of the Glen' (1797). In this case, however, the main subject is a brindle bull presiding over a motley collection of cows, goats and sheep, with some jagged Alpine mountains in the background.

THE GOOD AULD DAYS?

JOHN ANDREWS

Just as with communities everywhere, the people of Perthshire and West Stormont are not all paragons of virtue – and never have been; and numbers of us occasionally get up to no good. However, our ideas of what actions are anti-social and consequently deserve punishment, constantly change and probably have always done so. Just the same is true of society's ideas of the appropriate response to wrongdoing.

Even a superficial investigation of how offenders were dealt with in former times immediately reveals that what may appear to us to have been horrendous treatments were meted out for some of what we would consider to be either trivial offences or indeed not misdemeanours of any kind. However, attitudes have not always moved in an increasingly 'tolerant' or 'enlightened' direction. According to one writer, in 1688 there were 50 offences which carried the death penalty, but, by 1800 there were 200 offences punishable by hanging.

Examination of the records kept in the Perth & Kinross archives shows that, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the most common offences were largely what we would expect to encounter today:- theft, assault, swindling, anti-social behaviour etc., although there does seem to have been a remarkable amount of bigamy. Exactly what kinds of misdeeds were taking place in and around Perthshire during that period? Good evidence can be found in a book of record of the prisoners held in Perth between 1804 and 1816. In respect of each prisoner it lists:- Date of arrival, name, nature of crime, whether committed by judge or magistrate, date liberated, number of days of confinement and 'Liberated by'. NB 'date liberated' does not necessarily mean 'freed', but the date on which they left Perth prison. Quite a number were sent on to other prisons or transported. In some cases, under the heading 'Liberated' is the single word 'Death' or 'Hanged'.

Here's a sample of the contents:-

Christine Glog	Theft and drunkenness	79 days
James Chisholm	Insulting the military	1 day
James Gallagher	Unlawful gambling with dice	15 days
A French man	Could not give an account of himself	19 days
Duncan McGregor &		

James Forbes	For a riot at Crieff	33 days
Barbara Wylie	For swindling	57 days
Betty Wallace	For insulting her mother	2 days
A dumm woman	Drunk	2 days
George Anderson	For bigamy	24 days
A vagrant woman & 3 children	For stealing bread for children	6 days
Mary Clark	For begging	2 days
Margaret Allen	Delivered of a child	24 days
Angus Robertson	For supposed murder 58 days, then 'Death'	
A little boy	For theft	6 days
James Morrison	A poor debtor not able to keep himself 4 days	
John Grey	Throwing the stones off the Bridge Almond 8 days	

It is possible to put some flesh on the bones of these brief notes by looking at the vast collection of documents from the Burgh of Perth records and, in particular, those created by the court processes.

One punishment frequently applied was that of banishment. This was significant because the person affected would not be able to rely on parish aid in the event that they became incapable of supporting themselves by reason of illness, infirmity etc. Such was the plight of three women called Janet Stewart, Isabel Ross and Marion Crockett. They were found guilty of vagrancy – because *"they could give no account of where they resided or how they lived."* They were condemned to be detained in prison for two weeks and then *"to be taken from prison and to be whipped through the town at the ordinary places by the hands of the common executioner on their naked backs and then to be dismissed and banished this burgh, never thereafter to return."*

Note the use of the phrase 'at the ordinary places'. There was a particular circuit of the town to be followed, with a defined number of stripes to be applied at specific locations.

Surprisingly, it seems to me, it was possible to make application to be banished as a way of avoiding what was presumably thought to be an even more severe sentence. A certain James Smith, who had been imprisoned for 'dishonesty', was released from prison after signing a statement which reads *"I do voluntarily banish myself from the burgh of Perth and never to return under the pain of 100 pounds"*.

One particularly harsh aspect of imprisonment was that you had to pay for your own keep – in the matter of food, clothing etc. However, this was not without some recourse.

John Frazer, imprisoned on account of a civil debt, is reported as having appealed for help: saying that *"he hath not wherewith to aliment himself in prison and this is true"*

as he shall answer to God". He therefore appealed for benefit under the provisions of an act dating from 1696 called 'Act anent the aliment of poor prisoners'. His creditor was ordered to provide this benefit (I found no mention of how much) or to set him free.

The effect on families could be quite devastating. A prisoner called Alexander Mc Ewan, also appealed, saying *"My wife and two small children have none but God to look to them, my door being shut, and my wife and myself being very bad with the bloody flakes, may it please your honour to grant me and my wife the common allowance, for one farthing in the world have I not."*

It's abundantly clear that executions were just a normal part of life, but some of the arrangements I have found to be a bit baffling, e.g. the contents of a letter from the Sheriff Deputy of Edinburgh to the Lord Provost of Perth in October 1794, requesting him to *"send your common executioner, that can be trusted on such a business, for the execution of Watt and Downie for high treason"*. All expenses were to be paid.

These two men, both of them Edinburgh merchants, were radicals: campaigning for parliamentary reform. Why send for the man from Perth? Wasn't the Edinburgh fellow good enough at his job?

At any event, they were found guilty of conspiracy to overthrow the Government and their sentence reads:- *"You are ... to be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, there to be hanged by the neck, but not till you are dead; for you are then to be taken down, your heart to be cut out, and your bowels burned before your face, your head and limbs severed from your bodies and held up to the public view, and your bodies shall remain at the disposal of His Majesty; and may the Lord have mercy on your souls."*

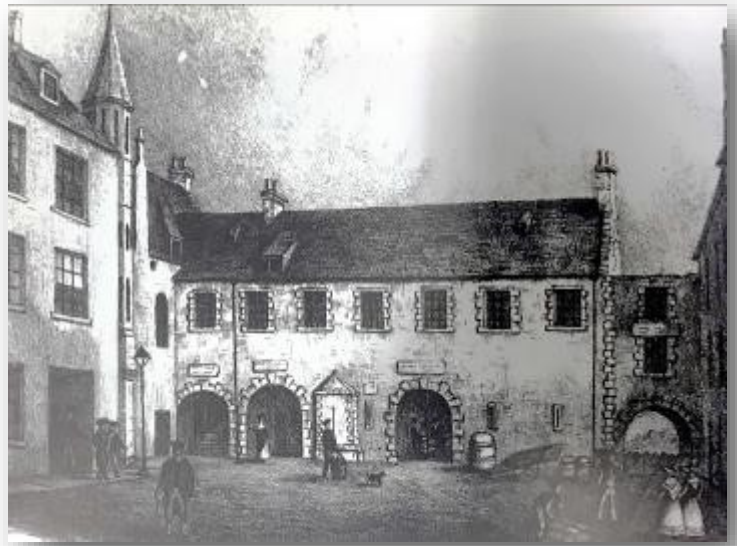
In the event, Watt was hanged, without the rest of this ghastly ritual taking place, but Downie was pardoned.

Some offences were of a rather different character. It's difficult to avoid a degree of amusement at the problems of Alexander Melville, who was accused of putting on the North Inch *"a vicious cow which ran at several persons"*. He got away with a ticking off and an order to remove the beast.

How about the prisons? As in many towns, the original Perth prison was in the Tolbooth, which stood at the foot of the High Street near the old bridge.

In George Penny's book, 'Traditions of Perth', published in 1836, there is a vivid description of this jail:- *"On the ground floor there was one cell, 12 feet square, arched above. The window was raised about eight feet from the floor, and so thoroughly set with a triple grating that very little light entered the place. The door was*

composed of thick double oak planks; there was also an outside iron door. This was what was termed the condemned cell, or iron house. Here the criminal was fastened to a chain in the floor; his bed a little straw on the damp stones, and a single blanket for a covering.



Perth Tolbooth. Image courtesy of Culture Perth & Kinross.

The upper cells were about 16 feet by 12. In the lower one there were three cages; each about six feet long, and four wide, built up to the roof, and of double plank. The door into them was about four feet high, and eighteen inches wide, with a hole for handing in their bread, about 12 inches by 9, with iron gratings on it.

Within were chains for locking the prisoners to the floor, a bundle of straw, and a blanket. Beside them was placed a wooden stoup, which was supplied with fresh water just twice a week, and their bucket with filth was only removed once a week.

In the upper cell, which was usually allotted for women, there was only one cage, situated in the centre of the room. In these dreadful places, with a scanty allowance of bread and water, were the poor wretches confined for months, some of them for years, without seeing the light of day or enjoying a breath of fresh air."

The first sections of the building now known as Perth Prison were built between 1810 and 1812 by and for French prisoners of war. From 1839 it was converted to a civilian prison and several rebuilds followed. It is now the oldest prison in Scotland.

Among the first arrivals were 3 children under 12 years of age, serving sentences from 18 months to 2 years, and 6 children aged between 12 and 16 having sentences of over 2 years.

Conditions there were soon little better than in the old Tolbooth. An 1859 report of the findings of a committee of the Town Council, concerning Perth jail and the condition of the prisoners, includes the following observations:- Reporting on the male wing:- *"In most cells there are 2 or 3 prisoners, but at times up to 7 or 8. The day room is the*

common receptacle where all herd together from 9:00 o'clock in the morning till 8 at night without employment and with very little light."

Because there were so many male prisoners:- *"The females have been removed to wards in the debtors' jail, where, from their vicinity, they have it in their power to annoy with obscene language a class of prisoners, some of whom it may be believed, have been put under confinement in consequence of their misfortunes rather than their crimes."*

And a more general concern, i.e.:-
"There is no separation between the accused and the convicted, the person charged with the most atrocious murder and the person charged with petty theft, the offender who has scarcely reached his teens and the veteran criminal of three score years. All are grouped together in a manner revolting to humanity, unjust to the parties, and which sets at defiance every attempt at reformation. The only kind of instruction which such a state of things facilitates is the giving and receiving of instructions in vice."

I found it a remarkable statistic that the number of sentences of imprisonment, in proportion to all other sentences, had been 8 to one.

And all this nostalgia for the good old days!

FUTURE PROGRAMME

Our Illustrated Talks recommence in January and will, once again, be peripatetic . . .

- Monday 30th January in Murthly Village Hall at 7.30 pm:

Steam Fever & Madness: The Making of Murthly

By Paul McLennan

The village of Murthly owes its existence to the coming of the railway in 1856 . . . and to the 'sweetener' offered to the Commissioners in Lunacy enticing them to build Perthshire's new asylum opposite the station.



- Monday 27th February in Luncarty Church Centre at 7.30pm

TBC

- Monday 27th March in Pitcairngreen Village Hall at 7.30pm

Bridgescapes

By Bruce Keith

In "Bridgescapes", Bruce Keith takes on a journey through history celebrating Scotland's bridge-building heritage. From the Brig o' Balgownie, dating from 1320, to the prototype cable-stayed design at the Haughs of Drimmie, developed by John Justice from Dundee in the late 1820s, to the iconic Queensferry Crossing, opened in 2017, we meet the engineers and hear the stories behind these magnificent structures, which are part of our national heritage.



Brig o' Balgownie

- Monday 24th April in Chapelhill Hall at 7.30pm

Plagues, Pestilences and the Pox

By Richard Oram

MEMBERS EVENINGS

There will also be a series of Members Evenings in Luncarty Church Centre at 7.30pm.

As previously, there will be a topic for each evening. But they will share a common theme: **Myth busting**.

Monday 13th February: **The Battle of Luncarty and the involvement of the Hays.**

Monday 13th March: **The Romans had a name for it. But was it 'Bertha'?**

Monday 10th April: **The specious truth behind Tin Pan Alley and Scotland's best-loved traditional songs.**

