

GRAVE ENCOUNTERS

AT KELLS

“I would rather be at a Scottish funeral than an English wedding”

Up to the time of the Disruption in 1843, there were often noisy and unseemly scenes in graveyards. Food and drink were served over several hours before the funeral procession began; in the churchyard whiskey was dispensed, often lavishly. Not only the poor of the parish, but stranger poor and all manner of beggars, gathered at the funeral, as they customarily received dole (gift of coins).

The cost of funerals varied tremendously from person to person, from a few pounds paid by the Kirk Sessions in the case of paupers to hundreds of pounds in the case of Dukes and Earls.

When Sir Robert Grierson of Lag died in 1733, his funeral costs included £240 Scots for food and drink. Below is a list of some of the items consumed, and their cost:

1733							
Decr 29th.	2 bottles small clarit	£	0 3 0	Janr 9th	4 wine glasses returned from Dunscore		
do.	2 flint glasses		0 1 4				
Decr 30th	4 bottles small clarit		0 6 0	Janr 12th	2 bottles strong clarit to the lodging	0	4 0
1734				do.	10 bottles strong clarit wt Carriel & more Gentelmen	1	8 0
Janr 1st	12 bottles strong clarit		1 4 0	Janr 14th	2 bottle clarit wt Carriel	0	4 8
do.	3 bottles ffrantinak		1 6 0		8 dozn empty bottles returned		
do.	3 bottles shirry		0 5 6				
do.	1 bottle more brandy		0 1 6				
Janr 7th	18 double flint glasses						
do.	1 lb double refined sugar				The Wines amounts to	14	5 5
Janr 8th	4 dozn strong clarit to the lodging	4	16 0		The Entertainments to	6	10 0
do.	6 bottles ffrantinak do.		0 12 0	1734	ACCOMPT. OF HORSES		
do.	6 bottles shirry do.		0 11 0	Janr 9th	2 horses of Lord Stormonds, 2 nights hay, oats & beans	0	5 0
do.	6 more double flint glasses to ye lodging			do.	2 horses 2 nights hay, oats & beans, Sr Thomas Kirkpatrick	0	5 0
do.	12 bottles strong clarit sent out to the burying place	1	4 0	do	the smith for Sr Thomas' horses	0	2 0
do.	12 bottles more strong clarit at night to the lodging	1	4 0		Pyd to Charles Herisse, smith, for iron work to the Hearse	0	5 6
					Mr Gilbert's horssees	1	4 6

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COFFIN ROADS

The distance from some parts of a parish to the kirkyard could be many miles for some funeral parties. The old trackways which were used to carry coffins to the kirkyards still exist in some places, and many are still known as 'coffin' or 'kirk' roads. Kirk Road in Laurieston was once used as the 'coffin road' to Balmaghie Church.

Alongside some of these ways are cairns every so often, originally marking the places where a rest was taken and the coffin-bearers were changed. There are tales of coffins having to be abandoned along some ways as a result of treacherous weather. One such incident took place in Galloway, when a coffin was being taken out from the shepherd's cottage of Backhill of Bush, remotely located in the Dungeon of Buchan. The funeral party carried it as far as the hill of Millfire, at over 2,000 feet, where it had to be left until the snows subsided. Several days later the bearers returned to the hilltop and continued to the kirkyard of Kells.

Over time, numerous superstitions appeared around the coffin roads: the coffin must not touch the ground or the deceased's spirit would return to haunt the living; the corpse's feet must face away from their house or they could return to haunt their former home; the coffin bearers must not step off the path onto neighbouring farmland or the crops would be blighted; spirits liked to travel in straight lines, so the paths often meandered; spirits could not cross running water, so the paths crossed burns; you could lose a following spirit at a crossroad, so the route would have a crossroad!

Hearses were at first used only by the upper classes but gradually became more common in lower social circles. There are a few kirkyards in which can be seen hearse-houses, buildings in which the horse-drawn hearse was kept between funerals, as at Crossmichael which is today used to house the Crossmichael Heritage Centre.



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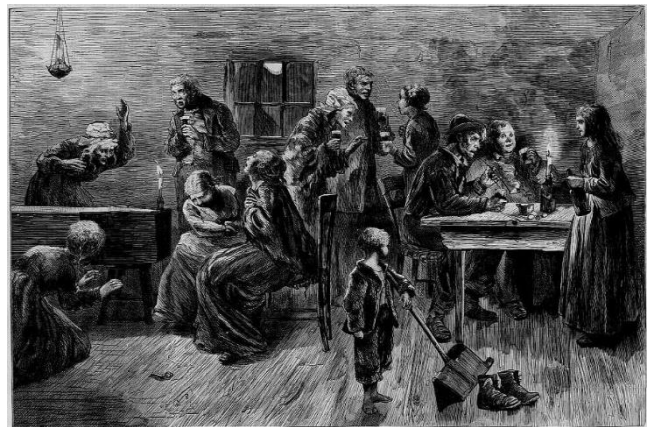
AT KELLS



THE LYKEWAKE

Following a death, a series of jobs were undertaken by the immediate family or close friends to prepare the corpse for the grave and arrange the burial ceremony. One of the most important was the 'lykewake', the watching of an unburied corpse, *lyke* being a harder form of *lich*, corpse. Lykewakes originated in pre-Reformation days, the original purpose being to ward off evil spirits who were thought to try to capture the soul of the corpse for the devil. It also had a more practical purpose in preventing vermin nibbling at the corpse, for in many areas, sanitation was still poor, and rats and mice were rife.

The corpse was generally kept in one of the bedrooms of the house, usually the best room, and the family would take turns at sitting with the body. Wakes lasted anything from a couple of days to over a week, depending on the deceased's social standing.



When the Laird of the Mackintosh clan died in 1731 at Dalcross Castle in the Highlands, he lay for exactly two months and two days, during which time open house was kept for all comers. The numbers of the mourners were 4,000 and the line extended from Dalcross Castle the four miles to Petty Church.

With all these visitors to the house, hospitality had to be shown resulting in a supply of alcohol, tobacco, cheese and bread being brought into the home. The alcohol supplied freely by the relatives of the deceased was often misused, and it was not uncommon for people unconnected in anyway whatsoever to turn up at a lykewake to drink a toast to the deceased.

Dogs and cats were kept well away from the corpse, cats being trapped beneath a washtub, for, should they cross over the deceased, the Devil could gain power over the soul. All clocks in the house were stopped at the time of death, and any mirrors were either covered over or turned to the wall. Visitors who came to pay their respects had to touch the face of the dead body; failing to do so would result in the visitors suffering from nightmares for days after.

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RESURRECTIONISTS

One of the stranger occurrences in the history of our graveyards must be the phenomenon of body snatching - the good old resurrectionists of the 18th and 19th centuries.

With an increase in medical schools and hospitals during the 18th century, there came a demand for cadavers for study and dissection. After the Murder Act of 1752, all executed murderers were allowed to be dissected for medical research but need soon outweighed supply and a thriving black market arose where you could make up to £10 per corpse.

The idea of dissection was so horrifying (it only became legal in the 16th century) that a fear of resurrectionists soon gripped the nation. Volunteers stepped up to guard the cemeteries through the night, watching over their recently interred relatives and waiting to pounce on anyone who dared to appear.

This was an arduous task, and the nights could be very cold, so watch houses were constructed at several cemeteries for volunteers to take shelter in. These would be small structures, and in many instances, they were furnished with fireplaces, as well as windows to look out over the cemetery.



An easier way to protect the bodies from resurrectionists was mortsafes. These started off as simply large stones placed over the coffins during burial, too heavy to lift, but they soon developed into iron (resurrectionists had worked out how to get around the stones!).

Some were complete covers that would fit over the coffin while others look more like cages. In many instances a town would have a supply of mortsafes that would be left over the coffin until long enough had passed, before lifting it out again to reuse for the next burial. For some though, such was the fear of the resurrectionists, that they would commission the building of their own mortsafe to be left on indefinitely.





Resurrectionists were active across Scotland, and newspaper reports from 1824 mention rumours that 16 graves were found empty in Hoddum, with similar occurrences reported at 'Drysdale, Annan, and Middlebie' to a lesser extent. As late as 1852, three individuals faced trial in Dumfries for attempting to dig up a grave in Annan.

The most famous resurrectionists in Scotland must be Burke and Hare, who dispensed with the heavy labour of grave digging and cut right to the chase, murdering 16 people in one year to sell to the medical profession.

But they weren't the only ones who chose to skip a step and there were once rumours that the body of the unfortunate Myles Crow had been taken by resurrectionists from St Cuthbert's graveyard in Kirkcudbright.

These rumours suddenly took on a more sinister tone when John Stewart was hanged in Edinburgh in 1829. Guilty of murdering people to exhume their body for sale to the dissection table, Stewart confessed last minute that one of his victims was an old assistant boatman at Kirkcudbright...

In the end, the Anatomy Act of 1832 addressed the need of supplying bodies and the body-snatching trade was no longer profitable. But traces of this strange time when resurrectionists would enter cemeteries at night to steal away the bodies of the recently deceased are still dotted around our cemeteries today.



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PERCY PHILIP Inscription 23

Percy James Philip was born at the Kells manse in 1886 and went on to become a war correspondent throughout both World Wars, living in Paris before moving to Ottawa in 1940.

Percy was later awarded a Legion d'Honneur (the highest French order of merit) and an OBE "for services to the cause of the allies in WW2".

One of Percy's most memorable experiences occurred when he was still in France in 1940, which he relayed in a letter to his father, the Rev. Pirie Philip. Here is an account from *The Scotsman*:



Mr Philip says that his experience on leaving Cambrai for Paris was that the life of every American and British journalist was in danger, not from the Germans, but from the French crowds. The latter were possessed with the idea that everyone was a spy or parachutist. Mr Philip describes how he eventually boarded a train filled with refugees and soldiers. His uniform excited comment and question, and whenever the train stopped, he, with others, got down to sit on the grass. Two men dressed in the uniform of Customs officers and armed with revolvers asked him who he was and demanded to see his papers. They were very aggressive, and informed Mr Philip that he was under arrest. A crowd soon gathered, and the general opinion was that he should be shot at once as a German parachutist. Twice the Customs officers went through his papers and threatened to shoot him. He was almost completely undressed, even to taking off his boots for examination. When a captain came up he was even more hysterical than the others, and immediately pulled out his revolver. Mr Philip thought that a French soldier had telephoned to the police, and after a Customs officer had thrown his boots on the line and told him to prepare for execution, he addressed the people and told them that everyone had a right to be tried. To gain time he asked to be allowed to put on his boots, saying that a Scot liked to die in his boots. The two minutes he thus gained saved his life, for two policemen arrived, and he was marched off amid the jeers of the crowd. At Liancourt his papers were properly examined, and he was allowed to resume his journey to Paris.



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ANDREW EWART Inscription 264

Andrew was ordained in 1691 and took up the appointment as Minister of Kells parish in the same year, which he continued for the next 48 years. He was the first minister of Kells after the recognition of the Presbyterian religion in 1690 by William III.

One of Andrew's sons, John, was to become godfather to the future prime minister, William Ewart Gladstone. And one of his great grandsons, William Ewart, introduced a bill which led to the Public Libraries Acts of 1850 and 1853 allowing free libraries to be funded from local taxes. When Andrew Carnegie offered £10,000 for the Dumfries library building in 1898, he suggested that the library be named after this very William Ewart.

However, one of the most remarkable events that involved Andrew Ewart occurred in the year 1695, an event which became known as "the most remarkable in the annals of Demonology".

Scan the QR code to listen to the story of the Rerrick poltergeist:



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ARCHIBALD BASIL HENRY MAXWELL Inscription 43

Archibald was educated at Rugby and then became a student at the Institute of Civil Engineers London. There he played Rugby Football for the London Irish. He was induced to help the Cheltonians in their matches against Bristol and Lennox and he was largely instrumental in the town's victory over the Londoners. He was only 22 years of age when he tragically died in the Scotch Express Disaster, seen as "one of the biggest railway disasters in the Edwardian period".

**The disaster was recounted in *The Northern Echo* for the centenary, 9th December 2010 –
'The Wrecking Of The Christmas Eve Express'**

Shortly before 5am on Christmas Eve, 1910, the London to Glasgow train sped double-headed past Hawes Junction, where the Wensleydale branch of the North Eastern Railway met the Settle and Carlisle line, and the Midland.

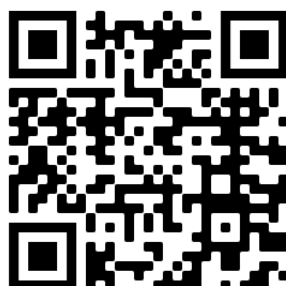
The Helm wind whipped across the high fell, the rain lashed against the windows of the box where signalman Albert Sutton was nearing the end of a ten-hour night shift made busier yet by the extra trains ferrying folk felicitously towards their families.

Simpson, the relief man, was already in the box when Sutton realised that he had made a terrible mistake. Two light engines, coupled together and heading north towards Carlisle, had been allowed onto the main line just ahead of the fast train and on the same section of track.

Twelve people, died in the collision and inferno that followed. Sutton's instruction to Simpson is still chillingly recalled:

"Go tell Bunce (the station master) that I am afraid I have wrecked the Scotch Express."

A song about the event was also written to mark the centenary:



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JOHN MURRAY

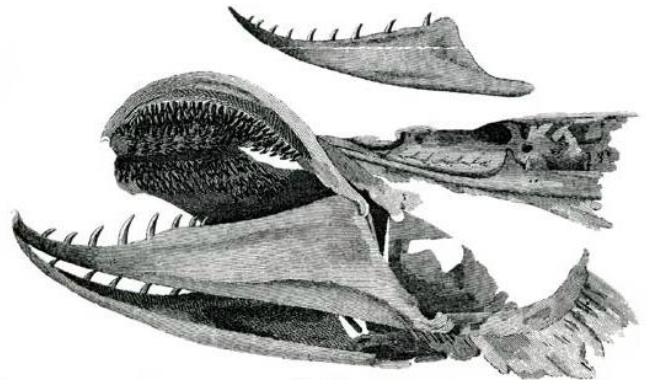
Inscription 314

John Murray died on 3 January 1777, aged 61 years. For 46 years he had been employed by Lord Gordon at Kenmure Castle as factor/gamekeeper. There is an affectionate poem on the reverse of the tombstone:

*Ah John what changes since I saw thee last.
Thy fishing and thy shooting days are past.
Bagpipes and Hautboys thou canst sound no more.
Thy nods, grimaces, winks and pranks are o'er.
Thy harmless, queerish, incoherent talk,
Thy wild vivacity and trudging walk,
Will soon be quite forgot. Thy joys on earth -
A snuff, a glass, riddles and noise of mirth -
Are vanished, all. Yet blest I hope thou art
For in thy station, weel thou play'dst thy part.*

A competition was held by the Honourable John Gordon, Murray's employer, to compose this epitaph poem, which was won by the local minister.

There is one magnificent story featuring Murray that is mentioned in several places – his capture in 1774 at Loch Ken, after a long and fierce struggle, of a monster pike fish, at 72lbs (again, this varies between accounts) and some 7ft long, the largest pike on record ever captured. According to *Monuments and Monumental inscriptions in Scotland, Vol 3*, "...elated by his achievement, John walked into the dining-room holding the pike's head over his shoulder, while the tail dragged on the floor. Stepping up to his master, he threw down the fish before him, saying, 'You may catch the next yoursel', my lord.' No such pike has before or since been caught in any part of Britain."



Scale of inches

Original of the Kenmure pike skull.