

# AGM Reports DHCP 2014

## **Dunfermline & West Fife Family History Group**

We now feel very well established in the Crypt of St Margaret's Church, and have obtained permission for a small amount of storage. We now have a filing cabinet where we store our books and the family trees that we brought with us from the Archives. Although on occasions we have sat with our coats on due to the boiler problems, this has now been resolved, and we feel very comfortable there. We still have some items in storage at the Fife Archives and we intend to collect the boxes soon to regain some of our source material.

Our membership dropped this year to 20, but we believe that a few of our visitors this year may well join after the summer break. We have had varying attendance at our meetings, but not all topics suit everyone, and that is to be expected.

Again we have heard from speakers on various subjects. In October, Lesley Botton – The Display Design & Activities Curator for the new Dunfermline Museum & Art Gallery, talked about the plans and showed us where Family History would fit in.

In November, Billy Ewing told us about the research he has been doing into the Dunfermline men who enlisted in the First World War. This led into the research he has done into the names on (and indeed not on) the names on the War Memorials. He had extensive records which he was happy to share with us. Some of the members were able to exchange information with him. We are hopeful that Billy will return this year to update us on his 1914 research.

December was our Christmas Party.

In January, Sue Mowat showed us how to research the history of our homes and streets, and some of our members are now doing this for themselves.

In February Lloyd Pitcairn came to talk about Non-conformist records and Scottish Wills. This led onto a lively discussion and Q & A session.

In March Elaine Campbell, who is one of our members, and is also a Heritage Guide led a Heritage Walk, which was much enjoyed by the members who went.

In April we held a workshop where we helped members to find those elusive ancestors.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel our planned outing to the Black Watch Museum in June as we were unable to fill the bus. We are now planning to visit the 'Who do you think you are?' conference in Glasgow in September, if there is sufficient interest.

We attended the 25<sup>th</sup> SAFHS conference which was held at the Business Centre in Halbeath, and had a busy day. It was a great day even if you didn't attend the talks, and wandering around the Family History Society stalls that were there was very informative. A lot of networking went on, and it was good to see old friends.

As previously mentioned we intend to visit WDYTYA, but felt that taking a stall there was not to our benefit (and also horrendously expensive.) but are investigating the possibility of doing so at the Fife Family History Fair in Glenrothes. Both of these events are in September.

We are currently in the process of planning next year's diary.

## **Publications Group Report**

### **“Sir Patric Spens”**

At last we have been able to move ahead with this project following the decision to turn to Print-on-Demand publishing which requires far less funding. Text had already been received from the six contributors, reproduction material was obtained from various museums and galleries for the illustrations by Robert Burns, a new designer was commissioned to do the layout, and proofs are currently being checked by the authors. Publication is planned for this Autumn to catch the Christmas market. A presentation, “Sir Patric Spens and Robert Burns, Limner”, was given to over twenty people at Oakley Community Centre on May 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **“Fire, Foe & Finance”**

Sue Mowat’s review of the social history of the people of Dunfermline in the seventeenth century, gleaned from various Burgh Records, has been completed, peer reviewed, and illustrations chosen. The text is now being set up by our designer and in due course will be published by Print-on-Demand in a paperback format.

### **Other Publications**

Sales of “Jhone Angus”, “John Orrason” and “Historic Dunfermline” were boosted at the DHCP Conference and a “Scottish Local History Forum” Conference, but have diminished during the year, as expected, but there are still sizeable stocks of the first two which will be promoted at future events along with some smaller booklets.

During the year, arrangements have been made through Morna Fleming for the **Robert Henryson Society** to join DHCP as a Project, initially within the Publications Group. There have been discussions on publishing a second edition of “Ane Gude Moraltie” by Klaus G. Janda. The Society’s extensive mailing list will be valuable to promote this, and other DHCP publications.

In a similar way, the **Fife Book Fair Association**, run by Lillian King and Tom Hubbard, has joined DHCP as a Publications Group Project. There was not sufficient time to organise a Book Fair in 2014 but this enterprise will be planned for next year.

### **Conservation Group Report**

The main activity has related to the conservation of St Catherine’s Chapel close to St Catherine’s Wynd. This 13<sup>th</sup> century listed building is in danger of deterioration through tree roots, ivy and other vegetation. It has also become a location for antisocial activities because there is little reason for other people to visit the area. A proposal has been put forward to the Parks Division of Fife Cultural Trust to consider turning the Chapel into a “Pilgrim Visitor Centre” with Pre-Reformation displays featuring virtual Pilgrim Tours of the Abbey, as well as the early history of the Burgh and information on points of interest in the modern town. As a first stage, an initial survey and clean-up has been carried out by Archaeology Scotland with a group of volunteers.

### **Archive and Cataloguing**

The Dunfermline City Archive material is still at the Fife Archive at Markinch and the Archivist, Andrew Dowsey, is happy to continue looking after it. The Markinch Archive will be moving next year when the lease on its building runs out and it is fairly certain that it will be housed in the former Amazon building at Glenrothes, in which case there should be plenty of space for our material as well, although the Committee will be using the opportunity to make final decisions about what we want to keep.

Jean Tait and John Richardson did a sterling job of cataloguing the bulk of the Archive, except for the Family History Group items which that group will deal with separately. We now know exactly what is in the Archive and are in a position eventually to decide what we intend to keep. Our collection policy is to restrict the holdings to material that is directly related to Dunfermline or to villages in the vicinity and most of the items meet those criteria.

Genealogical material deposited by Sheila Pitcairn has been returned to her at her request. There is a collection of coal mining information that has no connection with Dunfermline but may be of interest to the Mining Museum at Newton Grange. Some non-Dunfermline items are only on loan and will be offered back to the donors. Nothing will be thrown away, with the possible exception of a box of used sticks of greasepaint donated by a Drama group, but even those may be of interest to someone. However, I must emphasise that nothing will be done without the approval of the DHCP committee.

## **Graveyard Group**

Our main focus now is the search for flat gravestones in the northern Abbey churchyard that have become covered with earth and grass over the years. Last summer we did a lot of investigation using specially made probes to identify areas where 'something' seemed to be buried under the ground. In the autumn, after getting permission from Historic Scotland, we had a small dig in the northeast corner of the graveyard where there seemed to be solid areas that might denote buried stones.

Willie Greig, the Fife Council Bereavement Services Manager, was very helpful. He arranged for 6ft mesh barriers to be erected to enclose the area and for the turf to be removed for us. We did not find any buried stones but did find that at some time in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a layer of demolition rubble had been laid about six inches below the surface. This had become hard-packed over the years, hence the resistance to our probes. We have yet to find out when and why this was done and the exercise has been valuable to us in learning to distinguish between rubble and solid stone.

This year we are continuing to probe in the area near the north porch, just east of the main path from the graveyard entrance. We know of at least one definite buried stone there because a corner of it has been seen. When we have decided exactly where we want to dig, Willie Greig will again enclose the area with barriers and help with turf removal.

Probing and digging are fine-weather activities but we have continued to meet monthly during the winter at the house of Kate and Derek Park in Limekilns. We had a convivial Christmas lunch at the Glen Tavern and we have actually managed to visit two graveyards. The old graveyard at Limekilns is five minutes walk from Kate and Derek's house, so in February we took a chance on the weather to visit it and were engulfed by a blizzard of hail. The next month we went to Abercorn where there are some very interesting gravestones carved with trade and other symbols and a small collection of 11<sup>th</sup> century hogback tombstones. David Simpson was able to tell us a lot about the early history of Abercorn, when for a few years it was the seat of a bishopric.

Work continues on the interactive plan of the Abbey churchyard and on finalising the database of gravestone inscriptions that will be linked to it. The history of the graveyard has been researched and the results posted on the DHCP website. An article based on the research was also published in the journal of the Local History Forum.

## **Research Group**

This group has now been meeting for 18 months and for most of that time we were able to have free use of a room in the Dunfermline Delivers office in Canmore St. That arrangement has now had to end but because of work I have been doing to co-ordinate three groups doing background research for the new Museum, we have been given permission to use a room in St Margaret's house for our meetings, which happen on the fourth Wednesday of each month. I will be inviting the Museum researchers to join us.

This development is not only good from the point of view of having a settled free venue but it also gives DHCP a strong connection with the new Museum which can only be beneficial to us.

Since the last AGM we have heard from Robin about his research for the new Heritage Wall at Pitfirrane Golf Club, from Jean Barclay about Ralph Erskine and the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century splits in the various Dunfermline church congregations.

Shahana Kalique gave us a presentation about the plans for the new Museum and Alan Calder updated us on the search for the remains of the old church at Saline. We attended the seminar following the archaeological dig on the Museum site and Alan Calder also gave us his personal thoughts on being a volunteer at the dig.

Sandra Gilmour told us about the ironmonger's shop her father, Graham Souness, used to run in Chalmers St and Sue Mowat has given a couple of talks about poor relief in Dunfermline. One was an overview of poor relief from St Margaret to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and another concentrated on the Poorhouse, now Leys Park care home.

Jim Stewart, one of the group that is re-cataloguing the Dunfermline Dean of Guild Court plans, gave us a talk on some of the more interesting buildings that have come up in the course of the

work and Elaine Campbell spoke about her in-depth research into the development of education in Scotland and specifically in Dunfermline.

Our next meeting will be the first in our new home in St Margaret's House and George Beattie will be showing us two DVDs made by Stephen's the Baker about the history of the firm and more specifically about the old bakery at the bottom of St Margaret St that is currently due to be demolished.