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Notice-board Archive: Notes and Queries

Updated July 2004:

Can You Find a Grand Match for James Ritchie's Curling Carving?

The gravestone of James Ritchie, a former farmer from Cairney who died in 1840, is remarkable for amongst more traditional symbols of death, such as the inverted torch and sarcophagus, sit a curling stone, crampets and broom to commemorate a sporting life. This monument (see picture below) is built into the west wall of the north projecting jamb of Tibbermore Kirk, which lies a few miles to the west of Perth. Also included at the centre of the stone is a carving of the farmer's prize winning bull. David B Smith, author of *Curling: An Illustrated History*, is keen to find out whether any further examples of gravestones recording the game of curling exist. If you have encountered other curling gravestones anywhere in Scotland or indeed beyond please get in touch with David Smith care of the [Carved Stones Adviser](#).



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Updated November 2003:

Spouting Wisdom - the Gravestone with Gargoyles

Iain Miller, Carved Stones Adviser Project volunteer, spotted an unusual recumbent tombstone in Kirkmichael's graveyard, Dumfries. The memorial, which was dated 1671, is richly embellished with decorative carvings of mortality symbols but also has more unusual carvings at the head of the stone in the form of gargoyles (see photos below). Gargoyles are decorative waterspouts that are commonly found on Gothic churches, projecting from beneath the roof gutters. As in this example, gargoyles were carved in a variety of different monstrous shapes, possibly intended as a ward against evil. While some table-tombs and flat slabs are ingeniously fitted with holes or channels for drainage, invaluable for our climate, the gargoyles here are an unexpected, and perhaps quite rare, feature. If you have encountered other gravestones with gargoyles please get in touch with Iain Miller care of the [Carved Stones Adviser](#).

Kirkmichael Graveyard, Dumfries 'Gargoyle Gravestone'



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Detail showing drainage holes



Updated July 2003:

Can you help solve the puzzle of Clynekirkton's French connection?

Possibly one of the most exciting and certainly most intriguing discoveries ever to be made in graveyard research in the north of Scotland has come to light during a programme of vegetation clearance at the Old Clynekirkton Graveyard at Brora, Sutherland, by members of Clyne Heritage Society.

A tablestone with a beautifully carved inscription in English, celebrating the lives of William and Mary MacKay of Dalvait, who both died in 1779, was uncovered from the dense undergrowth by volunteer and Society member Donnie Baillie. Lying immediately next to it he discovered a flat stone inscribed in the same script, presumably by the same mason, commemorating a John MacKay, also



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of Dalvait, who also died, coincidentally, in 1779. Nothing too unremarkable in this, except that the latter inscription is in French! In full, it reads: *'Isit corps de John MacKay Dalvait mort l'annie 1779'* (Here is the body of John MacKay Dalvait died in the year 1779).

Why is the inscription in French? What is the relationship between the two gravestones? What happened to these people in 1779?

After many lines of enquiry, including to the National Museum of Scotland, the Council For Scottish Archaeology and the Highland Family History Society, as well as expert local historians, it appears that no other gravestone in the Highlands has been recorded as being inscribed in French. This indicates that this one may be absolutely unique and, therefore, very important from an archaeological and family history perspective.

At the moment, however, the Society can only speculate about its significance, but it may be that there is a military reason for this particular French connection. Maybe John MacKay was a mercenary or perhaps like many Scots, exiled after the final defeat of the Jacobite cause in 1746, he became a soldier in France. But how does this account for the inscription being in French *after* his death? But why carve an inscription in probably what was not his native tongue? How did the mason know what to carve? Did John MacKay had a French wife? Certainly there were still links with France at this time, but how this man was linked with the 'Auld Alliance' is stumping the Society members.

Can anyone out there help?

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