

# STANEHYVE ·TOLBOOTH TIMES·



A wintry scene probably taken around  
1900 from Belmont Brae



## EDITORIAL

When I was a pupil at Mackie Academy in the 60s, the Rector John Hutcheson gave a short talk each morning as part of Morning Assembly. One that I recall referred to the school motto 'Tendit in Ardua Virtus'—courage overcomes all difficulties. Or as described in Doric as 'a stout heart to a stiff brae'. An attempt to encourage us all to work hard and achieve more, a good thing perhaps to give youths of that time. His deputy, Archie Watt, wrote a book on famous men of Stonehaven and district in 1990, in which he referred to the accepted fact that people of this North-eastern corner of Scotland have intellectual characteristics somewhat different from those of their fellow countrymen, the result partly of race and chiefly of environment and a spartan upbringing. Whether that is true or not has never been proved, but Archie found 28 names who had achieved much through their connection with Stonehaven. Perhaps due to his interest in old history, Archie did not find many who lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Copies of Archie's book 'A Goodly Heritage' are still available on request).

Recently, it was suggested to your Committee that the Tolbooth Museum should celebrate notable citizens of Stonehaven, both men and women, who had achieved much in their lives, and Andrew Newton, Dennis Collie and Douglas Cusine have been researching a number of figures. We can best describe them as 'Worthies of Stonehaven' and the present list which can be seen in the Museum, will be expanded into a wall panel in the future. Details on one Worthie, Willie Main, are featured in this issue. If you have any suggestions for other Worthies, please let me know.

With best wishes to all for a Happy Christmas and A Happy and Healthy New Year.

*Gordon Ritchie* MVO DL

Editor

If you have any stories or information you think could be included in future editions, please get in touch with [gritchie626@gmail.com](mailto:gritchie626@gmail.com)

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**Front cover image** A wintry scene looking from the foot of Belmont Brae, with David Street on the left and Barclay Street on the right. The ornamental lights are outside the blacksmith's on the corner, later a garage and now demolished. On the right is the wall of the brewery, now the site of Kwik-fit garage.



## MUSEUM SNIPPETS

Not a lot has happened in the last 2 months. We had the annual visit from the Elphinstone Institute in October and our visitor numbers have been holding up well.

We have installed a standalone contactless donation system which will make it easier for visitors who do not carry cash and wish to make a donation.

The Capital Asset Transfer of the Tolbooth Museum by the Council continues to move along slowly. The title deed should be completed in the New Year. One complication, and which we pointed out when the Council first suggested last year that they would retain ownership of the first floor Restaurant, is how to physically separate the ground and first floors for fire and sound purposes. This has involved various plans, planning and building warrant applications and listed building consent. What will be done is applying insulation and packing between the floors, with most of the work to be done from the Museum side. The Council say they have funds for this and a contractor has been appointed. What we will find out shortly is how the work will be done and the disruption which will be caused to the Museum. Will we have to empty some of the contents, and if so, where do we store it? It will mean closure of the Museum for a period, and as soon as we have more details, we will keep all volunteers and supporters informed.

Over the Christmas/New Year period, the Museum will be open on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup>, Saturday 27<sup>th</sup>, Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> and Monday 29<sup>th</sup> from 12.30 to 3.30 pm, Hogmanay from 12 noon to 4.30 pm, and open on New Year's Day for the Nippy Dip from 10.00 am to 2.00 pm.

## LAST MINUTE CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Please do not forget the new book on Stonehaven Harbour by Douglas Cusine and Gordon Ritchie recently published by the Tolbooth Museum, price only £5. Available from the Museum, But'n Ben Books, 6 Cameron Street and Ritchie Leasing, 3 Market Square.

We also have more books and many other gift ideas in the Museum. Why not take a look?





## AN AUSTRALIAN MYSTERY by Dennis Collie

A recent visit to Australia reminded me of an event from our early days in the museum. I had come across a key – about 4 inches long and quite ordinary looking, but then I noticed inscriptions on the bow. I asked around but no-one seemed to know where the key had come from, so I took to the internet to see if I could unlock the mystery.



The inscription on one side was *C.W.A. Urana Branch*. I discovered that Urana is a small town (population 300) in the Riverina region of New South Wales, Australia, roughly halfway between Sydney and Melbourne. C.W.A. is Country Women's Association, a women's organisation that works to improve the conditions for women, children, and families, especially those in rural and regional areas. It was founded in 1922 and engages in various activities such as fundraising, handicrafts, and advocating for social and environmental issues. In some ways it is similar to UK's WI.

The inscription on the other side reads *Presented to her Excellency Lady Stonehaven by HJ Gauntlett at the opening of CWA Building 8-12-28*. Lord Stonehaven was Governor-General of Australia in the 1920s and Lady Stonehaven had been invited to perform the opening ceremony of a new shelter. There is a report of the event in the Sydney Times <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/16515487> "Rest Rooms at Urana Opened by Lady Stonehaven". This would be a refuge for mothers and children in need of some respite. I contacted CWA's secretary and she confirmed that Riverina CWA is still going strong, but the Urana Branch closed some time ago. She said "These days we lobby both levels of Government here in Australia to better living conditions, not only for women, children and families here in Australia, but the international arm ACWW (headquarters in London) works for women and children across the globe. We campaign for health and education services for our regional and rural families and work to assist in Emergencies and disasters. We exist in the background and fill the spots bigger charitable organisations miss working quietly, but doggedly. Here in NSW we are strong supporters of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. We also have fun with cookery, handicraft and cultural competitions but these are the lighter, social side of things."



## AN AUSTRALIAN MYSTERY by Dennis Collie (cont'd)

John Lawrence Baird, 1st Viscount Stonehaven, was the eighth Governor-General of Australia, serving from October 1925 to October 1930. Canberra was nominated as the new capital city in 1913 and development of the city began, but with regular disputes and interruptions. Not until May 1927 was the newly built Parliament House completed and Lord Stonehaven formally opened the first meeting of the Australian Parliament in Canberra. On his return to the UK in 1930 Lord Stonehaven returned to politics, before retiring to Ury House in 1938. Len Reynolds' caricature of Lord Stonehaven perhaps reflects Australian opinion of him and of the imposition of a British Governor-General.



As was the way then, there is much less recorded about Lady Stonehaven, although she was possibly of higher rank than her husband, being the daughter of the much-titled Earl of Kintore, Chief of the clan Keith. She outlived her husband by 33 years, dying in 1974 aged 100 years and 1 day.

So how did the key end up in the Tolbooth Museum? Presumably when Lord & Lady Stonehaven returned to Stonehaven, the key was part of their shipment. But after that ... who knows? Somehow it ended up in the Tolbooth. The key could so easily have been discarded by the museum as irrelevant; equally it could have been lost at some earlier time after the demise of Ury House. And without the internet it's unlikely that we could have learned of its history. The key, with several other items, is in a box in my office, waiting for more display/storage space at the museum.

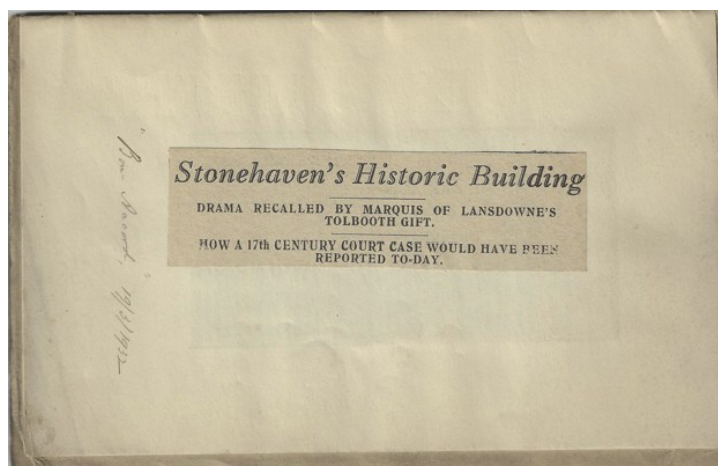
*Dennis Collie*





## STONEHAVEN'S HISTORIC BUILDING

An interesting article from the Aberdeen Bon Accord paper of 19 March 1932.



The announcement last week that the Marquis of Lansdowne had presented the Old Tolbooth to the town of Stonehaven has created great interest in the mind of everyone who appreciates the vivid historical background against which the County Town of the Mearns is set.

This rugged building looking seawards, sentinel-like at the junction of the North Pier and the Old Pier, has been aptly described as Stonehaven's most historic building. Indeed its significance is inextricably linked with the history of the county. As a local epic its story stands second only to that of Dunnottar Castle itself.

The threads of Tolbooth history fell originally from that tangled skein of chapters which have placed the ancient home of the Earls Marischall in a niche in Scottish history to which the passing centuries bring no decay. The building dates back at least to the 15th century, and prior to 1600 was used as a storehouse for the Earl Marischall. It was in the nature of a quayside shed, its position making it convenient as a dumping place for provisions brought by sea for Dunnottar Castle.

In 1600 it was turned into what would be called the County Buildings at the present day, accommodating the courtroom, meeting-room and the prison. Prior to this the judicial business of the county had been carried on at the centrally situated hamlet of Kincardine, which was, however, falling into decay.

It was from this time onwards, till near the end of the 18th century, that the Tolbooth was the scene of many memorable events. Some of these have been chronicled and although no complete consecutive

record of the grim, exciting story seems to be in existence, others can well be imagined.

Imagine, for instance, a court day. Picture the scene if Sheriff Laing or Sheriff Dallas, instead of motoring to the modern County Buildings to chastise a motorist for "speeding," were to make his way amid a clatter of horses' hoofs to the gaunt building by the water's edge, to deal with a charge of piracy! For, it is on record that "pirattis" from Aberdeen were among the wide variety of law-breakers who stood trial there. Or could the most sensational present-day drama of the Old Bailey surpass the scenes that must have taken place during those religious trials of Jacobite days? Between the lines of bald official records one can read stories which would to-day send the star writers of Fleet Street into ecstasies.

The year is 1746, immediately after the second Jacobite rising. There are not a dozen Presbyterians in the Old Town of Stonehaven at the time, and the Episcopal community are said to be sympathetic to the cause of Prince Charles.

An Episcopal minister stands in the dock, a stern Sheriff-Depute on the Bench. The court is crowded with members of the prisoner's flock, sullen listeners whose expression of hostility is repressed in all probability only by the convenient presence of armed force to enforce law and order is only men of the Duke of Cumberland calibre could enforce it. In their minds is a picture of the chapels of Muchalls and Drumlithie blazing to the sky, and the pulpit and pews of the Episcopal Church of Stonehaven making a huge bonfire in High Street. They seethe with indignation as their minister is charged under an act framed "to more effectually prohibit and prevent pastors or ministers from officiating in Episcopal meeting houses in Scotland without duly qualifying themselves according to law; and to punish persons for resorting to any meeting houses where such unqualified pastors or ministers shall officiate."





## STONEHAVEN'S HISTORIC BUILDING (cont'd)

It was trials of this nature in the years immediately following the '45 Rebellion that led to the most famous incidents associated with the Tolbooth. In 1784 there were tried before John Young, Sheriff-Depute of Kincardineshire, three Episcopal preachers, Alexander Greig, Stonehaven; John Petrie, Drumlithie; John Troup, Muchalls. A full record of the evidence given against them is in existence, but direct evidence of the sentence imposed is missing. It is accepted however that throughout the winter of 1748-49 they were imprisoned in the Tolbooth, and it was then that the loyalty and devotion of their flock led to the incidents which are to this day recorded with prominence in chronicles of local history.

During their imprisonment they received everything in the way of comfort and encouragement which their followers could convey to them, and the demonstrations of devotion on the part of the women were remarkable. Determined to have their children baptised by their own ministers the fisherwomen came trudging from as far off as the village of Sketraw, carrying their infants concealed in creels on their backs. When a favourable opportunity presented itself they waded through the estuary of the combined Cowie and Carron waters, and held up the babies to a window at the rear of the prison, through which the ministers conducted the baptismal sacrament. In some cases, when the parents happened to be in the good graces of the gaoler the infants were smuggled into the cells.

Many other records may still be perused of trials conducted at the Old Tolbooth, the story of which would be incomplete, of course, without mention of the days

when Stonehaven had a hangman of its own.

Nor was that official's grim job a sine-cure by any means. Pick one of the many cases at random, and see how it would appear in a modern newspaper. Here is how it might have read if a "Mearns Leader" reporter had described it with a 1932 pen:—

"Described as a habitual criminal, John Duncan, an Auchinblae man, was sentenced to be hanged at Stonehaven yesterday for theft and reset.

"Duncan was charged with having on Wednesday, July 10, 1700, stolen two stirks and a cow from the Hill of Kinloch, the property of George Burnett, Mulloch, and three stirks belonging to William Taylor, Knock.

"The Procurator-Fiscal said the accused had an extremely bad record, said Duncan drove the cattle to Palladius fair on the following day intending to sell them. One of the animals was actually sold to a man from Brae of Fern. The money received for this and the remaining animals were recovered . . . .

"An echo of Duncan's conviction was heard later in the day when John Reid, who appeared on remand, pleaded guilty to having stolen a number of linen webs from a bleach-green at Den of Morphie. Passing sentence the Sheriff said: 'You have pleaded guilty to a serious charge of theft. I sentence you to be branded with an iron on the right shoulder-blade, thereafter you will be bound to the prisoner John Duncan and carried with him to the Gallowhill, where, after witnessing his hanging, you will bury his body. Further you will be kicked by the court officer and banished from this county *sine die*.'

The county councillors of the present day think they have exciting times, meeting at the County Buildings to-day to discuss a fire at Stonehaven, and raise controversy over new schools at Laurencekirk. How much more exciting must have been the meetings of the "county gentlemen" in the Tolbooth!



The famous baptism scene, when mothers brought their babies to be baptised by the Episcopal clergymen imprisoned in the Old Tolbooth.



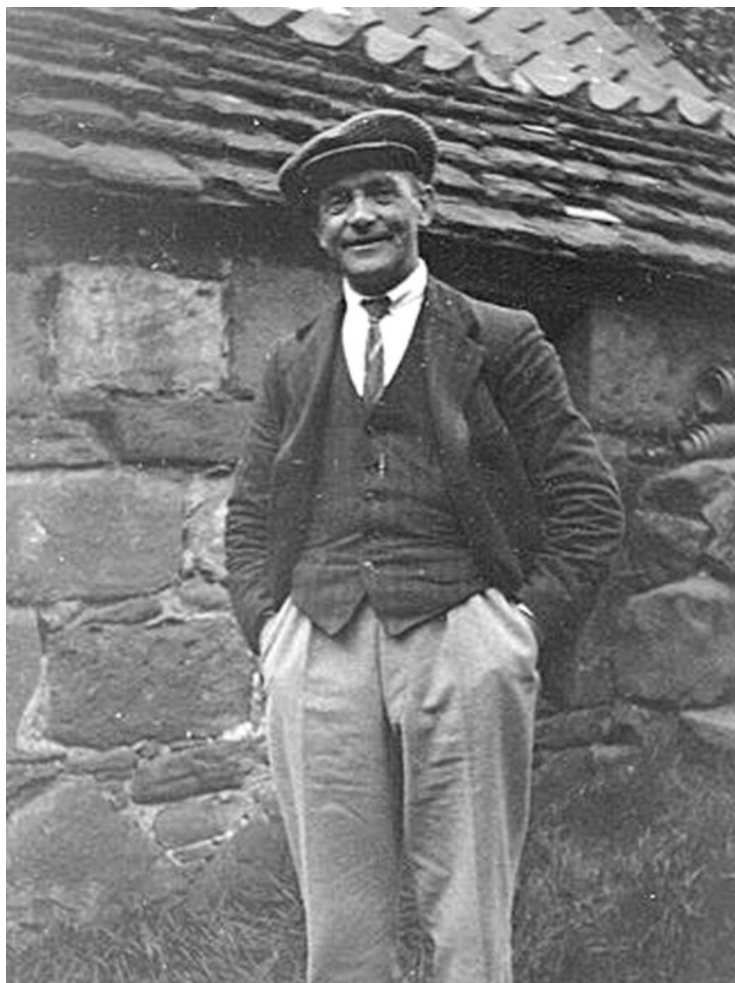
## STONEHAVEN WORTHIES

The Museum have embarked on a project to commemorate Famous Men and Women who were either born in Stonehaven or did their life work in or about the Town. As a starter, here are details of a little known artist, Willie Main. The Museum have a couple of his paintings but they are not presently on display.

**Willie Main**

**(1884 — 1959)**

**Socialist and Artist**







## STONEHAVEN WORTHIES – WILLIE MAIN (cont'd)

Willie Main was born in Stonehaven on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1884, the second son of Jane Scott and shoemaker James Main; he was one of three boys and six girls and the family lived at 1, Old Pier, Stonehaven. Four of Willie's siblings emigrated to Australia and New Zealand at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Willie remained in Stonehaven, eventually moving to 3, The Cross and died of a suspected stroke on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1959 aged 74. Outwardly he seemed an unremarkable man who lived an unremarkable life. Nothing could be further from the truth! Willie was a man of principle with strong convictions, a love for Stonehaven and possessed an artistic talent.

Willie was a leading Socialist in Stonehaven and held the view that war was one for the profits of capitalists and he would not fight against his fellow workers. This belief led him to becoming an Absolutist Conscientious Objector and refused to take up any military service during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. Initially he won exemption from combatant service but was still expected to join the army in a support role; again he refused. He was tried as an absentee from the Army and sentenced to 112 days of hard labour in the Aberdeen prison (Craiginchies). This confinement was followed by five months in a work camp at Ballachulish and two further spells in Craiginchies before being finally released in mid-1919. In late 1919 Willie resumed his former occupation as a gardener and a handyman.

Willie was also a prolific painter, especially of Stonehaven, and before his death he frequently sent paintings to his family in the New World. It is unknown how many paintings were created by Willie but Allan Main (his great nephew who lives in New Zealand) has tracked down 72 in galleries and private houses scattered around the world and Allan has loaded many images on a dedicated website. A relative said that *'Willie never had much nor wanted much during his life'* but he has left a stunning visual collection of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Stonehaven.

<https://kiwimain53.wixsite.com/willie-main/stonehaven-collection>



STONEHAVEN WORTHIES — WILLIE MAIN (cont'd)



© Allan J Main

The Backies before the car park and board walk.



James Main (Willie's father) wearing his shoemakers apron buying fish from a fishwife.