



*Broughton Tolbooth 1582–1829*

# BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## Editorial

Place names are a mixed bag when it comes to studying our local history. Many of our streets are named after people or places of no local significance – Albany, Comwallis, Mansfield and Rodney for example; and London, Union and the Claremonts. But others such as Picardy Place, Barony Street and Drummond Place do reflect local history. My own street was named Hope Crescent in honour of Dr John Hope, who founded the Botanic Garden nearby in the 18th century; unfortunately a clumsy amendment to Hopetoun Crescent in 1966 blurred the history – the Garden's founder was not one of the Hopes of Hopetoun.

Nicknames can be equally if not more interesting, for they often say something about what ordinary Broughton folk did at different local places over the years. The poem by Robert Garioch featured in this edition's 'Broughton in Literature' includes several, starting with Cockie Dudgeons – 'where the bus depot is now', he writes elsewhere. 'The show folk would come there for Christmas, with their caravans and swee-boats and Cadona's Golden Dragons and traction engines and steam organs all covered with carving and mirrors and painted figures keeping time to the music ... after a rainy night we sometimes had free trips on the Helterskelter, as many as we liked, to polish the slides.'

Some people remember 'Cockie-Dodgies' rather than Garioch's 'Cockie Dudgeons' – and the origin of the name? What about The Sandies? The Coup? Please tell us more about the places in Garioch's poem; and about others you remember personally, or have seen references to. It would be good to gather them together, for ourselves and for future generations.

Place nicknames are a part of Broughton's history it would be a great pity to lose.

*Sources: Stuart Harris, Place Names of Edinburgh (Gordon Wright, 1996). Garioch's 'Early Days in Edinburgh', published as a chapter in As I Remember: Ten Scottish Writers Recall How for Them Writing Began, edited by Maurice Lindsay (Robert Hale, London, 1979).*

John Dickie

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Ideas or contributions for our next edition?

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### **Bridges at Powderhall**

In our summer edition we wondered if there had been any Powderhall crossing of the Water of Leith prior to the Bailey bridge built in 1948. At that time the answer was 'probably not' – certainly foundations were built from scratch. But since then our community paper *Spurtle* has found fresh evidence through contact with a City Council engineer, Richard Berry.

A series of 17 photos record the building of the bridge in 1948: and in some of them can be seen a smaller existing footbridge a few yards upstream. (St Mark's Path must have had a slightly different alignment previously.) 'I think the older bridge was quite a recent phenomenon', says *Spurtle's* Alan McIntosh, 'put up in the 1930s or 1940s (it doesn't appear in the 1920s map used by the Council) and demolished shortly after the Bailey bridge made it redundant.' (*Thanks to City Council for this photo.*)

# St Bernard's Football Club

Society member George Park has recently completed a book about the Saints

Most people regard the old St Bernard's Football Club founded in 1878 as a Stockbridge club, and with some justification because that is where it originated from and where a large proportion of the people who supported it lived. However, apart from the very early days when the team played in what was known as Stockbridge Park, where the tenements now stand at Comely Bank, the club spent almost its entire existence located in the Broughton/Canomills area.

The first real ground was the Royal Gymnasium in Royal Crescent, where the club operated from 1880 to 1882 before moving to the larger Old Powderhall on the banks of the Water of Leith. Both of these venues were operated by W. M. Lapsley, whose main preoccupation was pedestrianism which was popular at that time. The City's Refuse Works now occupy that Powderhall site.

In 1889 after difficulties of conflicting dates with the athletics, St Bernard's took the very bold step of setting up a ground of their own at Logie Green. This site was where the tenement block in Logie Green Road now stands. This was developed into a first class football ground capable of holding a crowd of around 18,000, and was leased from the Heriot Trust. The ten years spent there was St Bernard's golden period. After finishing third behind champions Celtic and Hearts in the Scottish League in 1894, in what was to be the Saints' highest ever position, the following season was to be even better when the Scottish Cup was won, truly the pinnacle of the club's achievements. The season after that the ground hosted what was, even to this day, the only Scottish Club Final ever to be staged outside of Glasgow, between Hearts and Hibs.

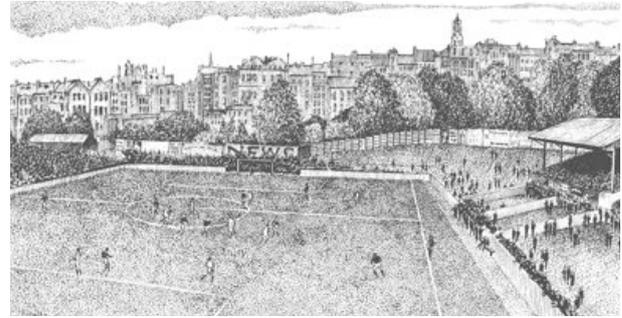
Logie Green was well equipped for in addition to a grandstand on the west side of the ground, in the north west corner stood a clubhouse which appears to have been a bit of a social centre for the area. This was entered from the far end of Beaverhall Place. But operating a professional team led the Saints into financial difficulties and the need to give up Logie Green in 1899.

Through the good offices of W. M. Lapsley, St Bernard's moved next door to the New Powderhall. This had been created by Mr Lapsley to replace his former venue. This was a short-term measure and only lasted two seasons, being fraught with football/athletics date clashes again. This ground became Powderhall Stadium until its recent sad demise and conversion to housing.

From 1901 until the First World War the club moved back to the Royal Gymnasium, on a pitch running from Royal Crescent towards Eyre Place with the grandstand on the east side. All of this period was spent in the Scottish Second Division, with

Saints winning it twice and also annexing the Scottish Qualifying Cup on the same number of occasions.

After two seasons of inactivity during the War the Saints revived at New Logie Green in 1919, which formerly had been Leith Athletic's ground. This of course was not the old Logie Green but the site which until recently housed the car park for Powderhall Stadium.



Sketch of the Gymnasium ground in 1924

In 1924 the Saints moved back to the Royal Gymnasium after it had been repaired following damage caused by Army occupation, and they were to remain there until their demise in 1942. A new grandstand was built parallel to Royal Crescent, and the pitch was turned round 90 degrees from the former occupancy. The biggest highlight and also the biggest disappointment came in 1938 when the team, still in the Second Division, reached the Scottish Cup semi final and it took three games all played at Tynecastle before East Fife, also from the lower league, beat them and went on to win the Cup.

This article has concentrated entirely on the location of the St Bernard's grounds, which I hope will be of particular interest to the members of the Society. However I have just published a full and detailed history of the club entitled *St Bernard's Football Club or when the well ran dry!* For outlets selling it (£5.99) please consult the website [www.stbernardsfc.co.uk](http://www.stbernardsfc.co.uk). The total proceeds are being donated to the children's leukaemia charity CCLASP.



St Bernard's team 1932-33

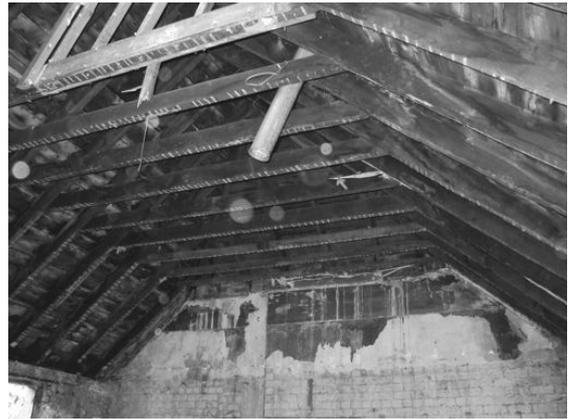
# Delving in the archives for the Botanic Cottage

Dr Joe Rock is one of two researchers currently doing archival work alongside the archaeological project at the former gardener's house; the photos of finds at the house are by Eileen Dickie

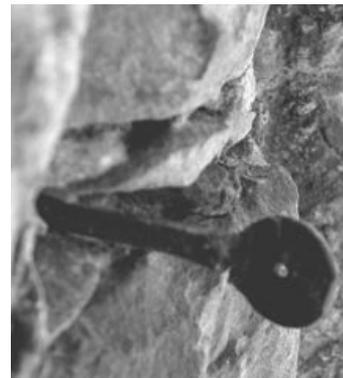
As often happens with research, you find answers to questions but you also find new questions. This was certainly the case with research on Botanic Cottage. Built as the gardener's house for the Botanic Garden established by Dr John Hope in Leith Walk between 1763 and 1823, this little house survived when almost all trace of the garden has disappeared. Documents also survived and the accounts provided fascinating insights into the design, building, decoration and furnishing of the cottage.

The garden stood in five acres of land set within a larger area of thirteen acres on the west side of Leith Walk, belonging to the banker, Thomas Fairholm. Thomas and his brother Adam were partners in Fairholm's Bank, which crashed in very similar circumstances to the present banking crisis, in 1763. In January 1764 John Hope, with the guidance of the architect John Adam, negotiated the lease on five acres of Fairholm's land and agreed with the government to finance the establishment there of the Botanic Garden. Within two months Hope had purchased the full thirteen acres, including the garden site, for £1000 and it now appears that this deal was designed to improve the finances of both John Adam and Thomas Fairholm. John had placed almost his entire fortune (close to £1.2 million in today's money) with the Fairholms and lost it all when Adam Fairholm drowned in March 1764, after jumping from the ship that was carrying him to the continent and away from the bailiffs. Dr Hope's family would later exploit this shrewd investment by developing the area between Leith Walk and Hopetoun Street, although, as the incomplete development of Hopetoun Crescent shows, they became caught up in the next recession of the 1830s.

Having secured a site John Hope set about laying out his garden and he is probably responsible for the earliest design for the Botanic Cottage. It appears on a large plan of the garden annotated in a very personal way with the names of Hope's botanical heroes; 'Linnaeus', 'Bute', 'Nasmyth' and even his father-in-law, 'Walker'. The gardener's cottage is shown in its eventual position, as a two-storey house of traditional design with one window either side of a central door, and external chimney stacks tacked onto each gable. The surviving documents give a confusing picture of who his architect might have been. John Adam signed the estimate for building the cottage, greenhouse and garden walls in 1763 and there is a receipt by him, 'for making plans & estimates of Gardiner's House, Green houses, Hothouses', dated 29 March 1765. However, two sets of un-signed drawings for the cottage survive, not by Adam, but it would appear



*The house still has its 18th century roof, with the original timber of a high coved ceiling discovered in the lecture room on the first floor*



*This wrought iron fixing was used to secure the back of a window case to the wall*

from their style, by James Craig, designer of the New Town. Craig was the Hope family's architect of choice. Not only does he appear to have made the drawings for Botanic Cottage but he is the author of an undated plan of the Old Abbey Garden at Holyrood, now at Mount Stuart in Bute, the Design of the western stove at the greenhouse in 1778, a feuing plan for Robert Hope for the area around St. Patrick Square in 1788 and a design for a memorial to John Hope, for Greyfriars churchyard. He was also the architect for the new Physicians Hall in 1777, where John Hope was a Fellow. As a recently rediscovered and highly important plan of Leith Walk shows, James Craig was also responsible for laying out the Walk, in association with John Hope and a remarkable man, Sir Adolphus Oughton (1719–80), in 1774. This plan is now in the National Archives of Scotland.

The question remains – who designed the cottage? As has been shown, John Adam was paid for the plans but it now seems likely that the design for it and the greenhouses was the result of a complicated collaboration between John Hope,

John Adam, James Craig and William Robertson, who may have been related to John Adam through his mother, Mary Robertson. Robertson certainly re-worked John Hope's sketch of the greenhouse and turned it into a working design, and his signed drawings survive. Put together, the inescapable conclusion is that James Craig and William Robertson were probably employed for a period in John Adam's office.

Botanic Cottage, erected between 1764 and 1766 by the mason James McPherson and the wright or carpenter John Young, seems to have consisted of a large room used for lectures and possibly a small closet for the use of Dr. Hope on the top floor, with two bedrooms, a kitchen and a parlour on the ground floor. From the records we know that there was an early problem when the carpenter built a wooden staircase and John Hope had to insist, no doubt with the safety of his students in mind, that it be replaced in stone. This was done, not perhaps with good grace, by the mason in April 1765, some of whose charges were disallowed by Hope. The upper room was first decorated in 1767 by Alexander Runciman and his partner, Dugal McLaren, the ceiling white and the walls in yellow. Dugal was the son of Donald McLaren a surgeon and friend of John Hope, who stood as cautioner (pronounced kayshoner) when Dugal was apprenticed to the painter James Allen in 1759. As well as being an important decorator, Runciman was one of the leading artists of his day and became drawing master at the Trustees Academy in 1771. There are botanical drawings by him that were in John Hope's collection (now at the Royal Botanic Garden) and that may even have been drawn in this upper room. Most of the furniture for



*Curved sections of the Garden wall, attached to each side of the house, are shown in old drawings. The surviving one has been uncovered –rear view below.*



the cottage was built-in by the carpenter but in May 1766 John Hope purchased six Beech chairs from Alexander Peter, one of the leading furniture makers of the eighteenth century who had supplied furniture for the Duke of Gordon, the Earl of Dumfries and the Earl of Stair among others.

This brief foray into the surviving records of the Botanic Cottage is based on the Historical Timeline produced by the writer and the diligent researches of Jane Corrie, both supported by National Lottery funding.

*Joe Rock has a fascinating article about Robert Forrest's exhibition of sculpture on Calton Hill, 1832–76, in the current edition of The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club. (The Melville statue in St Andrew Square was also by Forrest.)*

## Broughton in Literature

### 'Sae wir aff by Cockie-Dudgeons an the Sandies and the Coup'

In our last edition we quoted Broughton featuring in two novels: Robert Louis Stevenson's *Catriona*, and James Robertson's *Joseph Knight*. Here we highlight a poem.

Robert Garioch Sutherland (1909–81) was brought up at 109 Bellevue Road and went to St James Episcopal School, 103 Broughton Street. His father was a painter and wrote the number of their house in gold leaf on the fanlight at the front door – as he did for many of the houses along the street. When Garioch (as a poet he used this as his surname) went to Edinburgh University in 1926 he wrote 'Fi'baw in the Street' as a reaction against the 'englishness' of the poems being written by his classmates.



#### FI'BAW IN THE STREET

Shote! here's the poliss,  
the Gayfield poliss,  
    an thull pi'iz in the nick fir  
    pleyan fi'baw in the street!  
Yin of thum's a faw'y  
like a muckle foazie taw'y  
    bi' the ither's lang and skinnylike,  
    wi' umburrelly feet.  
Ach, awaw, says Tammy Curtis,  
fir thir baith owre blate ti hurt iz  
    thir a glaikit pair o Teuchters  
    an as Heilant as a peat.  
Shote! thayr thir comin  
wi the hurdygurdy wummin  
    tha' we coupit wi her puggy  
    pleyan fi'baw in the street.

Sae wir aff by Cockie-Dudgeons an  
the Sandies and the Coup,  
and wir owre a dizzen fences tha'  
the coppers canny loup,  
and wir in an ou' o backgreens an  
wir dreepan muckle dikes,  
an we tear ir claes on railins  
full o nesty irin spikes.  
An aw the time the skinnylinky  
copper's a' ir heels,  
though the faw'y's deid ir deean,  
this yin seems ti rin on wheels:  
noo he's stickit on a railin wi  
his helmet on a spike,  
noo he's up an owre an rinnan, di  
ye iver see the like?

Bi' we stour awa ti Puddocky  
(that's doon by Logie Green)  
an wir roon by Beaverhaw whayr  
deil a beaver's iver seen;  
noo wir aff wi buitts and stockins  
an wir wadin roon a fence  
(i' sticks oot inty the wa'er, bi'  
tha's nithin if ye've sense)  
syne we cooshy doon thegither  
just like choockies wi a hen  
in a bonny wee-bit bunky-hole  
that' bobbies dinny ken.  
Bi' ma knees is skint and bluddan,  
an ma breeks they want the seat,  
jings! ye git mair nir ye're eftir,  
pleyan fi'baw in the street.

The Gayfield poliss also feature in Ian Rankin's crime fiction: Inspector Rebus is based there in the later novels. Is the 'funny smell in the CID office at Gayfield Square' mentioned in *Exit Music* pure fiction? 'You often noticed it at the height of summer, but this year it seemed determined to linger. It would disappear for a matter of days or weeks, then one morning would announce its creeping reappearance. There had been regular complaints and the Scottish Police Federation had threatened a walkout. Floors had been lifted and drains tested, traps set for vermin, but no answers.'

In the same novel Rebus's sidekick Siobhan Clarke meets a colleague for coffee in Broughton Street. 'They were seated on stools at a table by the window. It was a basement, so all they could see was a passing parade of legs at street level'. (I think Siobhan's home is placed in Barony Street in a previous novel?)

And a reader tells us that a very messy murder at the beginning of Christopher Brookmyre's *Quite Ugly One Morning* is set in a flat overlooking the Gayfield Square police station; followed by a scene in the Barony Bar, Broughton Street, where Brookmyre himself used to drink (maybe still does?).

Sources: Thanks to the Scottish Poetry Library for permission to reproduce Garioch's poem in full from Robert Garioch: *Complete Poetical Works*, edited by Robin Fulton (Macdonald Publishers, Edinburgh, 1983). Photo by Jessie Anne Matthew. Garioch's own 'Early Days in Edinburgh', published as a chapter in *As I Remember: Ten Scottish Writers Recall How for Them Writing Began*, edited by Maurice Lindsay (Robert Hale, London, 1979).

## The 'twin monuments' of St Andrew Square

Following our article about St Andrew Square Garden in the last edition, David Watt of Bellevue Place wrote: 'The Melville Memorial – a present city councillor, surname Dundas, claims to be a direct descendant of Viscount Melville'. We invited Councillor Charles Dundas to respond.

Your correspondent is not wholly correct when they attribute me as a direct descendant of Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville. My own cadet branch of the Dundas family is far less distinguished, or notorious. I have been able to trace my family back to about the same period as Henry so I know that I am not directly related: my ancestor at the time was a Robert Dundas, a merchant in Glasgow.

The article did remind me that on a number of occasions now the First Minister has recounted how Henry Dundas was so powerful as Lord Advocate that he was able to build a townhouse at the far end of St Andrew Square, skewing the symmetry of James Craig's New Town which would have placed a church on that site. It was, however, Lawrence Dundas (1710-1781), the "Nabob of the North", not Henry, who



wielded such power in Edinburgh and had the house built; but I was far too polite to alert Mr Salmond to his error. Perhaps now I could use the pages of the Broughton History Society's newsletter to correct this misconception?

Lawrence and Henry belonged to very different branches of the Dundas family and nursed a fierce dislike for each other during their lifetimes. Henry was a Dundas of Arniston, the distinguished Midlothian legal family, whilst Lawrence was born the son of a draper who sold stockings from the Luckenbooths outside Royal Exchange.

Perhaps the enmity started when Henry, as a teenager, was almost arrested in Hanover for the debts which his distant relative Lawrence had run up a quarter of a century earlier on his own grand tour of the Continent.

Lawrence was essentially a self-made man who struck it rich by signing some lucrative supply contracts for the British Army throughout the numerous conflicts of the 18th century. With his profits he was able to buy not just the Orkney and Shetland Isles, but also vast swathes of Falkirk and Stirlingshire.

It was in the 1760s that Henry and Lawrence's career paths began to cross. As a wealthy local businessman Lawrence quickly became a major player on Edinburgh's Town Council and Governor of the Royal Bank of Scotland; whilst Henry rose through the ranks of the Faculty of Advocates like so many of his Arniston relatives before him.

As MP for Edinburgh Lawrence piloted an Edinburgh Improvement Act through the Commons which paved the way for the building of the New Town. It was at this point that he was able to use his influence to preview James Craig's plan and purchase a prime site on the East side of what was soon to become St Andrew Square. He then had Sir William Chambers build Dundas House which still stands now as the headquarters of the Royal Bank of Scotland. A great story, however, is that shortly after moving into his new house, Lawrence promptly lost it in a drunken game of cards and had to quickly build another new house in Dublin Street to pay off his debt.\*



During this same period Henry Dundas was promoted within the Scottish legal world to the political role of Solicitor-General and a few years later became the MP for Midlothian and Lord Advocate. It was now that he began to build a reputation for control across his native land which would make him the "uncrowned king of Scotland" – with the exception of Orkney, Shetland, Falkirk, Stirlingshire and Edinburgh where another Dundas, an uncrowned Nabob, still held sway.

I find it very neat that these twin monuments, Dundas House and the Melville monument, both stand in tribute to two very different men united by power, politics and a common surname,

but divided by almost everything else.

The First Minister's mistake is understandable, but I wouldn't want to see the brash charm of the nouveau riche Lawrence Dundas forgotten beneath the shadow of the Machiavellian intrigue of his distant cousin Henry.

\* *Editor: The house referred to in the story was at the foot of Dublin Street, where Drummond Place Garden is now. Called Bellevue House, it was built for Major-General John Scott – who according to James Grant was indeed 'one of the most noted gamblers of his time', with 'a judgement in play superior to most gamblers'. (Cassell's Old and New Edinburgh, 1880–83, Volume II, page 191).*

## Cramond's Roman Fort Excavation

**John Dods of Cramond Heritage Trust hopes the results of this summer's community dig will increase our understanding of the Romans' stay in Cramond**

It has long been known that the Romans had a presence in Cramond, although why they were here, for how long and how large their presence, has been a matter of some debate. When Sir John Sinclair compiled the *First Statistical Account of Scotland* it included a volume on the Parish of Cramond. This, published in 1794, was John P. Wood's *The Antient and Modern State of the Parish of Cramond*. It contained illustrations of Roman antiquities which had been discovered in the vicinity of Cramond and also mentioned Roman masonry and artefacts discovered when the present manse was being built in 1745. More recently, the excavations carried out by Alan and Viola Rae in Kirk Cramond between 1956 and 1964 showed that there had been a Roman fort on the site. The subsequent discovery of the Roman bath-house and the Roman Lioness has only added to the conjecture.

It is currently believed that the fort was initially constructed around 142–44 AD as an outpost of the Antonine Wall. It was occupied for

approximately 20 years with a small break at one point. It was then abandoned and not re-occupied until 208 AD during the reign of the Emperor Severus. No evidence of an earlier occupation had been found on the site, despite scattered finds from the first century having been discovered in the area. A number of other archaeological digs in the area have provided further evidence of a large industrial complex in support of the fort, a further defensive system to the south-east of it and further large quantities of artefacts. These have all raised questions as to whether the site was considerably more important than previously supposed and whether the Romans were only here for the two brief periods postulated by the Raes.

A community dig was carried out this summer on the site in Kirk Cramond in an attempt, in the words of The City of Edinburgh Archaeological Service, 'to answer key research questions as to the nature and layout of, in particular, the Antonine period fort'. Having completed the excavation, the

fort, rather than being reburied, is to be stabilised and the surrounding area landscaped. This will improve the display and interpretation of the Romans' presence in the area. The paths adjacent to it will be improved and extended to enable disabled access.

The fort's clay bonded masonry construction is rather fragile and it must be consolidated with lime mortar so that it can be displayed. Unlike cement, this mortar takes a considerable time to set and until this happens it is susceptible to frost damage. The fort therefore has been temporarily re-covered to prevent the clay bonding being washed out by the winter rains. It will be re-excavated in spring to enable it to be consolidated and the surrounding area to be landscaped.

Machinery was used initially to clear the soil overburden from the site but once this had been cleared all further excavation was carried out by hand. The preliminary manual excavation cleared any remaining overburden to enable an assessment and recording of the state of repair of the known remains. Once this had been accomplished excavation recommenced, eventually going well below the level where the 1964 dig had stopped.

The excavation was carried out by volunteers, managed and supervised by professional archaeologists from AOC Archaeology Group. They continued to work through the atrocious weather which bedevilled its early phase and threatened it throughout the entire dig. The professionals and some of the more experienced volunteers carried out what I considered to be the more boring but very important task of logging all of the finds and properly mapping and recording the site.

Further evidence of Roman occupation was discovered beneath the previously known remains of the fort. This included pottery, glass, metalwork, and coins. Large quantities of Roman pottery sherds were discovered, some of which had

obviously broken in situ since all of the pieces were together. A small bronze bowl was recovered, in such good condition that it was difficult to accept that it was around 1800 years old, although because of the context in which it was discovered, there could be no doubt about it. Slightly farther over, on the same site, a number of very heavily corroded World War II cartridge cases had been uncovered, just below the soil surface, which made the survival of the bronze bowl even more remarkable. The heavily corroded remains of two Roman daggers and what may prove to be metalwork from horse harnesses were recovered from a series of stone lined 'boxes' which were sunk into the floor. In addition, a series of what appear to be the post holes of a large wooden structure was uncovered.



*Excavating below the known floor level*

In the area between the Kirk Hall and the rear wall of the Kirkyard a quantity of human bone fragments were found, above the Roman remains. It is assumed that they were buried in an area which was originally within the bounds of the Kirkyard. These will be re-interred in the near future, after analysis.

You may be forgiven for wondering whether there is any connection between Roman Cramond and Broughton: the majority of the artefacts which have been found in Cramond, over the centuries, are held in the City Archaeologist's store in Broughton Market. We want them back!!! Unfortunately we will have to wait until our new visitor centre is built in the dim and distant future, so please keep an eye on them for us.

It is still too early to determine the result of the excavation and whether the 'key research questions' have been answered. The general consensus is that it has been a success and we feel that when the results have been analysed a lot of the questions which gave rise to the excavation will have been answered.

## Canonmills in Winter 1879

**From 1939 to 1941 an I. E. Welch wrote several articles about Canonmills for the *Weekly Scotsman* – Alice Lauder read from one of them at our 2007 AGM. 'A former resident', he or she wanted to write 'ere my eyes grow dim and memories fade away'. Two of the articles described a very severe winter**

The winter of 1879 was one to be remembered for a long time by the inhabitants of Old Canonmills. The pump handle at the 'Happy Land' had been broken for some weeks and the poor folks had to carry their water from the pump in front of Baker's Land. The frost set in and everything was frozen hard. The mill dam was a solid sheet of ice and the

mill wheel in Canon Street had ceased to give its rhythm to the water music.

The Water of Leith and the pond at the Royal Gymnasium were scenes of skating, while the Pitt Street swimming baths were closed until the burst pipes were repaired. Matters became so bad that water had to be sent daily in carts from the city to

the people, where it was doled out, and many of the inhabitants did not have a bath for months!

The 'penny school' had no water and the scholars – who were taught for a penny a week if they were under seven years of age, and two pence if over seven years – too often had no pennies and for a few weeks the school had to close.

The millers had no work owing to the lack of water and the local tannery at Beaverbank could not get skins forward as transport was difficult; the result being that carriers were idle for weeks.

To make matters worse the whole district became infested by rats, as these vermin were forced to leave their usual haunts by the Water of Leith and sides of the dam, and search farther afield for food. Shopkeepers were at their wits end over this plague, and they had either to keep a cat or a dog. The local butcher kept a pair of owls in his cellar. The rats had played havoc among everything eatable – they had nibbled everything uneatable also. The village plumber opposite the house where R. L. Stevenson was born had the doors of his workshop eaten through – even the putty having been nibbled, and the tailor had several lengths of tweed badly damaged by these vermin. The village shoemaker lost over thirty pounds in uppers – evidently the rats thought 'there's nothing like leather!'

At last matters got so bad that the shopkeepers of the district decided to hold a meeting and consider what was to be done, as between unemployment and the rats they were facing ruin. It was finally decided to employ rat-catchers, and each had two dogs. They worked from the mill lade at Old Jenny's Toll (at the foot of Pitt Street) to the Water of Leith beyond the cemetery gate.

Decent men in the Canonmills quarter who had been thrown out of work by the severe winter

### Notes

\* Who was the writer I. E. Welch, and where exactly did they live? Someone who lived in the Canonmills area in 1879: but they must have been young then, we don't know whether they were male or female, so they might not appear as Welch in Census or other records of the time.

\* *nature* – *International weekly journal of science*, 12 June 1879: 'for upwards of a century since thermometric observations of the temperature of the air began to be made in Great Britain there has not occurred a tract of weather so cold, as respects duration and intensity combined, as has prevailed during the half year ending with May'.

were hard put to it, and a not unusual sight was to see children barefooted. The people of Warriston Crescent, Inverleith Row and Terrace were so pestered by beggars from Canonmills that these streets became known as the Beggar's Row, Moocher's Place, and Sponger's Brae! Matters were so bad that the residents decided to finance a soup kitchen, and an empty shop was taken for this purpose. It was near Inverleith Terrace, and the policeman at Canonmills Bridge turned back any suspects who were not going to the soup kitchen.

Fish was very cheap, although that year the prices soared. Vegetables were also very scarce. As a rule a good broth was made from a penny marrow bone and 11/2d worth of mixed vegetables. This was

usually half a cabbage, some carrots or one very large one, a large turnip, some parsley, and sometimes a parsnip. That winter cabbage reached the price of 7d, carrots 1d and 2d each, and it was said there were only two cauliflowers in the whole of Edinburgh, for which the sum of 10d each was asked! No wonder the people were unable to buy green vegetables ...

At last things began to improve. The frost gave way, the sun shone, and the men got back to work – the mill wheel began to turn once more. Then there was a grand spring cleaning – not of carpets, these were taken to the Calton Hill to be beaten by two men who used carpet flails – but of people! A lady in Inverleith provided for the poor of Old Canonmills to get a bath at the swimming baths in Pitt Street. Some of them were loath to take advantage of this offer, arguing that the dirt kept them warmer!

*Sources: Winter 1879 is described in two of Welch's articles published in the Weekly Scotsman on 1st and 8th March 1941 (Press Cuttings, Edinburgh Room, Central Public Library).*

\* Pitt Street ran downhill from Great King Street, the name disappearing when it merged with Dundas Street in 1967. The Public Baths lay between Pitt Street and the lane that became Eyre Terrace in 1897. They're marked on PO Directory maps for 1879 and beyond, but had gone by 1900 (the year Glenogle Baths opened).

\* Welch says the millers had no work during the harsh winter. But secondary sources say the mill buildings had 'lost their original function in 1865', although the lade continued to be used until nearer the end of the 19th century. This apparent disparity needs investigation. [*Gifford et al's Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh*, p.421 (1984, 1988 edition, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books); and *Joyce Wallace's Canonmills and Inverleith*, pp.8–10 (John Donald, 1994).]



*The much-altered mill – but still recognisably the same building as in old drawings*