

This whole area has significance to walkers, geologists and botanists as well as 18th century and world war historians and industrial archaeologists. It is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest, mainly on account of the natural woodland and associated flora.

Unfortunately there is now a 'badger in the burrow' situation. Much of the camp is covered by rapidly regenerating birch woodland due to the reduction both in the number of sheep and of pollution from the factory. The remains of the toilet block graphically show the damage that is being caused. Soon the area of the camp is likely to revert to woodland. However, a local initiative has contacted various groups who have made an approach to Scottish Natural Heritage for permission to implement a woodland management programme and of course funding is being sought. We await the results of this initiative with interest.

References

- Burgess, C., 1996. Pre-afforestation survey for Highland Council. A.O.C. (Scotland Ltd).
Gregor, M. & Crichton, R., 1946. *From Croft to Factory*. Nelson.

Acknowledgements

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OBAN BURIALS

by Charles Hunter

Few people give a second glance towards Oban's only Churchyard at the end of Combie Street, even when they are taking the short cut from Glencruitten Road to Soroba Road through it and through the car park of the medical practice.

Within the triangular boundaries of the Churchyard, the original layout is symmetrical at right angles to the base of the triangle on the side where the car park and new Church Hall lie. There are ten equal rows of forty-four lairs

extending to the back of the church and four rows on either side with a diminishing number of lairs culminating in rows 1 and 18 in the corners which originally comprised only three lairs apiece. The rows are nine feet apart but the lairs are only two feet six inches wide, which led to their being used mostly in pairs. The total number of lairs was 590 with the recorded addition of numbers 591-601, location not known, and an early extension of row 6 along the side of the Chapel of Ease described as the South Gable. These were given new numbers 4 to 14 in the record. Later both gables of the church had two rows of burials of which the other three have no known record apart from the surviving stones. These and small extensions to other rows have been provisionally numbered by the writer.

The known record consists of a soft-covered book entitled "Register of Interments in Oban Burying Ground", written in many hands and a hard cover copy all in the same hand. Both books cover the period 1821 to 1866 with a few burials around 1901 added to the copy only. The comparison of these two records helps to confirm difficult names in the original but raises the question of where the large number of burials which took place after 1866 are recorded. This was the year in which the recording of burials became compulsory in Scotland and the year that saw the opening of Pennyfuir Cemetery. Pennyfuir has a "Book of Mortality" which records everyone buried there apart from the paupers, but it definitely does not cover the continuing use of the Oban Churchyard.

The existing record shows the lair holder and names and dates of persons buried, which is useful where there is no memorial or inscription. Nevertheless the number of blanks indicate fairly light use of the burial ground up to 1866. That burials continued apace up to 1901 with consequent overcrowding can be judged by the following stern minute of the Trustees of the Oban Parish Church dated 25th March 1901:

"The Trustees resolve to instruct the Beadle Mr Donald McIntyre ... that no interment takes place in future... except in accordance with the interlocutor issued by the Sheriff on 1st February 1895, and no new tombstones or railing... without the consent of the Trustees." (Signed) Alexander Duff, Clerk

The Beadle was to issue a burial certificate for every interment and hand it to the Clerk to the Trustees for insertion in the book of Register of interments.

This minute may account for the sudden flurry of 1901 burials in the copy record; in fact the copy record may date from 1901, if the original soft-covered Register, long out of use, was deemed to be unusable. The last recorded burial in the copy was in 1906.

However, burials continued here, without known record, to within living memory. Mr Gilbert MacKechnie told me he was present as a lad of about twelve at the burial of his grandmother "Lily Mor" MacKechnie around 1928.

Her lair has been identified as number 9 in Row 2, between the existing stones on lairs 8 and 10. Gilbert's grandfather could afford neither stone nor gravedigger, and the family dug the grave themselves!

Looking at the Churchyard from any angle one notices the yew trees scattered about. The most notable are at the corners of a low wall almost in the centre, which encloses sixteen lairs in two rows. Lairs 278-285 in Row 9 belonged to Robert Campbell of Sonachan while the adjacent lairs 322-329 were taken by Charles Campbell of Combie Esq. Charles Campbell's recorded burials are;

Lair 325: David Campbell, buried 15 Jan (?) 1830 aged 20

Lair 326: Charles Campbell of Combie, buried 27 June 1855 aged 72

There is a single stone within the enclosure which reads;

"Sacred to the memory of Charles Campbell Esq of Combie, died 19th June 1855 aged 72, his wife Mary Tough who died 12th July 1858 and two of his sons: David, died April (?) 1830 aged 20 and Charles died 10th January 1862 aged 25. Also his son Capt. John Campbell MM and late Lieut. RN, died at Edinburgh 17th November 1872 aged 41: also his daughter Anne died 7th March 1904 aged 81, the last survivor of his family, all interred here".

Campbell of Combie owned the north of Oban and Campbell of Sonachan, who was the Duke's Factor, acquired the Southern half of the Burgh in 1821. A further link is that Robert of Sonachan had married Susan, sister of Charles of Combie, in 1815.

In contrast it is worth noting that there are no memorials on the Glencruitten Road side of the Churchyard, apart from marker slates. This is where the paupers were buried at the traditional density of five to a lair. Only three burials were allowed in the other lairs. The unmarked graves cover parts of rows 14-16 and all of rows 17 & 18 in the corner nearest to the steps of the new church hall. The record shows one "stillborn child" and several burials of "a child" in Row 16. The copy record lists undated pauper burials in lairs 560-566 under the signature of J S McC(aig), Inspector of Poor. Another lair- No 516 in row 15- was taken by Capt. Nickels of the Thamis in February 1854 to bury Ali Cushie Ali Yuk aged 30, with the given name of Simon.

Most of the visible stones and slabs are modest and the interest is in the detail. The burial in lairs 18-19 in Row 3 is that of James Grant, officer of Excise, who died in August 1821 aged 63, and "whose remains were the first interred in this churchyard". Lairs 1-3 and 4-6, in the corner adjacent to this burial, were taken out by William Campbell, Collector of Excise and the recorded burials are "L Douglas children" and "Dr Bell's children"(both undated), with No 6 specified as Mary McLarty, died September 1825 aged 71. A low wall surrounds these six neglected lairs which may have been reserved

for stillborn or unbaptised infants in the early days. There is a moss-covered flat slab within the enclosure.

The Stevenson family is represented by a handsome monument in Row 11, where lairs 354-7 were taken by John Stevenson of Oban, who died on 10 April 1869 aged 69. His parents Thomas Stevenson and Matilda Maule, who died in 1844 and 1845 and other members of the family are also buried here. The burial place nearby, of John (aged 43 in 1846) and Donald (aged 63 in 1855) Stevenson, believed to be sons of James Stevenson and Flora McDonald, has no stone, which is odd.

The Cumstie family has three flat slabs added to row 5 adjacent to No 119. The middle slab is that for William Cumstie and his wife Jean Herriot, who died three days apart in 1852 aged 74, and for three of their children. The last of these, Peter Cumstie, died in 1900 aged 80. He was a local merchant who bought the Oban Distillery in 1866.

The other "business families" of Oban, the Kennedys, Sinclairs, McKichans are all represented on the gravestones. The McCaigs were buried in Pennyfuir except for lairs 114-5. There is no stone but the lairs were taken by "John S McCaig, merchant Oban", and the burials are recorded of his mother, Jane Stewart who died 3rd March 1847 aged 90 and of Margaret Stuart McCaig who died 8th August 1865 aged 68.

As would be expected, a number of ministers are buried here. These include:

Lair No 19, row 3: Rev Peter McIntyre, died 1834, Kilmore & Kilbride for 21 years.

Lair 65-7, row 4: Rev. Duncan McInnes, died 1903, Minister 1853-56.

Lair 119, row 5: Rev. John McIsaac, died 1847, Minister of Oban (after Canada).

Lair 348-9, row 11: Rev. Charles Whyte, Minister of the Gospel in Oban 1832-77.

And same lairs: Rev. Archibald Farquharson, Minister in Tiree 1832-78.

Lairs 373-4, row 11: Rev. John Campbell, Congregational Minister of Oban 1810-1853.

It would be interesting to learn more about J P McGregor, surgeon Oban, who died at the early age of 35 on 1st June 1840. His prominent memorial at lairs 100-101 in Row 5 was "erected by his friends" and the name of D Smith, builder Oban, is on the base. The Minutes of the Oban masonic lodge mention a subscription to provide a suitable memorial, so he must have been a much-respected member. That he was loved by his widow Annie Maclachlan (noted as Nancy McLachlan in the record), cannot be doubted. She died thirty years later and is buried in lairs 145-6 of row 6, directly opposite to her husband with her inscription on the reverse of the stone, presumably so that he could read it!

There are several sad stories, including a stone beautifully inscribed in Gaelic which tells of the death of many children in infancy. Again, in lairs 360-61 three McCallum infants including twins were buried on the same day, 27th April 1844.

On a lighter note, the elaborately-decorated celtic cross at lairs 171-2 in row 7 bears the inscription:

“Erected to the memory of Donald Campbell Black MD, late Professor of Physiology in Andersons College Glasgow: died in Glasgow 20th December 1896 aged 57. An honourable man, an eminent medical authority and physician, a true Highlander, a sincere friend and benefactor to the poor. True to his convictions and fearless in their expression, he was a hater and exposor of hypocrisy and shams”.

The Mormons have recorded the Oban burying ground and there are three references to it on the internet, with manuscripts microfilmed in 1958, 1968 and 1975, the last of which is described as 16 leaves*. I am indebted to Edna Stark for what may be a condensed version of this record on four pages. This helps to confirm some dates and details, which cannot be easily deciphered today even in ideal sunlight. The problem is that, not having the correct sequence of the layout, the Mormons have numbered the gravestones from an arbitrary point of reference.

There are several questions that cannot be easily answered.

- (a) Where were the Oban people buried before 1821? The population of the village was listed separately from the rest of Kilmore and Kilbride parish in 1791 at 586 souls, and even in 1778 the Duke's first census listed Oban families separately from those in the landward part of Glenshellach. This separation was recognised by the erection of Oban as a quoad sacra parish in 1804 which comprised the whole land area of Glenshellach and Glencruitten on both sides of the Black Lynn. Somewhere in this area there must be one or more burial places for this new parish.
- (b) Where is the full record of persons buried in Oban burying ground after 1866?
- (c) Where were the “other denominations” buried before Pennyfuir was started in 1866?

There is only one reference to a Free Church elder, and the known burial of the long serving John Campbell, Minister to the Independent (Congregational) church.

*<http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Library/fhlc>

Editor's note: a plan of the lairs is available from the author.