

Helensburgh Heritage Trust Newsletter

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Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome!

Local History

Luss Heritage

Only six weeks into the New Year and your Editor has been to three meetings of historic and heritage interest! The first was in Glasgow hosted by the Transport Museum, but on the initiative of your Trust and chaired by Stewart Noble. We have been concerned that the 200th anniversary of the sailing of 'Comet' on the Clyde might go unrecognised. MSPs, Two Provosts, Maritime and Transport Museums, Clydeport, Tourist bodies and the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders now appreciate the significance of August 2012, Henry Bell and Comet. A committee was set up and will seek to ensure that significant celebrations take place.

Then, our regular public meeting was lead by Dr Martin MacGregor who spoke of The First Scottish Wars of Independence 1286-1329. A change to the publicised Battle of Glen Fruin, it nevertheless held the attention of a large audience who hoped that next season Dr MacGregor will be invited back to share his researches on our local battlefield.

Finally, Helensburgh Probus gave Michael Davis an opportunity to show the Reference Library's early maps of Helensburgh. The Schaw or Colquhoun 'fantasy map' was equivalent to the modern Estate Agents computer generated picture of what your new house might look like! An undated aerial view was very familiar. The stages of development of the town were clearly illustrated.

KNC

The Reverend Dane Sherrard, Minister and Luss Parish Church, are this year celebrating the 1500th anniversary of the arrival in the area of St Kessog (or MacKessog, the Gaelic form of St Kessog).

Legends say that St Kessog came from Ireland and established a monastery on the island of Inchtavannach - the island that you can see from the old road immediately opposite the two cottages with the splendid gardens about one mile south of Luss village. The name of Inchtavannach actually means monks island. St Kessog also founded the first church in Luss. Ten years after his arrival Kessog was martyred, perhaps at Bandry, about one-quarter of a mile further south.

Robert the Bruce went into battle against the English at Bannockburn in the name of the blessed Kessog, and after his victory he decreed a three-mile sanctuary around Luss.

When the Reformation came to the area, the Catholics buried their treasures in a small mound for safe keeping - and forgot about them! Around 1750, the army were building the first road along Loch Lomondside, dug into this mound and unearthed the treasures, which you can see today in Luss Church.

Three items survive:

1. A carved stone head of St. Kessog now reckoned to be about 1000 years old.
2. A medieval carved stone statue of a man in clerical garb, now also reckoned to be of St Kessog - this is probably about 500 years old.
3. A stone baptismal font, believed to be about 1000 years old and still in use.

Dane Sherrard has established the Luss Pilgrimage Centre to explain all this history in much more detail. It is in the low building almost straight across the road from the Church, and

well worth a visit.

You can find out more about the celebrations at Luss and about the Pilgrimage Centre by going to the Church's website which is www.lussonline.net

If you are visiting Luss with a group and the church is locked, it may be possible to obtain access. Either go to the Pilgrimage Centre or, if that is closed, to the manse (the big house straight across the road from the Church). However there may be occasions when it is impossible, for example when the aisle is specially decorated with flowers. Weddings can be televised across the world, via the web, using the Church's own equipment.

Dane Sherrard was also instrumental in having the bridge across the river rebuilt, thus providing access from the village to the glebe where a fine cross has been erected, and a Pilgrim's path encircles the glebe.

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Next Public Meetings

Wednesday 24th February at 7.30pm
Helensburgh Tennis Club

Mary Haggerty will speak on

The Arrochar, Tarbet and
Ardlui Heritage Group

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Wednesday 31st March at 7.30pm
Helensburgh Tennis Club

Charlotte Rostek-Davis

will speak about

Dumfries House

The Building of the Victoria Halls

As reported in various editions of the Helensburgh and Gareloch Times - and researched and abstracted by Stewart Noble

By 1885 Provost William Bryson had sounded out a number of people in the town about the adequacy of the existing public halls, and they had confirmed his suspicion that something better was required. Consequently a committee was set up to raise funds for the construction of what at that time was called "The New Town Hall".

Three sites were considered as possibilities. One was beside the municipal buildings in Sinclair Street (presumably where the municipal buildings extension was subsequently added in 1906), but this was deemed to be too small. The second was in Colquhoun Square, but this was too expensive. The third was in Sinclair Street beside the Mallig Mill on land belonging to the Colquhoun Trustees; initially they were looking for something in exchange, but then decided to make a generous gift of the land, and so the Victoria Halls came to occupy their present site.

Needless to say, it was proving an expensive venture. On 1st September 1886 it was reported that the estimated cost had gone up, and was now standing at around £3,500. At the same time sealed offers were received from contractors. A visit to Cumnock Town Hall had impressed the committee with the result that they appointed that building's architects for the new hall; consequently it came to be designed by the firm of J & R S Ingram of Kilmarnock.

One week later the names of the successful tradesmen were revealed. It was also revealed that the estimated cost (including painting and furnishing) now stood at £4,100, but only £2,700 had been subscribed to date. Despite this, it was reported that "the builder has already broken ground".

It didn't take long for the first problem to materialise. 15th September it was reported that "Mr Miller, contractor for the mason work, has asked to be relieved of the contract, alleging that his offer is too low when the advanced state of the season is taken into consideration; his men cannot work continuously in winter and a week of weather such as

we experienced last week, had operations been further advanced, would have caused a heavy loss to the contractor". Two weeks later a new contract had been awarded for the masonry work.

Despite a report in the newspaper on 17th November, 1886 that both the building and fund-raising were proceeding well, the edition for 26th January, 1887 contained a letter from Provost Bryson appealing for funds. The new building was now being called "The Jubilee Hall", 1887 being the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. However this new name lasted no more than one month as the paper reported on 2nd March, 1887 that it was now called "the Victoria Hall" (singular). Furthermore a committee to organise a fund-raising bazaar had been nominated..

The big event took place on 23rd April, 1887 with the laying of a memorial stone with full masonic orders. This ceremony was preceded by a procession through the town which included the following: 5th Battery, 1st R&DA [Renfrew and Dumbarton Artillery Volunteers]; "A" Coy, 1st DRV ["A" Company, Dumbartonshire (sic) Rifle Volunteers]; the Fire Brigade; the Free Gardeners; the Oddfellows; the Shepherds; the Police Commission; the Masonic Lodge; the Provincial Grand Lodge; the Cumberland Band [that consisting of boys from the training ship "Cumberland" moored in Rhu Bay]; and the Chief Constable of the County.

The memorial stone was hollow and contained a set of coins, a Helensburgh directory, newspapers, a list of the names of subscribers, etc. Over it was placed a brass plaque inscribed as follows: "By the favour of Almighty God, on the 23rd day of April AD 1887, and the era of masonry 5887, and in the Jubilee Year of the reign of our beloved sovereign, Queen Victoria I, this memorial stone was laid by John Maclellan Martin of Auchendennan, RWPGM, Dumbarton". [Auchendennan is now the Loch Lomond Youth Hostel]. The stone was "laid in accordance with the rules and customs of masonry". The ceremony was followed by a banquet with many toasts.

Unfortunately the whereabouts of this memorial stone are no longer known, the brass plaque having disappeared. There is however a stone on the west front of the Victoria Halls about halfway up the building which has what appears to be a masonic symbol engraved on it. Is this the memorial stone itself, or is it in some way connected with it?

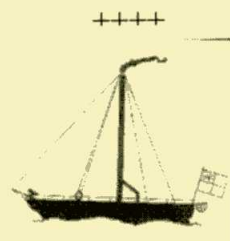
By the end of the year work was obviously proceeding apace and so the post of hall keeper was advertised. At the start of November it was recorded that there had been 80 applicants for the job, and three weeks later an appointment was made.

The official opening of the Halls took place on 17th January, 1888. It took the form of a "Musical Promenade when Subscribers and other Friends may inspect the Building. Mr Ingram's Quadrille Band will perform". Speeches were made at this free event and it was remarked that with one exception all the building trades came from Helensburgh; they were Messrs John Jack, mason; McKinlay and Son, plumbers and gasfitters; Donald Dempster, slater; William Thompson, plasterer; Sillars Brothers, painters; and J and W Bain, blacksmiths - the joiner was McLetchie from Kilmarnock.

At the opening Provost Bryson announced that the total cost was £5,000, of which £4,300 had been raised - and of that £2,000 had come from William and Richard Kidston. Consequently the next two events were not free! On the 18th January there was a "Grand Concert by Lady and Gentleman Amateurs" and two days later a "Grand Subscription Ball" which included supper and refreshments.

HSN

In 2005, The Trust designed a leaflet about the Halls, which is printed by the Council from time to time, and made available to visitors in the Foyer KNC



Celebrate Comet in 2012