

# STANEHYVE ·TOLBOOTH TIMES·



Shorehead, Stonehaven circa 1900



## Editorial

We have all had to deal with this year's Corona virus pandemic in different ways and learned how to adjust to a new way of life. Checking that you have a facemask in your pocket before you leave home is now becoming routine and using contactless payments is the norm. Throughout these several months, I trust you have all been keeping safe and well.

Whilst the Tolbooth Museum has been open sporadically in the last few months, it has not been possible to fully reopen the museum. We are slowly trying to re-open at weekends only, but both volunteers and visitors are understandably hesitant given the ongoing Covid-19 situation. We will need to wait and see what the future holds.

In the meantime, I have received the new display panels for the Museum and have been busy working on updating the large collection of old photographs originally held by the Heritage Society. This is a big exercise and if anyone has an interest in old photos and has the computer skills to help with this task, please let me know.

This edition of the newsletter continues to explore the various guides written about Stonehaven and gives insights to our town in a bygone age. As I write this looking out on a grey rainy day, the Guide titled Catch the Sun at Stonehaven seems very optimistic.

Keep safe.

Gordon Ritchie, MVO

Editor

**Cover photo**—a busy view of Shorehead around 1900 with a lot of activity, fishing boats, fish workers and lots of barrels. The Ship Inn can be seen and the buildings on the Old Pier and the Tolbooth look the same as today.

This is from the Heritage Society collection now held by the Tolbooth Museum and, when the new display panels are installed, will be one of many photos on show.



## Museum Snippets

Although the Museum has been closed since mid-March , life continues behind the scenes.



In April we received **£1,490** from the Co-op Community Fund and once the pandemic has run its course we will be able to spend this grant on pre-agreed items, e.g. better equipment for our outreach work.

During August ,Museum Galleries Scotland (MGS) was anxious to get Scottish museums operational again and they provided us with a grant of **£750** to pay for PPE and other items that were required before we could re-open. This grant was most welcome and allowed us to adapt the museum so that we were legally allowed to start receiving visitors again. Unfortunately as soon as we re-opened (nothing to do with us) Aberdeen went into lockdown and we had to close again for a period.

In September we obtained **£2,500** from the Coastal Community Fund to pay for half the cost of two new projects. Dennis Collie has taken the idea of the Pebble booklet to a higher plane and has been co-ordinating and editing a 40 page booklet which families can use on the beach to identify a wide range of geological specimens, the birds likely to be encountered and marine life in the intertidal zone. It is anticipated the initial print run will be 500 and the book should be a good seller next season. Gordon Ritchie has been busy on new display panels and story boards and we should see these in the museum at the start of 2021.

Currently MGS are operating a Recovery and Resilience Fund and have £4M to dispense before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. MGS have been in touch with ourselves and are keen that we make an application along the lines of recent phone conversations. However, any application is time consuming and if successful would involve commitment from either trustees and/or volunteers in the first 3 months of 2021. Applying for this grant requires careful thought. *Contact Secretary Andrew Newton if you would like further details.*

Our website has been operational throughout the pandemic and we have received a number of interesting requests for local information. A request from Brazil was seeking permission to publish the museum image of *Pneumodesmus newmani* in a technical book. Information was requested on a Jean Stiven, closely linked to the Episcopal Church in the 1750's. Earlier in the summer, information was requested on a James Laing, born in Stonehaven in 1815 and convicted of theft and transported to Australia. *If you have any interest in genealogy and want to help with such requests, please get in touch with Secretary—Andrew Newton .*



## Guides to Stonehaven Part 2 (continued)

By Gordon Ritchie

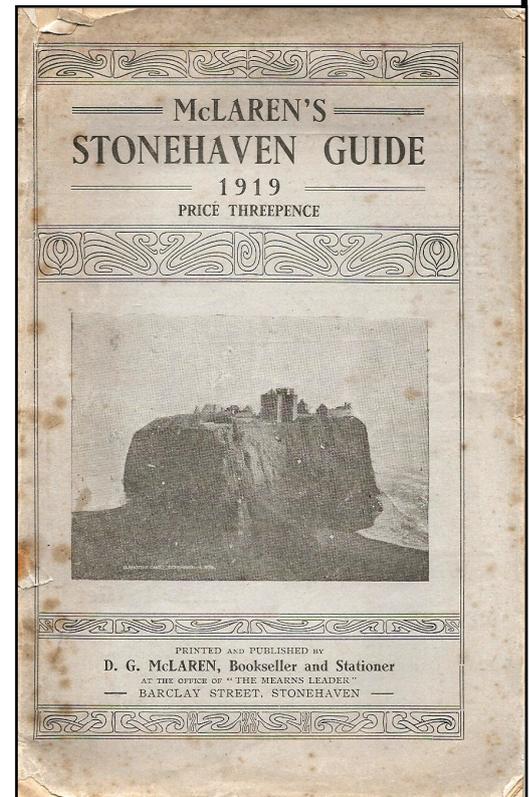
**McLaren's Stonehaven Guide 1919** was published by D.G. McLaren, publishers of the Mearns Leader, 57 Barclay St and was 34 pages long—with 19 pages being advertisements.

Issued just after the first world War, presumably with the intention of attracting visitors back to the town, it follows the usual format. Stonehaven is described as the ideal summer resort with its bracing air, indeed it goes on to say—*one of the chief summer residential haunts in Scotland*. The visitor s taken on a historical tour of the town. In addition to tennis and bowls, the Recreation grounds had facilities for croquet. A charabanc ran every hour from the Market Square to the Golf Club. There was a Newsroom in the Town Hall where newspapers could be read and the Literary Society Library was also kept there.

The adverts were for all the main businesses and shops in the town.

Sydney S. Smith , Family Grocer was at 9 Bridgefield and the finest summer footwear could be seen at Dundee Equitable Boot Depot on Evan St. . The Stonehaven Motor Garage Ltd., was at 12 High St. (opposite Dunnottar School) , open day and night and could supply any make of car.!

All of these guides offer positive uplifting descriptions of what Stonehaven had to offer. A lot of the attractions and businesses mentioned are still with us today. With that in mind, should 2021 perhaps be the year where our town is again celebrated for being '*one of the chief summer residential haunts in Scotland*'?'





## Guides to Stonehaven—Part 2 (continued)

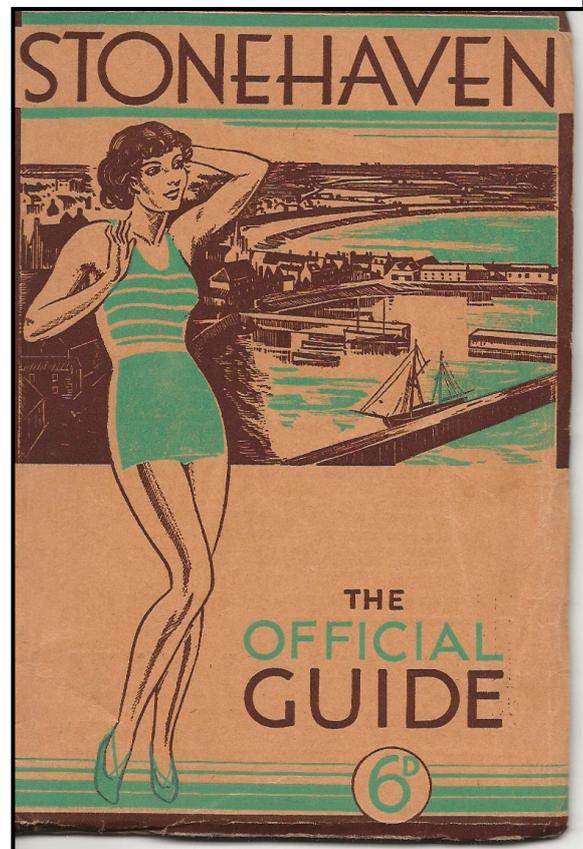
*Stonehaven the Official Guide*, was published in 1939 with a cover showing a traditional view of the Harbour and a long-legged bathing beauty, presumably to represent the Outdoor Pool which had been opened only 5 years earlier.

The introduction is again by Dr. Charles Burns. He waxes eloquently on the setting of the town, the historical connections and its climate almost unequalled for its bracing and tonic qualities.

*There is nothing relaxing or sub-tropical in its atmosphere, but a kindly stimulating warmth. It is an ideal resort for the convalescent, for the business man or maid from the less invigorating west or south.*

The reputation as a health resort had shaped the policy of Stonehaven Town Council in developments and improvements, with catering for the visitor having become of prime importance.

*We have here the only heated open-air swimming pool in Scotland where the water temperature is varied to suit that of the atmosphere. It is well staffed and is as safe and hygienic as man can make it. When we play golf, play cricket, boat or fish on land or sea or sit upon the new esplanade in peaceful reverie, let one's mind, fancy free, conjure up mirages in the silvery sheen of the North Sea. When the evening falls, if you are young in heart and limb, you may dance, if your fancy leans to harmony and variety it is there for you. If you prefer the screen with the latest in comfort and pictures, it is yours.*



The remainder of the Guide follows the standard format, with details of the history of the town, the main buildings of both the New Town and the Old Town and the Harbour. The Esplanade had only been completed the previous year 1938, running from the south end of the Recreation Grounds, to the north end of the swimming pool buildings, much as we still have it today. It was expected that the substantial structure, unlike two previous proms, would withstand the elements for many years to come. Sea bathing had of course been replaced by the swimming pool, opened on 2nd June 1934.



## Guides to Stonehaven Part 2 (continued)

*The changing rooms have provision for 500 bathers, with heating provided, a feature to be found in very few outdoor pools. The pool forms a perfect rectangle 55 yards by 20 yards and holding 325,000 gallons of sea water which is added to daily. The water depth at the shallow end is 2 ft 9" with a gentle slope towards the centre to 4ft.; from there the slope is more acute, dropping to 9ft 6" at the diving pit. Great facilities are offered to diving enthusiasts, the steps of stage being easily graded to a height of 20ft. Two international springboards are also provided at 1 and 3 metres respectively. Seating on both sides of the pool is comfortable and there is accommodation for 2,000.*



First class entertainments were given during the summer months in the Beach Pavilion, a handsome and spacious building erected by the Town Council in 1930. The Picture House in Allardice Street was roomy and well furnished and appointed with a high class show of films. Dances were held on Wednesdays and Fridays in the Town Hall, under the auspices of the Town Council, with the additional attraction of a Cabaret Show on Wednesday evenings.

Details are given of walks and motoring excursions from the town with reference to Dunnottar Castle, Fetteresso Castle and Ury House.

The adverts are interesting with many photographs.

- The Heugh Hotel was Stonehaven's newest first class hotel with 3 acres of grounds including private tennis court, putting green and croquet lawn.
- The Eldergrove Private hotel in Arduthie Road was a first class old established board residence noted for comfort and cuisine.
- F.K. Murray, Tailor at 78 Barclay Street offered everything in men's sports wear.
- Duncan C Main, Wholesaler and Retail Tea and Provision Merchant, 55 Allardice Street offered a country van service.
- The Brae Board Residence in Gurney Street offered comfortable bedrooms, liberal tables and a midday lunch under the supervision of Mrs. Morgan.



## Guides to Stonehaven Part 2 (continued)

What was probably one of the first post-war Guides for Stonehaven is entitled ‘*Catch the sun in Stonehaven*’. The striking cover is illustrated and in two colours and shows an other long-legged beauty in a bikini reaching towards the sun over the sea. She must have

been an early riser to catch the sun, as of course you can only see the sun over the sea at sunrise in Stonehaven—but perhaps that was just artistic licence.

On looking at the cover, you might have thought that this Guide would date from the 1960’s, but surprisingly it was published in 1949, not that long after the end of the Second World War.

This was a much more professional Guide, published for the Town Council by Travel Press of 41 George Street, Edinburgh. It extends to 52 pages, of which 24 were advertising and with photographs on most of the editorial pages.

The text is by Rhoda Spence, and in what is really very colourful language, she describes the town and its attractions. The Market Square she describes as:-



*Though it is really quite spacious, it has something of the engaging quality of a good toy that has been carefully cherished by a model Victorian child. The perky spire of the Market Buildings which dominates the scene, the prosperous air of the shops, and the trimness of the trees which border the Square, all contribute to this pleasant illusion. When dusk falls, it intrigues the visitor afresh, by assuming that strangely continental look that all Scots east coast towns wear at times. Then the lamps twinkle through the foliage, the clock on the Market Buildings is lit up, and as people are released from work, they gather round to chat. It only needs the striped umbrellas of a wayside cafe, the clatter of sabots, the tinkling of a slightly cracked waltz tune as the bell chimes the hour, to transport the whole scene to the other side of the English Channel. But in no continental resort would such a pure champagne-like air fill your lungs as you turn out of the Market Square into Allardice Street to strike seawards.*



## Guides to Stonehaven Part 2 (continued)

Rhoda Spence must have really liked the town as this is an other of her poetic descriptions of Stonehaven.

*Stonehaven has taken nature's endowments of site—the sheltering rise of the brae to the countryside beyond, the romantic embrace of two rivers, the Carron and the Cowie, the bold sweep of the sea coasts carved by wind and wave into a hundred impressive rock shapes—and has enhanced the wholesome beauties of the place with comfortable houses set in mellow gardens with a well appointed progressive shopping centre, and those simple aids to enjoyment that add up the sum total of a successful holiday.*

Several pages are given to the proud history of Stonehaven. There is a description of country walks — *You may walk up into the coolness of Dunnottar Woods, along winding aisles of shadow shot with gold.*

Dunnottar churchyard is given the following description by Ms Spence — *a feeling of age, the spirit of other generations lingers here, in that atmosphere of timelessness which none but such a place can hold, and the glimmer of gray stone and moss, pale against the darker green of yew trees, make it like an engraving in some forgotten book. Among the headstones are the records of simple lives, not indeed that they are all devoid of adventure, for what city churchyard could equal the intriguing clue to the story of Rebecca Ferguson, wife of Andrew Kennedy of the 79th Cameron Highlanders, who 'accompanied him to the Battle of Waterloo' and what is more, came back safely to die in peace at Stonehaven on 25th November 1861.*

Dunnottar' Castle's stormy story is given yet again with details of excursions from Stonehaven. She tells again the story of the Covenanters imprisoned in the Whigs Vault and concludes—*but now turn from this unhappy memory, this record of man's inhumanity to man with which our own age is only too familiar. It is summer at Dunnottar, on a tall rock beyond the Castle cluster the gulls. The sea is a deep warm blue, St. Ninian's Den is fringed with wild flowers. And when twilight comes, the journey back to Stonehaven can be happily occupied with plans for tomorrow and tomorrow as long as your holiday endures.....for there yet lie before you many highways and byways for exploration, countless' green days in forests and blue days at sea'.*

The advertisements are still interesting with Hugh Ramsay having been the centre of Stonehaven for over 100 years. Expert photo developing and printing was given by John Craig, Chemist and Optician at 27 Evan St.. For sunburn, tan, freckles and roughened skin, use his famous 'Braemar Cream', non-sticky and non-greasy. The leading hotel was the Bay Hotel, beautifully situated overlooking the sea with 40 bedrooms, spacious public rooms and unique cocktail lounge.



## Guides to Stonehaven Part 2 (continued)

Further adverts are for the St. Leonard's Hotel which is close to the beach, swimming pool, golf course and tennis courts. Fetteresso Castle Guest House retained its historic atmosphere but offered every comfort and convenience consistent with modern standards. The proprietors, Mrs. Chrystal Muir and Miss Geraldine Muir offered excellent food with terms from 6 guineas to 8 guineas per week. The climax to a day was visiting Freddy's Valencia Fish Restaurant at 2 Barclay Street. The Sports Emporium (D.B.Couper, Proprietor) was the place for fishing tackle and also an agent for Meccano at 74 Barclay St. For a taxi you could phone Stonehaven 83 to J. Johnstone, Taxi Office at 14 Barclay Street.



A fine photo of the new Stonehaven Pool floodlit for Midnight Bathing.  
From the collection of the late Richard Hogg, first pool Superintendent in 1934.  
His story is included on the new display panel on Stonehaven Pool currently being prepared for the Tolbooth Museum.



## Tolbooth Artefacts

*The first in an infrequent series which will explore the history of some of our items on display*

By Andrew Newton

Nearly everyone knows the story of Robinson Crusoe but how many people know that the museum has a tenuous link to this famous fictional character.

Robinson Crusoe is a fictional character in a book written by Daniel Defoe, first published in 1719. In this famous book, Robinson Crusoe is shipwrecked and marooned on an island surviving alone until he meets up with Man Friday, another inhabitant of the island. The story by Defoe, however, was based on the real life experiences of a Scottish seaman called Alexander Selkirk.

Born in 1676, the seventh son of a cobbler, Alexander Selkirk grew up in Lower Largo, Fife. At the age of 19 he found himself in trouble with the Kirk Session after his brother Andrew laughed when Alexander mistakenly took a drink of salt water out of a can. In the ensuing fight Alexander beat up another brother, his father and a sister in law. Before his case was heard, Selkirk fled to sea hoping to make his fortune through privateering (effectively legalised piracy on the King's enemies) against Spanish vessels off the coast of South America.

Eventually Selkirk was appointed as the Sailing Master on the *Cinque Ports*, a sixteen gun, ninety ton privateer and in April 1703 the *Cinque Ports* and the *St George* left London with the intention to sail down the coast of South America and try to capture a Spanish treasure ship off Buenos Aires. If the booty from this capture amounted to £60,000 or above, the boats would immediately return to England. If they missed the ship, however, they planned to sail around Cape Horn into the Pacific to capture Spanish vessels carrying gold to the mines at Lima. Failing that, the ships would sail north and attempt to capture the Acapulco - Manila ship, which was nearly always laden with treasure.

These plans were not a great success and in September 1704 the two ships decided to part company and continue their search for booty as separate entities. At the same time Selkirk was becoming concerned about the condition of the *Cinque Ports* and demanded to be put ashore on the next island they encountered. Selkirk was castaway on the uninhabited island of Más a Tierra (today known as Robinson Crusoe Island), one of the islands in the Juan Fernandez group over 400 miles off the west coast of Chile.

He was left with a gun, a knife, a hatchet, some oats and tobacco, as well as a bible, books of devotion and some navigational instruments. Selkirk's decision, turned out to be a wise one. The *Cinque Ports* leaked so heavily after leaving Juan Fernandez that the crew had to abandon ship and take to rafts. Only 18 sailors survived to reach the South American mainland where they were captured, mistreated by both the Spanish and the native people and imprisoned. Selkirk remained alone on the island for four years and four months. He was rescued by another privateer commanded by Captain Woodes Rogers. In his journal Rogers described the moment when Selkirk was rescued in February 1709:



## Tolbooth Artefacts (continued)

*‘We arrived at the island of Juan Fernandez on 31 January. We lay there to recoup ourselves until 13 February. At the island we found one Alexander Selkirk, a Scotchman who was left there by the Cinque Ports and survived four years and four months without conversing with any creature, having no company but wild goats...*

Selkirk re-embarked on his career as a privateer and within a year he was master of the ship that rescued him. In 1712 he returned to Scotland £800 richer, and surprised his family as they worshipped at the Kirk in Largo. They had long given him up for dead and were astonished that he was alive, let alone alive in his fine, gold and lace clothes. In 1713 he published an account of his adventures which were fictionalised six years later by Daniel Defoe in his now famous novel: ‘Robinson Crusoe’ although Defoe moved the location of the island from the Pacific to the Caribbean and added Man Friday!

Selkirk, however, could never really readjust to life on the land, and, in 1720, a year after he was immortalised by Defoe, he joined the Royal Navy as first mate on HMS *Weymouth* and died of a fever in December 1721 off the coast of West Africa.

In 1966, Chile changed the name of Más a Tierra to Robinson Crusoe Island because of the presumed connection between Selkirk and Crusoe. They also changed the name of Más Afuera, a different island, to Alejandro Selkirk Island, even though Selkirk was never marooned there. Anything to cater for the tourist trade!

Now to the other part of the story. and the Tolbooth connection

Between 1885 and 1889 Samuel Kevern served aboard HMS *Wild Swan*, a 6 gun sloop. The *Wild Swan* was assigned to the Australia station and based in Sydney but carried out innumerable patrols off the west coast of South America. In late 1885 (exact date unknown) the *Wild Swan* hove to in Cumberland Bay, Más a Tierra and sent a crew ashore for fresh water and general exploration. Samuel Kevern was part of this water party and whilst foraging along the beach/vegetation line he discovered the broken down remains of a hut. Just like modern tourists Samuel wanted a souvenir and remove a small piece of stone from the hut. This remained in his family for another 135 years but is now on loan to the museum. **It can be viewed in the extreme right hand side of the geological case.** Sometimes fact can be stranger than fiction.

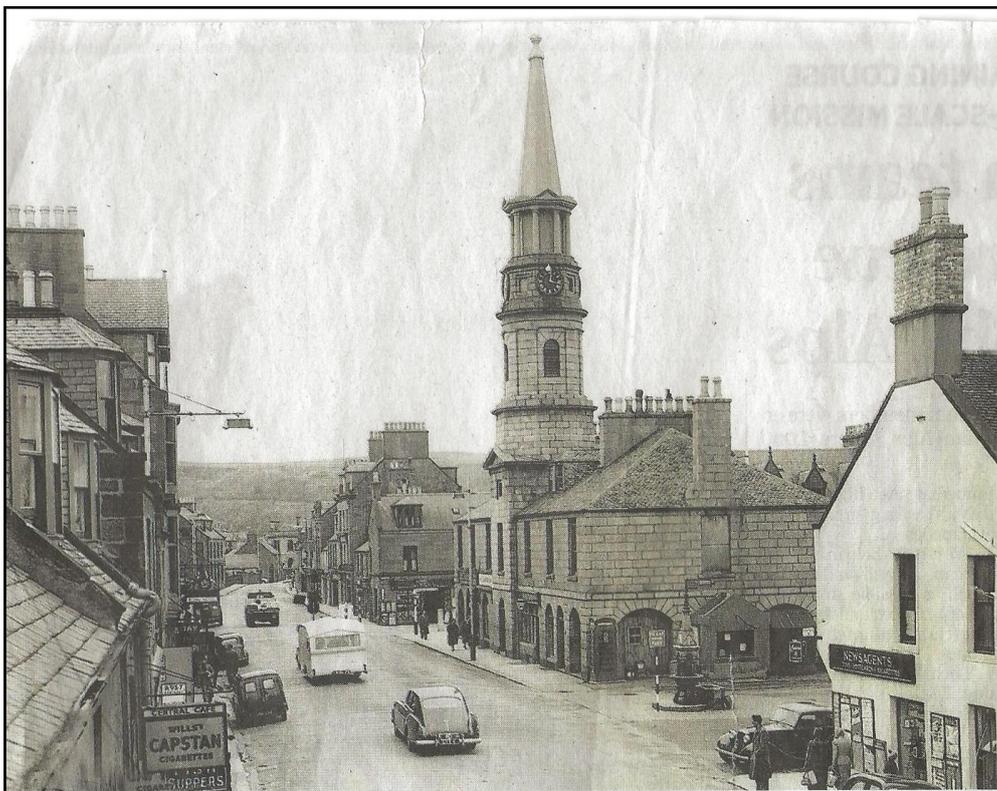
[Post Script](#). Over time the hut disappeared completely and its exact whereabouts were also lost but there have been several expeditions to Robinson Crusoe Island and in 2005 a Japanese explorer claimed to have re-discovered the remains of the hut.



## In the next edition—

### Stonehaven Shops and Businesses 1960–2020

Details of a new book by Donald Mitchell on how shops have changed in Stonehaven over the past 60 years.



Allardice Street looking south—1950's

If you have any stories or information you think could be included in future editions, please get in touch with either

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