

collace HISTORIC CHURCHYARD



Collace Church



Perth and Kinross

Heritage Trust

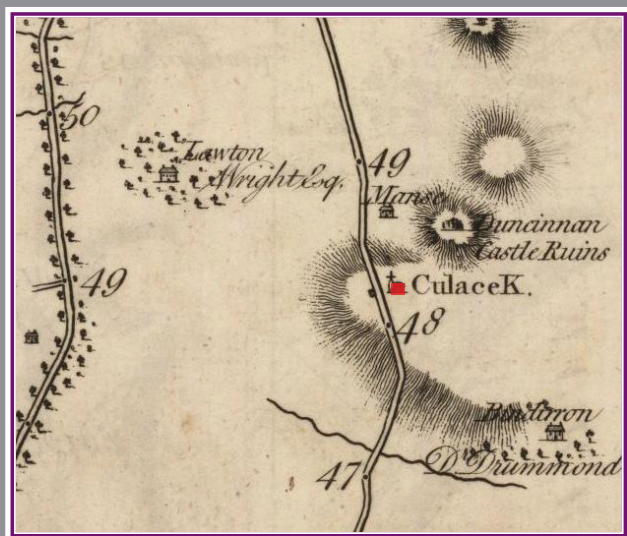
Archaeology | Architecture | Conservation

The churchyard at Kirkton of Collace has a rich history, providing a tangible link to the people and events of the past. This history is writ large in the church, for many centuries the focal point of the area. The churchyard itself has an outstanding collection of carved gravestones and graveyard buildings in a beautiful setting to the north of the Sidlaws.

history of collace

Collace Parish Church is only a few miles 'off the main road', the A94, sitting at the foot of Dunsinane Iron Age hill fort. This is the hill associated with Shakespeare's Macbeth, in which the three witches proclaimed that;

***"Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him."***



Map by Taylor and Skinner 1776, under license to the National Library of Scotland

The Nairne family were given the baronetcy of Dunsinnan and Sir William Nairne rose to the rank of Lord of Session. However, a scandal surrounded his niece Catherine in 1765, when she was found guilty of her husband's murder, along with her husband's brother.



Sir William Nairne



Sir William Nairne's memorial plaque

Both were arrested and sentenced to death, but there was a stay of execution for Catherine as she was pregnant and she managed to escape to France, it is said with help of Sir William.

Another scandalous event happened in Collace when John Mather (Meather) was shot while transporting illicit liquor from Brechin to Perth in 1740. His grave lies in the churchyard, marked by a table stone.

THE CHURCH AND CHURCHYARD *(BOTH B Listed)*

A church was consecrated at Collace in June 1242 by David de Bernham, Bishop of St. Andrews. The current Church was designed and built in perpendicular or 'heritors' gothic in 1813 and has been attributed to James Gillespie Graham who was the architect of the Grade A listed Liberton Church in Edinburgh, of which this may be the pre-cursor. It is broadly rectangular with buttressed walls, crow-stepped gables and a square bell tower with pyramidal finials.

The churchyard stands on a mound (typical for an old churchyard where successive burials have caused the ground to rise) and is rectangular in plan. The mortared rubble boundary wall would have previously been a dry stone dyke, originally with turf copings (described in 1717 as a "faill-dyke"). It has since been subsequently re-built, most likely in the early part of the 20th century.



The Mort House before restoration

the nairne mausoleum (B Listed)

The Nairne Mausoleum is the burial enclosure of the Nairne family and was constructed in 1813 and may be either the original aisle or a side-chapel of the old church. It is a roof-less rectangular rubble-built enclosure with castellated top. It is notable in having a 13th century Romanesque (round-headed) chancel arch with two columns. The outer chevroned arch is later and may have been added in 1813.

collace mort HOUSE (B Listed)

The mort house is a small building mainly built in rubble with droved sandstone dressings and pinnacles. It is thought to date from the early 19th century, although the vaults beneath point to an earlier use for burial. The mort house is one of only eight such structures which are listed by Historic Scotland and has been conserved by the project. The purpose of the mort house was to protect the dead from body snatchers who would dig them up and sell them to anatomy schools for dissection. The building was fit for its purpose, with a thick stone vaulted roof to keep the building cool and a stout lockable door. Access is by arrangement and at special events such as Doors Open Days.



The Mort House (Copyright George Logan)



The Nairne Mausoleum



Historic Churchyards Project

key to gravestones



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Although many of the gravestones have eroded and become difficult or impossible to read through the ravages of time, careful observation can reveal much about past people and events.

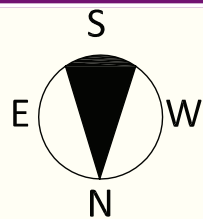
Collace has a particularly fine collection of gravestones dating from the 18th century or earlier. These are often more pictorial than written (presumably because of low literacy) and are typically arranged in three parts. A 'winged soul', or angel's head with wings, carrying the soul to heaven, is at the top. Below, often with carved initials or names and dates are heraldic or trade symbols, of which plough shares and looms are amongst the most common. At the base are the emblems of death; skulls, crossed bones and hour-glasses. Some of the most unusual gravestones are described and indicated on the plan (1-6).



2 William Hay, d. 1765, costumed figure, wright's tools. Father Time above similar to the one in St. Madoes.



1 Headstone with ship on south face.



CHURCHYARD plan

MODERN
EXTENSION
TO
CHURCHYARD

MORT
HOUSE

NAIRNE
MAUSOLEUM

COLLACE
PARISH
CHURCH

DISABLED ACCESS
TO CHURCHYARD



COLLACE
PRIMARY
SCHOOL

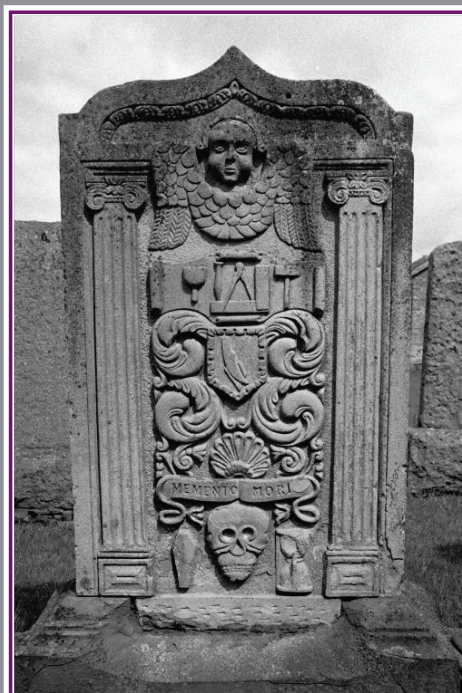


3 Panel from a table stone showing Adam and Eve in profile either side of the Tree of Life.

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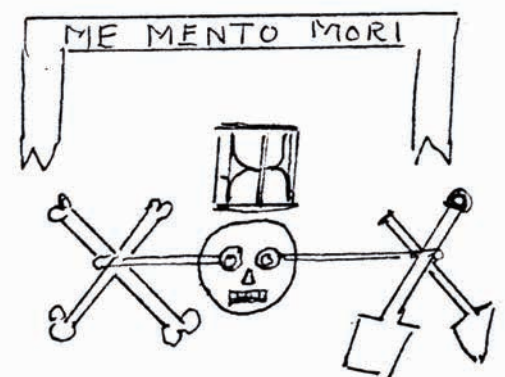


4 The Medieval discoid cross is a highly unusual carved stone which has been moved off the ground for safe-keeping. It features a six-pointed star arrangement with oak-leaf outline, a Solomon's Seal in the centre and six circular holes. Drawing on comparisons with similar stones in Cumbria and Ireland it may date from 13th century and the first Church consecrated here. It may have been an architectural fragment, a preaching cross or a grave marker.



5 John Will, d. 1762, fluted ionic columns either side of Masonic symbols. Features an unusual scalloped shell above 'memento mori'.

By kind permission of Betty Willsher.



6 Headstone to David Gardiner, d. 1791, badly eroded, features an unusual binding or thread through the eyes of the skull at the base.

Further information is available from:

Hay, Miller and Watt, *Off The Main Road*

Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust

- website at: www.pkht.org.uk
- *The Historic Churchyards Leaflet*
- *Defending the Dead:*
The Legacy of the Body Snatchers

Mitchell, *Monumental Inscriptions (pre-1855)*
in North Perthshire

Willsher, *Stones and Understanding*
Scottish Graveyards

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Historic Churchyards Project

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



BIODIVERSITY
THE VARIETY OF LIFE

