

EAST NEUK OF FIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY



ANNUAL REPORT YEAR 2025

www.eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk

A Scottish charity SC051336

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DATES FOR THE DIARY

MEMBERS' VISIT at 2pm on 18 May

The visit will take in a guided tour of two of Pittenweem's historic houses, Kellie Lodging and Gyles House, and a guided tour of the interpretive panels installed by the Society at Pittenweem Priory. Light refreshments will follow. Tickets £10

KELLIE MIDSUMMER EVENING from 6-8pm on 22 June

Members will gather for prosecco and canapés on the lawn of Kellie Castle at 6pm (in the Undercroft if inclement). At 7pm upstairs in the Drawing Room, lecturer Ian Buchanan Smith will deliver an illustrated lecture on Hew Lorimer's life and work as a sculptor and on Lorimer's key contribution to the National Trust of Scotland's Little Houses Improvements scheme. Tickets £20

Tickets for both events are available at the AGM and can also be reserved by contacting Bill Kennaway, Gyles House, 6 The Gyles, Pittenweem KY10 2NG via chair@eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk or 01333 313172

THE EAST NEUK OF FIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY (SCIO)

NOTICE OF 5th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Annual General Meeting to be held on Monday 4th May 2026 at 7pm
in St Monans Church Hall, Station Road, St Monans.**

**Interested members are invited to gather at the Fishermen's Memorial Garden
in Station Road at 6.20pm to hear about the project**

Agenda

- 1 Welcome and Apologies
- 2 Approval of Minutes of 5 May 2025 (previously circulated)
- 3 Matters arising
- 4 Treasurer's report and Approval of Accounts
- 5 Chairperson's report
- 6 Election of Trustees (the constitution states that trustees shall retire from office at the AGM but shall be eligible for re-election). The current trustees have indicated their willingness to serve again.
- 7 Election of Management Team
The Chair, Vice-Chair and Hon Secretary and Treasurer have indicated their willingness to continue to serve in their roles.
- 8 Any Other Competent Business

**Peter Peddie, Chairman of St Monans Auld Kirk Enterprise, will give a talk on
their acquisition of this iconic historic building and their plans for its future**

Refreshments will follow the talk

Annual subscriptions

Annual subscriptions are now due - please pay promptly to save the Treasurer extra work and expense. You can pay now or at the AGM. If paying by post, please make out the cheque to "East Neuk of Fife Preservation Society (SCIO)" and address your letter to ENFPS Chair, Bill Kennaway, Gyles House, 6 The Gyles, Pittenweem KY10 2NG

To pay by bank transfer, ENFPS account no is 16067868, sort code is 83-24-24, bank name is RBS, Kirkcaldy Branch, account name is East Neuk of Fife Preservation Society (SCIO). To set up a standing order, please contact our Treasurer via treasurer@eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk

Annual subscriptions are £20 per person; Joint membership £35; Life membership £300 per person; £525 per couple. If you pay your subscription annually and are a taxpayer, you can assist the Society by completing a Gift Aid Declaration form which is available from the Treasurer.

THE EAST NEUK OF FIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY (SCIO)

ORGANISATION

Honorary President

Dr James Carstairs

Honorary Vice-Presidents

The Right Hon. The Earl of Lindsay

John Beaton

Trustees

Dr James Carstairs, John Beaton, Bill Kennaway, Angus Cameron, David Jenkins, Jane Forbes, Martin Gorrie

Management Committee members

Chair	Bill Kennaway chair@eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk
Vice-Chair & Planning Convenor	Angus Cameron vicechair@eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk
Hon. Treasurer	Martin Gorrie treasurer@eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk
Hon. Secretary	Jane Forbes secretary@eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk

Area Representatives

Anstruther	John Campbell
Elie & Earlsferry	Margaret Lambie Alastair Graham Andrew Nicholson
Kilconquhar & Colinsburgh	Stephen Aynscough Debbie Birrell
Kilrenny & Cellardyke	Steven Liscoe
Landward	Paula Martin
Largo & Lundin Links	Alison Genet
Pittenweem	Bill Kennaway Jane Forbes
St Monans	Angus Cameron/ Kim Cameron Kay Bryant

If you wish to contact an area representative, please do so through the Hon. Secretary

The East Neuk of Fife Preservation Society (SCIO) is a Scottish Incorporated Charitable Organisation with charity number SC051336

REPORTS FOR 2025

CHAIRPERSON REPORT

Our AGM was held in the Drawing Room at Kellie Castle on 5 May, where we welcomed Martin Gorrie as our new treasurer, David Jenkins having stood down after a heroic 10 years in the role. Other office holders were confirmed in their posts, and retiring trustees including David Jenkins were re-elected, with Martin Gorrie added to their number.

Thereafter we were enlightened by an illustrated lecture by leading furniture historian David Jones on the subject of 'New thoughts on East Neuk furniture' covering 16th and 17th century carvings in the burghs of Crail, Pittenweem and St Monans, thereafter repairing to Kellie's undercroft where we enjoyed drinks and the Society's usual nibbles provided by our members.

Our organized members' visits during the year took in two of the finest houses in Fife: Balcarres on 9 June and Balcaskie on 23 July. Full reports on these visits with photographs are included in the Colinsburgh and Landward sections of this report, on pages 11 and 17 respectively.

And exceptionally we managed a third visit in 2025, to Fife Council's Collections Centre on 9 September to view the three historic chairs the Society held for decades in its St Monans office as well as to see the historic artefacts and artworks archived there, which include over 50 Scottish Colourist paintings. A report on this visit including David Jones's invaluable contribution to ensuring appropriate display of the Society's former chairs is given in the article on page 30.

We greatly enjoyed a Xmas Social Event, again held in Pittenweem Coastline Church on 7 December, where Paula Martin gave us an erudite illustrated lecture on the Milestones of Fife, which have long been an interest of the Society.

Our committee has kept up to strength with some record attendances at our bi-monthly meetings, and we're very pleased Paula Martin has re-joined the committee, this time filling the Landward representative role.

The Society's project for interpretive panels at Pittenweem Priory that kicked off in 2022 finally got over the line in 2025 with the opening ceremony held on 3 December, as reported on page 28. And our Pittenweem Tolbooth project that started in 2025 has already borne fruit with our feasibility study having led to a potential tenant beginning discussions for leasing the disused building.

The Society supported several initiatives important to the heritage of the East Neuk including donating to St Monans Memorial Garden and assisting community groups responding to church closures; this included active participation with Friends of Pittenweem Kirk and providing advice and funding to St Monans Auld Kirk Enterprise and Elie Kirk Community Enterprise.

PLANNING CONVENOR REPORT

East Neuk shop fronts

One, often overlooked, aspect of the East Neuk is the range of historic shop fronts that still exist. On the right below, the former shop on Bank Street Elie has Art Nouveau detailing in the top lights that include leaded glass flower motifs together with original wrought iron security gates. Davidsons chemist shop in Elie has an impressive mortar and pestle above the door.



Examples include the curved glass and stone frontages at Barnetts of Elie, etched and stained glass at both Traquair's and Adamson's in Pittenweem, and the tiled threshold and woodwork at the Giddy Gannet in St Monans.



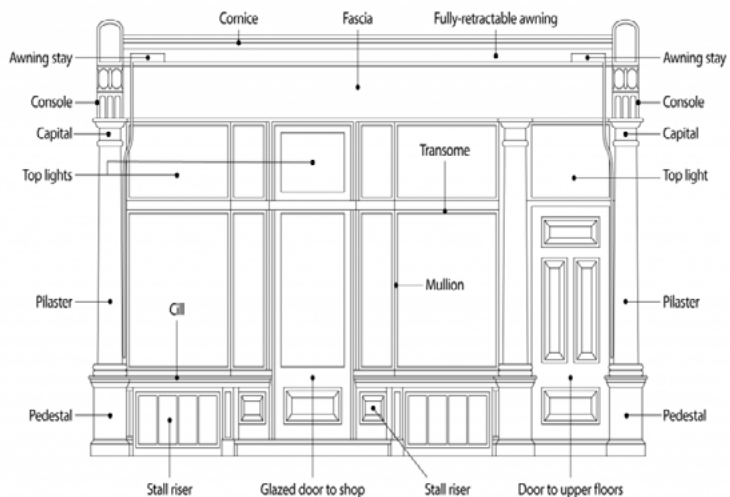
The preservation of shop fronts, particularly in light of the recent removal of an Edwardian frontage in Anstruther (see local report) is an important issue. The overall appearance of the streetscape is a key component of the cultural history of a place. This can be seen in the presence of long-standing family businesses and by illustrating the changes in architectural fashions over time. The traditional shopping streets in the East Neuk have lost many of their former owners due to the changing methods of shopping with endless homedelivery vans taking their place. Shops have been closed and converted to domestic properties or been let on short term leases where the new tenants may have little regard for the history of the property.

It can be challenging to protect existing shop fronts where properties have been altered for domestic occupation. Where properties continue to be used for retail purposes it can be expensive to restore frontages where new owners require upgraded marketing images and modern standards for accessibility must be followed.

Early shops were simple adaptations of domestic properties and in places such as St Monans, where there were approximately 30 shops in 1952, the majority of these now show no obvious signs of a shop front.

It was in the mid 19th century when shop front design took off, partly due to the abolition of the Glass Tax and the development of plate glass that could replace small handmade panes.

This figure shows the components that can be found in a classic shop front from the early 20th century. It can be an interesting experience to try and identify them



Historic Environment Scotland produced a short guide on the history of Scottish shopfronts and Fife Planning has issued specific guidance on shop front design. Key objectives are to protect and enhance the traditional character and appearance of individual listed buildings and within Conservation Areas.

A series of interesting retail frontages lends character to traditional shopping areas. Guidance recommends that traditional detailing, modelling and decoration on older shop fronts should be retained and maintained as these add variety and interest to the street and help to create a sense of place – this is a key to successful marketing.

Even where there is no firm evidence of the original arrangement of shop fronts on listed and older buildings, the restoration or reinstatement of traditional shop front designs is still encouraged, particularly where current shop fronts are of poor quality. Specific technical guidance is given and recommends, for example, that door panels should match the panelling and height of stallrisers. Items such as door fittings should be of a type that matches the period of the shop front.

Where blinds and canopies are to be fitted to a listed building, or in Conservation areas, these should be of the retractable, straight awning type (i.e. not the fixed type). Modern materials such as glossy plastics, aluminium, stainless steel and plastic-coated metals are not recommended as they detract from the architectural quality of the building and overall character of the area.

The fascia board is the key item for identifying the shop and this should be located over the whole shop front. The scale and design should match the character, height and period of the building and be in proportion with the shop front. Traditional gilt sign lettering on the fascia is encouraged and signage above fascia level is not recommended.

Projecting signs of a traditional style such as trade symbols are encouraged (e.g mortar and pestle, hanging boards). Interestingly, the unique lock sign that used to be above Gray & Pringle's shop front seems to have disappeared recently. When it comes to external lighting of shop signs it is recommended that these be fret cut, halo lit or use a similar system. Internally lit box fascias and swan neck lights are not recommended. Fife Council even has specific limits on the light intensity that can be used on shop front signs.

From a security perspective the use of solid roller shutters (usually with an associated projecting box) are not permitted as being inherently ugly and damaging to original woodwork. Instead, traditional stallrisers with window shutters, storm doors, security gates and demountable grills are encouraged.

ANSTRUTHER

21 Shore Street

During August demolition work was undertaken without listed building consent, planning permission or building warrant approval by the tenant of this property at 21 Shore Street. Sadly, this beautiful Edwardian shop front was destroyed in favour of the aluminium storefront shown below.



Subsequently the tenant left, leaving the façade in a state of limbo and an eyesore on the face of the waterfront. Having been alerted by the Preservation Society to this issue, Fife Council has now started enforcement proceedings for unauthorised works, and the Council's Built Heritage Officer is advising the building owner on reinstatement.



New lifeboat station and ramp

Construction has begun with work expected to take 18 months. To address the removal of a significant number of parking spaces for the construction site logistics, a temporary parking area has been created behind the Co-op, with a shuttle bus service operating in the summer months.



Dreelside Woods Community Asset and Path Accessibility Project

This community asset transfer project by Footprint East Neuk has upgraded 400m of the Dreelside path connecting the Dreel Tavern to the path over the old railway bridge, thus encouraging a greater connection with nature and promoting active and travel through cycling and walking in a safe and attractive environment.



A long access ramp has been constructed at the Dreel Tavern end allowing disabled people to use the Dreelside path for the first time.

The project included resurfacing, fencing, handrails, placemaking and retention works to create a cycle and pedestrian path as well as upgrading the existing steps to the path over the railway bridge, with a cycle ramp added to it.



Milton Muir

Visible on the coast road between Anstruther and Pittenweem, the second phase of this development of seven houses, three of which are for holiday lets, will see completion in 2026.

The scheme is of good modern design by architect Scott Strachan. Its clever re-use of original stonework in its frontage should make it visually a marked improvement over most other recent housing developments in the East Neuk.

This visual image shows the proposed elevation of the reconstructed front wall of the old Milton Muir farm steading, whose shallow foundations meant rebuilding the walls has been required.



image courtesy @gggraphics.co.uk

This shows the already completed phase one of the development. This involved upgrading the farm track access from the main road, where a bus stop is now provided.



COLINSBURGH & KILCONQUHAR

Society visit to Balcarres 3 June

Over 40 members of the Society attended the visit to Balcarres house and gardens at the invitation of the Earl and Countess of Crawford and Balcarres. Our host gave us a gripping account of his family history and then conducted us on a tour of the house, talking us through its stunning collection of European art, with furniture historian David Jones on hand to explain the history of items of the house's 18th century furniture.

A notable feature of the interior of the house is this splendidly elaborate decorated plaster ceiling of c1630 in the dining room.

Originally built in 1595 by John Lindsay, second son of the ninth Earl of Crawford, the house was extended in stages in the 19th century under the direction of leading architects William Burn and David Bryce.

After an explanation of the garden's history and planting scheme we were able to explore its spectacular terraces and visit the atmospheric 16th century roofless chapel.

Our tour culminated with the traditional Society drinks and nibbles in the courtyard.

A donation of the proceeds of ticket sales for the visit was made to our hosts' chosen charity, St Monans 1875 Memorial Garden.



Colinsburgh

At Muircambus on the Elie road, site work has started on converting the unlisted farm steading into eight houses. The existing stonework including the archway is to be retained albeit with some reconstruction.



The new Charleton golf clubhouse is now complete, replacing the old building that burned down some years ago. Unconventional in design, with its low profile and timber cladding it blends really well into the landscape.



The big Paddocks housing development is nearing completion; hopefully it will get the old Nether Rires name used for the entrance street.

Work on the Colinsburgh Kids Community Garden project is now underway next to the Town Hall, organised by Colinsburgh Primary School Council.

Kilconquhar

Sadly Kilconquhar Parish Church is to close; faced with the very high costs of upkeep, the congregation has requested that Fife Presbytery proceed with closure and disposal of the building.



The Kilconquhar Inn continues to attract high accolades by various food critics across different publications. In 2025, the Inn was rated as one of the top 100 restaurants, as well as being rated as one of the top 50 Gastropubs and is also mentioned in the Michelin Guide.

In 2025 there have been very few changes to the fabric of the buildings in Kilconquhar village. Several houses changed hands last year and new neighbours have been settling in and making their homes here within our small community which is good to see.

This painting depicts Kilconquhar in the 19th century, and many of the houses in the painting still stand, looking much the same. There has been much change to the village, but the core has remained the same and is still recognisable today.



ELIE & EARLSFERRY

Once again the past year continues to have a high level of planning applications for alterations, extensions and new build developments. These fall mainly within Conservation Areas in each village, and outwith where design guidelines are normally less onerous.

The main concern is how these affect Listed Buildings as these are referred to HES and the Fife Council Heritage Officer for comment. Some of these applications have been approved for what could be construed as insensitive additions involving balconies and overscaled dormers which do have an impact on the local streetscape. Dialogue with a senior planning officer to express concerns will hopefully result in a more responsive approach when assessing these applications by case officers.

The high level of holiday homes and short term letting properties is also an issue which Fife Council is addressing to consider introducing STLCAs (short term letting control areas). This would restrict STLs in certain areas like St Andrews and Elie & Earlsferry which have a high proportion of these properties. This is also compounded by planning applications for the addition of extra bedrooms to these properties for letting which then increases the demand for on street parking especially during summer months.

The major housing developments at the Grange Earlsferry and Wadeslea Elie submitted by Nairn Estates have not progressed to the actual development phase due to the ongoing resolution of site servicing and provision of upgraded facilities for sewage treatment.

The future of Elie Parish Church has been a priority for the local community. A company has been established as Elie Kirk Community Enterprise Ltd with Alastair Graham as Chairman, and which is completing a detailed feasibility study for adapting the building to various uses including a café.

The renovation of the water fountain at Toll Green is also being progressed, although an issue has arisen regarding the ownership of Toll Green, and various bodies are being approached for funding.

The outgoing Chairman of Elie & Earlsferry History Society Graham Johnston was presented with the David Thomson Award by his successor Alastair Graham. It is named in honour of the founder of the Society. Graham's many research projects are accessible on the History Society archive www.eliehistory.com/explore-archive/



KILRENNY & CELLARDYKE

This past calendar year has only seen a small number of planning applications submitted for Cellardyke and Kilrenny, and if duplicate Listed Building Consents and variations to already consented applications are discounted then the total barely amounts to seventeen, with only eight of these within the bounds of Cellardyke's Conservation Area (CA), and none within Kilrenny's.

With development space limited within the footprint of these areas, and certainly Cellardyke has very little latitude for further urban expansion, a good deal of those applications were for the maintenance and repair of existing properties. These applications again predominantly related to replacement windows, doors, rainwater goods, roof repairs and rooflights *etc.* The number of applications for extensions of any description to properties within the relatively new Muir "Silverdykes" housing scheme has noticeably declined over the past couple of years, falling to just two during 2025. Conversely, the most common application within the Conservation Area was that for single storey extensions to the rear of properties, and these comprised some 60% of the total made throughout 2025. With only three of these being sited outwith Cellardyke's CA we are seeing a continuance of the infilling of remaining open space within the 18th century core of the settlement.

Such infilling of burghal rigs with hard structures causes its own problems with loss of open ground, but more immediately it reduces the garden space available and it is probably too simplistic to directly link this factor to the welcome proposal of the development, by Fife Council, of an area of garden allotments. This will take place on ground, alongside Tolbooth Road, which has remained as open space since demolition of the military accommodation/holiday camp site. The project will provide over twenty plots for allotment as well as a large community garden and a separate facility of a meeting room for common usage.

One minor CA application was notable as an example to illustrate the situation that most residents within a CA are completely ignorant of, or choose to ignore, which is that whilst the freedom of Permitted Developments (those which do not require Planning Consent) still applies equally to a CA it is necessary that an assent is still required from a planning authority to ensure that nothing wholly inappropriate or intrusive to the architectural integrity of the area is allowed to be erected.

One might think that putting up a timber pergola and trellis (both categorised as temporary structures) in a garden would be exempt, but when the garden is part of an open streetscape then that nominal consideration has to be made.

Nothing has changed with the situation concerning the demolished Tam Blyth's Byre, and the site remains derelict behind ubiquitous HERAS fencing, awaiting any plan to develop the now empty plot. The Byre's walls form part of the back dyke which most likely marked the burgh perimeter alongside the "Back Road" of Silverdykes since the 16th century.



Of steadily increasing concern to indigenous residents, and not only in Cellardyke but all other East Neuk coastal villages, is the proliferation of conversions by corporate AirBnB speculators, of domestic dwellings into holiday rentals. These many properties (referred to as Short Term Lets, aka STL, in Planning parlance) continue to be disdained in Cellardyke.

They are easy to spot: they will have a key safe at the door, which will often be painted grey to match the windows, in which will be an obligatory scatter of seashells and some wooden ornaments purporting to represent a lighthouse or a fishing boat, but of more concern is that they are frequently unoccupied, and will be so for extended periods over winter months.

The increase and effect of the high percentage of these STLs and the dormancy of the properties, particularly in Cellardyke, have received national attention in the press with articles voicing concern for the situation appearing recently in *The Courier*, *The Scotsman*, and *The Sunday Times*.

<https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/5386704/cellardyke-short-term-let-family-homes/>

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/controls-on-holiday-lets-in-east-neuk-ghost-towns-considered-5468511>

<https://www.thetimes.com/uk/scotland/article/inside-the-fife-village-being-hollowed-out-by-holiday-lets-jvlmb0g6g>

Perhaps the bubble of holiday rentals may be nearing its elastic limit, as this time last year there were only two applications concerning STL properties. Notably one of these was for a house to be converted from an existing holiday accommodation property back into a domestic dwelling.

However, the other application, affecting a Listed Building, involved substantial internal alteration and the construction of a large two storey extension, with balconies, on the rear of the building, providing accommodation for ten persons, which is not far short of a small hotel.

This proposal in particular has attracted concerned comments and involvement from a number of local Councillors, and unprecedented objection from the local community. Nevertheless, the application was approved by eleven votes to four. Situated close to Skinfasthaven the development will be in addition to the thirty STL properties that already surround the harbour, and the many more in neighbouring streets.

Another application encompassed several of the topics referred to in previous reports, and above, *i.e.* infilling of open ground, the obvious potential for change of use to rental accommodation, destruction of another section of tarred heid dyke, and meritless architecture, though to its credit it specifically incorporated PV panels into the design proposal. Whether you consider them ugly or not they are a serious contribution to renewable sources of energy.

This application is particularly notable (at the time of writing) for garnering almost equal numbers of objections (8), exclusively from Cellardyke residents, and supporting statements (7), of which two were from Cellardyke addresses, the others hailing from as far afield as St Andrews, Colinsburgh, and Dundee. These also just happened to include three supporting statements that appear to come from employees of the architectural practice who designed the building, which then made the application as agents on behalf of their client, and then made the planning application as agents for their client. The client also appears to be the director of that same architectural practice and is likewise apparently named as the applicant

And finally, the pestilence of grey is still a present feature of properties and designs throughout the burghs, but it has progressed beyond the realms of just paint! Whilst you would anticipate that a holiday rental chalet (large shed with windows) erected within the curtilage of a property might have been traditionally constructed in timber, think again.

Following demolition of a section of 'heid dyke' and 'formation of hard standing' (ENPS Report 2024 *et.al.*) said rental chalet was constructed and can clearly be seen to comprise of faux timber panels moulded in grey plastic. At another location, a deteriorated set of timber gates in a property's masonry curtilage wall were renewed, not with the expected equivalent set of wooden replacements, but with galvanised steel frameworks infilled with faux timber panels moulded in grey plastic. Such examples offer nothing of worth and detract from their environment. However, the end for grey may yet be in sight, as quite recently a Cellardyke resident genuinely asked online for advice that as grey was no longer considered fashionable what colour should they now paint their house! Answers on a postcard please.

LANDWARD

The Society's second visit of the year on 23 July was to Balcaskie House. Our host Toby Anstruther explained the history of the house, which was designed and built in 1674 by Sir William Bruce for his own occupation. Bruce was both a significant political figure in the time of Charles II and is important as the first proponent of classical architecture in Scotland.

The house's dramatic north and south frontages, its long terraced garden and surviving original Bruce interior make Balcaskie one of Scotland's finest early Renaissance houses. The Anstruthers acquired Balcaskie in 1698, perhaps trading up from their previous Dreel Castle residence in Anstruther which was famously slighted by Charles II as a 'craws nest'. Charles had stayed there not long after his arrival in Scotland at age 20 to be proclaimed by the Scots Parliament as their king after the demise of his father.

Our host conducted us on a tour of the interior of the house, followed by refreshments and impressive nibbles organised by our volunteers in the south-facing garden. The terraced garden has a vista aligned right down to the St Monans windmill on the coast and across to the Bass Rock.



image:©Jimmy Graham



Our visit had started out at Comielaw, a farm steading on the Balcaskie estate converted into 16 studios for artists and craft and tech businesses, and we enjoyed meeting several of the business owners and viewing their work.



A donation of the proceeds of the visit was made to Anstruther Improvements Association, our hosts' chosen charity.

Carnbee Kirk

The sad news is that Carnbee Kirk, grade B listed, is to be sold. This follows the union of the parish into the new East Fife Rural Parish Church of Scotland along with Kingsbarns, Kilrenny and Largoward. Services will continue in rotation at each location except that on disposal of Carnbee Kirk they will thereafter be held in Arncroach Church Hall.

Carnbee Kirk is a gem of a building, built in 1793 by Andrew Horsburgh, wright in Pittenweem, who provided the design. It has interior furnishings designed by Robert Lorimer including an oak font carved by William Wheeler of Arncroach; its walls hold the heraldic arms of the 1st Earl of Kellie and of Bethune of Kilconquhar. Arncroach Church Hall is a former Free Church building dating from 1845, designed by local architect LA Rolland and is itself grade B listed. The logic for retaining Arncroach Church Hall instead of Carnbee Church is understandable. Arncroach has a larger population and as the Church Hall is already cleared of pews, pulpit etc it can be used for both community activities and church services.

A full history of Carnbee and its Kirk can be found in a new publication by Prof Anthony Lodge 'Carnbee Past', available from Pittenweem Library.

Lorimer Society's Annual Lecture

This was held on 4 Oct 2025 at Kellie Castle, with Dr Juanita Cox presenting her lecture 'Precarious Privilege: Women of Mixed Heritage in Post-emancipation British Guiana and their Scottish connections'. Her husband, Rod Westmaas, presented on 'Colonial legacies and hidden lives: Sir David Patrick Chalmers, Joanna Herbert, and the Lorimer connection in British Guiana'. The talks were followed by a recital given by pupils of St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh.

LARGO & LUNDIN LINKS

Life has been quiet on the planning front in Largo and Lundin Links, but Lower Largo has seen several completed new developments, as below.

These changing rooms and toilets at Temple Car Park are great news for swimmers and for those enjoying the Castaway sauna; a disabled access toilet is provided under Fife Council's 'Changing Places' project.



Less beneficial is this new building at the end of the Temple which got its planning consent as a studio workshop, suggesting a benefit to local employment. It is now for sale as a 'two bedroom beach studio'.



A disappointing trend of over-large extensions spoiling views from the beach has continued with this example where a box-like structure at the back of the property facing the beach has replaced traditional windows and a conservatory.



This is a result of planning decisions that routinely approve rear extensions without consideration of their impact on significant vistas from public spaces. This is becoming increasingly the case where some of the traditional character of villages is being lost due to 'beach' views, as opposed to 'road' views and as such do not fit into the Council's criteria as being deemed to require planning protection from sometimes inappropriate developments.

Following the decision by the Pier Group last year to stall attempts to protect and restore Largo Pier back to its former glory, a new group has been formed. The Largo Harbour Regenerative Group is now working hard to source funding to try to stabilise and protect the Pier from further deterioration.

The Heritage group (part of Largo Communities Together) is organising an event to celebrate Alexander Selkirk's 350th anniversary in 2026. There will be a number of events to celebrate the occasion including a Ukrainian theatre group based in Dundee putting on a show.

The Aurrie Café (originally the Baptist Church) which closed earlier in the year has now found new hosts to run the Café. This sculpture at the Café is by local artist Alan Faulds whose other works similarly enliven the seafront.

Aurrie Mor community centre (previously St David's Church of Scotland) is providing a good base for local arts and community events.



Planning permission has been given for Scottish Water's new sewage treatment scheme which is part of the improvements needed following the designation of Lower Largo bay as an official Bathing Water. The new installation will add secondary filtration treatment during the bathing season to the existing wastewater treatment works located near the end of the Serpentine. Access arrangements are currently being debated.

At Upper Largo, the Church of Scotland Largo Parish has been united with East Neuk Trinity Parish Church and St Monans Parish Church into the new Fife Coastal Trinity Parish, meaning that after disposal of the other church buildings, Largo will be the only historic Church of Scotland building hosting services west of Anstruther. Hopefully services will continue in some of the redundant church buildings under their new ownership.

At nearby Sir Andrew Woods Tower little of the recommended remedial work has been carried out other than curtailing the ivy which fortunately no longer immediately threatens the roof, hence there has been no significant further deterioration of this historically important Scheduled Ancient Monument.

One positive development is that the orchard area of the Walled Garden has been cleared of undergrowth and so the Tower's carpet of snowdrops can be enjoyed.



The consultation process regarding the future of Kirkton of Largo Primary School which 'mothballed' in 2024 due to insufficient numbers of children attending, has now been completed. The conclusion is it is no longer viable as a school and it will close completely as of August 2026.

At the time of writing there has been no further development of the now abandoned area where the Lundin Links Hotel once stood.

PITTENWEEM

The burgh has seen some interesting progress on the mural front.



On the wall of the Larachmhor Tavern the offending witch is gone - at long last - but her wrinkled brow still lingers on the pub name sign.



This seascape mural at the playground of Pittenweem Primary School was carried out by the Pittenweem Playpark Project who teamed up with the Arts Festival, with the painting largely done by local children.

At West Shore the major second phase of Scottish Water's sewage outfall work has now been deferred to 2028, meaning that the present seriously unsatisfactory conditions for local residents and swimmers will continue.

The planning application to re-instate Pittenweem Inn (originally the Station Hotel) as a hotel/restaurant has been withdrawn following objections; already in poor condition the building is likely to deteriorate further.

At No. 5 High Street, planning approval has been given for a like-for-like replacement for the popular Fish Bar; this involves demolition of the existing frontage which is to be re-instated including elements of the old structure. Work has yet to start due to an archeological investigation being required ahead of demolition. This bench was the final stage of the project by Pittenweem Fishermen's Memorial Association to mark the men and women who made their living from the sea and those who lost their lives in so doing. The bronze sculpture is by Alan Herriot.



Pittenweem Tolbooth, adjoining the Kirk, was extensively restored by its owner Fife Council a few years ago but the restoration did not extend to the interior which was left in an unusable state.

Funded by a Fife Rural Development grant, the Preservation Society commissioned a viability and architectural feasibility study to ascertain the costs of restoring the interior to a usable condition, to identify options for a commercial or social use, and to identify possible tenants. One of the organisations contacted during the study is now beginning discussions over leasing the disused building.



At Pittenweem Parish Church the viability and architectural feasibility study commissioned by the Society on behalf of the Friends of Pittenweem Kirk for community ownership of the building was completed. Subsequently the agreement in principle of the Church of Scotland General Trustees was obtained to the Off-Market transfer of the building, with the sale price determined by the independent valuation arranged by the General Trustees.

The basis for the asset transfer application to the General Trustees was that disposal of the building would not be until 2027 in line with the closure timetable stated in Fife Presbytery's 2023 Mission Plan, and that a sufficient period of exclusivity would be available to allow acquisition proposals to be developed, in accordance with the General Trustees policy on asset transfers quoted in Fife Presbytery's Historic Churches Working Group 2023 report.

A key finding of the feasibility study was that the redundant Pittenweem Church Hall should also be acquired and developed to provide an annual income for the Kirk. This option was closely examined but found not to be achievable due to high capital cost involved and difficult funding prospects.

The Society's consultants have since suggested an interim low-cost solution for acquiring just the Kirk and the Society will be exploring this option, using the feasibility study information on conversion and running costs to support discussions with potential partners interested in using the building.

At the end of 2025 the ownership of the Kirk building transferred from the Pittenweem Parish congregation to the new combined St Adrian's East Neuk Parish, following their union. Clarification has been sought from the General Trustees and St Adrian's East Neuk on the status of the agreement for the Off-Market transfer of the Kirk building and on the disposal timescale.

ST MONANS & ABERCROMBIE

The major 2025 event in the burgh was the opening of the St Monans 1875 Fishermen's Memorial Garden on Saturday 22nd November.

The Garden was officially opened by Anthony, Earl of Crawford and Balcarres accompanied by his wife, Minnie. The opening was preceded by a service at Braehead Church, then by a reading of the names of those lost at sea held down at the harbour, and with a bagpipe lament specially written for the occasion.



image courtesy The Courier

The Mayor of King's Lynn, Andy Bullen, travelled to the event, and as a mark of the friendship between Fife and Norfolk he was given an inscribed quaich. The project had been thought of over the past, knowing that in King's Lynn where the 8 of the fishermen's bodies that were recovered were buried, there is a fine sandstone Fifie-boat engraved with the men's names in Hardwick Road Cemetery, but no local tribute existed in St Monans or Cellardyke to the 37 lives lost. In 2019 the Residents' Association started planning for a Memorial Garden with the 150th Anniversary, i.e. 2025, in mind. An open entry competition was mounted to try and obtain a broad spectrum of ideas, the unanimous winner being that of Fermin Beltran dos Santos.

The design features three rose granite plinths, elliptical in shape, like Fifie boats. The increasing height of the plinths obscuring the Corten steel sails symbolises the rising seas and is a reminder of the dangers for those who go to sea for a living.



Work on site was only started in September 2025. The area was cleared and the raised garden area and paved area were quickly built. The Beautiful St Monans team, with help and advice from Glendoick Garden Centre, planted up the raised bed and the area around a fine anchor which had been donated by someone whose brother perished at sea more recently.

Meanwhile, in Inverurie, the stonemasons were suffering several setbacks with a flawed granite pillar, 2 broken granite saws and a broken crane.

The day before the grand opening the plinths arrived and our wonderful local contactors dropped all current work to hasten to the site, to get the plinths installed and the rest of the site paved, this still being completed 30 minutes before the service!

Fundraising continues for Phase 2 which adds the remaining wave-form bench, notice & history boards and protective pavement bollards.

Other news of note was of St Monans Auld Kirk Enterprise (SMAKE) finally purchasing the Auld Kirk from the Presbytery in December. As Peter Peddie (Chair) says, it would not have been possible without the strong support of the local community and this was witnessed at their first formal event, the Watchnight Service on December 24th where the Kirk was packed.

National Lottery Funding of £115,000 has been awarded to further develop plans, with matched funding required for its release and to allow the Kirk to be used as a venue for functions such as services, concerts and as a café.

This year saw the usual planning applications for replacement windows, roofs, rainwater goods etc. A notable exception in permissions appears to be of Fife Council's gradual acceptance of more environment-friendly window structures particularly including timber framed but double-glazed versions even, in some instances, in listed buildings.

An example is of 2 Narrow Wynd where the past glazing pattern was 6 on 2 but in the interests of more durable and efficient timber double-glazed windows, 1 on 1 panels have been accepted. The argument being that the smaller the panes the less efficient they are and the more quickly they degrade and need replaced so are even less eco-friendly.

One contentious application, now approved, is at the Burnside, West End in front of the Auld Kirk where there is an old bitumened shed used in the past for fish-smoking. The application seeks to convert the shed into a Summer House by enlarging the current footprint by around 40% to include high grade insulation, incorporate the attached WC and build a new timber double glazed window into the seawall, heightened to accommodate this, with two large sliding glazed doors for the garden-facing aspect.

Whilst it is good that derelict buildings and sheds are nurtured back into use, it was felt the very sensitive iconic site would be seriously detracted from by this development's obvious modern appurtenances, moderation of which might suit everyone. The large glazed doors facing the adjacent property have now been modified to that of a normal-sized door but the sea-wall window appears, sadly, to be retained.

SCOTS GIRN ABOUT GRITS, GRUEL AND GREENS ⁽¹⁾

This is a quote from a report by a Scottish merchant living in the very small Dutch town of Veere in 1750, where he records his compatriots' dislike of the local diet and their preference for a good piece of meat on the table daily.

The quote is also the title of a booklet on Veere's amazingly strong historic connection with the east coast of Scotland. This article by Bill Kennaway is based on this booklet and follows an afternoon last year spent in Veere, which is on the island of Walcheren in the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands.

These two buildings in Veere, built by a Scottish merchant in 1539, are known as 'De Schotse Huizen' (The Scots Houses), and are sited on 'Schotse Kaai' (Scots Quay). One of the buildings later became the residence of the 'Conservator of Scottish Privileges in the Low Countries', who was effectively Scotland's consul to Flanders. The two buildings have identical lower frontages suggesting that both originally had stepped gables.



The Schotse Huizen were restored in the 1880s by Albert Ochs, a Jewish millionaire from England who used them to house his art collection, later donating the buildings to the Dutch nation. In 1949 his daughter Alma also donated the family art collection, having managed to escape to England during WW2. The houses are now an art gallery and museum of the Scots connection.

These former trading houses on Veere's market street are typical of buildings owned by the Scottish merchant community there. Some of these retained their Scots names, e.g. Domfris (Dumfries) and Laterdale (Lauderdale), and the former manse and part of the Scots Kirk are still standing. Stepped gables (trapgevels) as shown here originated in the Low Countries before their migration to the East Neuk - as did pantiles (dakpannen) which first arrived as ballast in ships returning from the Low Countries.



Trading links between Scotland and Flanders began in the 12th century with the export of wool by the monks of Melrose Abbey, and by the 1400s Flanders was Scotland's main trading partner. In 1407 the right to land certain Scottish goods free of customs duties was formalised by a decree of the Duke of Burgundy which created the office of 'Conservator of Scottish Privileges in the Low Countries' and granted a monopoly on trading Scottish goods under a system called the 'Staple Contract', with Bruges as the initial Staple port.

However, silting of Bruges' entrance channel restricted navigation, hence in 1518 the Lord Conservator Sir Alexander Napier, Laird of Merchiston, transferred his Office and Staple Court to the cathedral city of Middelburg on the island of Walcheren which is across the Scheldt estuary from Bruges.

Middelburg subsequently thrived as one of the founding ports of the Dutch East India Company which dominated world trade in the 17th century, with the city reaching a population of 20,000 by the end of the 18th century.

But in 1541 the Staple moved to Veere in the north of Walcheren, favoured by the Scots for its easier access to the North Sea and its Protestant affiliation. This was a time of religious wars with Scotland suffering eight years of *Rough Wooing* by Henry VIII and Walcheren enduring occupation by the Spanish troops of Philip II, with Middelburg for years an isolated Catholic stronghold until its surrender to Dutch Protestant troops after a siege of well over a year.

Veere had been founded in 1296 as a small ferry port, later developing into a 'borg' i.e. a fortified trading port or burgh. Its ties with Scotland were established in 1444 by the marriage between Wolfert VI, Lord van der Veere, and Princess Mary Stewart, daughter of King James I.



For over 250 years despite its small size Veere remained the main port for Scottish commerce with the Netherlands. Wool was Veere's major import from Scotland, next to coal, hides, whisky, flax, grain and salmon. Exported to Scotland were cloth, roof tiles, leather, brassware, salted herring and wine.

The Scots traders in Veere, largely from around the Forth estuary, enjoyed special privileges under the Staple Contract, including paying fewer taxes than local citizens, with the Court of the Lord Conservator enforcing its own laws in civil and criminal cases.

In 1612 the Scottish community in Veere was given the right to establish a chapel and graveyard and to appoint a minister. This was the first Scottish Protestant Kirk established on foreign soil, with its ministers appointed by the General Assembly in Edinburgh. The Kirk's last minister departed in 1799.

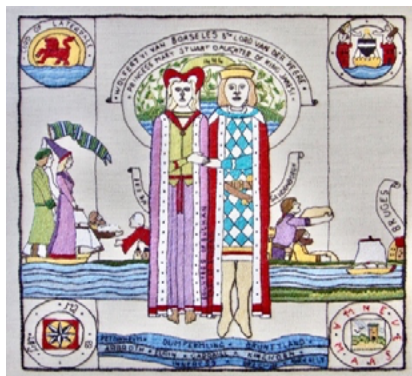
Veere also has a long military connection with Scotland. A Scots Brigade of the Dutch States Army was formed in 1582 and served for 200 years, with three infantry regiments stationed in Veere as its garrison.

In 1944 Scottish 52nd Division and Canadian forces liberated Walcheren after fiercely contested amphibious landings costing over four thousand lives. Naval bombardment and heavy bombing raids breached the dykes and deliberately flooded the whole island, which had been heavily fortified with gun batteries controlling the Scheldt estuary and preventing shipping and supplies reaching the port of Antwerp for the Allied advance on Germany.

At the start of the war Middelburg, one of the Netherlands' most historic cities, had been bombed by the Luftwaffe and heavily shelled by defending French artillery, with the loss of hundreds of its medieval timber buildings. Civilian casualties were low because the city had been evacuated, whereas in the 1944 battle well over a thousand Dutch citizens died across the island, many from the flooding. Almost miraculously Veere's liberation by the 52nd Division was achieved with little loss of life or damage to its buildings. Middelburg has since been rebuilt and its medieval town hall and abbey have been restored.

A more recent connection between Scotland and Walcheren has come about through the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry project, in which volunteers in 34 countries created 300 panels depicting the history of Scots 'in diaspora'.

Six of the eleven panels for the Netherlands are about Veere, embroidered by its residents, with the Veere panels being on display in the Schotse Huizen museum. This panel is about Princess Mary's wedding in 1444; other Veere panels are about the Lord Conservator, the Special Privileges, the Scots Kirk, Culross, and the 1944 liberation by the Scottish 52nd Division.



A Veere-Scotland Society www.veere-schotland.nl was formed in 1998, jointly in Veere and Culross, and it has a permanent exhibition in Culross town hall.

¹ 'Scots girn about grits, gruel and greens' Stichting Veere-Schotland 2008

PITTENWEEM PRIORY INTERPRETIVE PANELS



The opening ceremony for the Society's three interpretive panels was held at Pittenweem Priory on 3 December, with the Lord Lyon King of Arms Dr Joe Morrow officiating and Provost of Fife Jim Leishman representing Fife Council, whose community and environment grants were a key part of funding the project.

This 'Sacred Foundations' panel gives the timeline from the original 8th century Celtic monastery on May Island, to the 12th century buildings here in Pittenweem that were the shore base for the Benedictine monastery on the island, and to the 15th century construction of Pittenweem Priory as a full Augustinian monastery. The panels' illustrations show how the 15th century monastery would have looked.



Until recently little was known about the early history of the Priory, but this gap has now been addressed thanks to Professor Anthony Lodge whose extensive research into church archives and charters has provided the information for the panels.

Here Prof. Lodge braves the elements during the opening ceremony to explain the second 'Priory Life' panel describing the monks' daily life and mission. This panel also records the important figures who were its Priors, including Archbishop Andrew Forman, who was blamed for the disastrous Battle of Flodden because of his role as James IV's diplomat to the French and English courts.



Images courtesy Robert Melville

En route to the third panel the party took shelter in St John's Church where Bill Kennaway thanked all those organisations that supported and assisted the Society's project, also drawing attention to Sir Robert Lorimer's design of St John's interior and the armorial panel of Archbishop Forman on its wall.

The third 'Lost Priory' panel shown below illustrates the monastery buildings that have disappeared and explains the 16th century Kirk and Tolbooth buildings which followed, along with an image from one of the Kirk's stained glass windows by William Wilson, Scotland's leading 20th century stained glass artist. Also noted on the panel are Lorimer's restoration of the Priory buildings and the kirkyard's idiosyncratic gravestones.



Thereafter guests made their way to the Prior's Lodging building, originally the manor house where the Prior lived and entertained guests. Here Jane and Graham Forbes revived this tradition by hosting a reception for those attending the opening ceremony.



The panels and extracts from Prof. Lodge's history can be viewed via this link www.eastneukpreservationsociety.co.uk/what-we-do/projects/previous-projects. The panels' QR codes allow visitors to access this information on their phones.

Images courtesy Robert Melville

THE SAGA OF THE SOCIETY'S ST MONANS CHAIRS

For about 50 years until their transfer to Fife Council the Society held three historic chairs in its St Monans office, so with this interest a group of our members visited the Council's Collections Centre in Glenrothes on 9 September to see the chairs as well as to view the artefacts and artworks archived there.

The Glenrothes Centre houses most of Fife Council's extraordinary collection of over 60 Scottish Colourist paintings, including 38 by SJ Peploe, with the majority from the estate of John Blyth, a Kirkcaldy linen manufacturer and grandfather of Michael Portillo.



The one disappointment of our visit was to find that the three chairs were difficult to view or even locate, being stacked up on racking and without any information as to their historic significance or their St Monans heritage.

The style of the St Monans chairs is of French origin and is known as a *caqueteuse* (from the French 'caqueter' to chat). In Scots burghs of the 17th century these chairs were the favoured status symbol for the baillies, i.e. magistrates. Latterly the *caqueteuse* chairs held by the Society found another ceremonial use in the annual coronation of the St Monans Sea Queen.

The transfer of the chairs to Fife Council in 2023 followed a visit to the Society's St Monans office by the Council's Archive team who explained the historical importance and financial value of the chairs and raised concerns over security and fire etc protection arrangements and insurance cover.

It was subsequently established that the Society did not hold the title to the chairs but had merely been given custodianship following the 1970s local government reorganisation that did away with local burgh councils. Hence the Society agreed their transfer to Fife Council; the Council in return provided the Society with large board-mounted photographs of the chairs.

After the visit, a query to the Collections Centre about the lack of visibility of the chairs revealed they had been moved onto racking during the curator's maternity leave; it is now agreed that they will be restored to open display.

The Society also requested that the display include appropriate interpretive information, with the request supported by a statement of the chairs' significance provided by leading furniture historian David Jones.

David's statement highlighted the uniqueness to Fife of the chairs' decorative motifs and that due to the limited number of such chairs in existence, and because of the secure provenance of these examples, these three chairs are of high significance to the historical culture of Fife, and Scotland itself.

The Collections Centre have accordingly agreed to display the following interpretive information, as supplied by David, at the chairs' location.

CHAIR 1 *Caqueteuse* chair. 1618. Oak

This chair was made for the Baillies of St Monans, originally kept in their loft in St Monans Auld Kirk and later transferred to the Burgh Chambers. In 1584 St Monans was made a Burgh of Barony governed by three baillies, a treasurer and fifteen councillors. The chair has a particularly elaborate cresting of foliate scrolls put down on a central plinth, inviting comparison with other *caqueteuse* chairs from East Coast burghs such as Aberdeen, where there is a



provenanced group made between 1620 and 1635 for the Deacons of Aberdeen Incorporated Trades. The unique Fife features include the cresting itself, which is in one piece that 'keys' into the upper part of the back panel, the angled palmettes, feathered or *penne* carving in the stiles, distinctive foliate carving and central oval rosette.

CHAIR 2 *Caqueteuse* chair. c1610-20. Oak

This chair differs slightly from Chair 1 in its back design which centres on a large double rosette which is repeated in the cresting. It may be the work of a different carver but the rosettes and the angled palmettes are familiar features of Fife chairs in the early 17th century. The turned front posts are more attenuated than Chair 1 and gouged decoration appears on the lower back rather than on the front seat rail. The cresting rail, which was originally probably of more elaborate paired scroll design, has been replaced by a modern approximation, likely to have been done by William Wheeler of Arncroach, who is known to have repaired and copied Fife *caqueteuse* chairs.



CHAIR 3 *Caqueteuse* chair. c1904. Oak

This is a facsimile of Chair 1 and was made by William Wheeler, a wheelwright and furniture maker in the Fife village of Arncroach.

Photographs by Nick Haynes, courtesy National Museum of Scotland

THE WHEELER DYNASTY OF ARNCROACH

A Legacy of Furniture Making in the East Neuk of Fife

In the quiet village of Arncroach a remarkable story of craftsmanship unfolded over nearly a century, with the name Wheeler becoming synonymous with quality furniture-making, a reputation that endured from the 1870s until the 1960s across three generations bearing the same Christian name: William.

William Wheeler the elder was born in January 1845 in Kinghorn, Fife, and after serving an apprenticeship in Cowdenbeath he set up this workshop in Arncroach in 1877. Wheeler established himself primarily as a cartwright and joiner, his transition from general carpentry to fine furniture-making beginning around 1884.



image copyright trove.scot

The Lorimer Connection

A pivotal moment in William Wheeler the elder's career came through his association with Sir Robert Lorimer, one of Scotland's most celebrated architects and furniture designers. Robert Lorimer's early furniture design was heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, and it was natural that he should engage local craftsmen such as Wheeler to execute his designs.

During the 1890s, Wheeler worked closely with Lorimer, making some of the furniture that Lorimer submitted to the triennial Arts and Crafts Exhibitions in London. The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society's catalogues record Wheeler as the maker of an oak bureau in 1893, and an oak writing bureau and oak chest in 1896.

This exposure in national exhibitions and prestigious art journals brought Wheeler's name before a wider audience and validated his work in sophisticated design circles.

The furniture made for these exhibitions was deliberately vernacular, reflecting the Arts and Crafts Movement's interest in traditional forms and honest craftsmanship.

However other pieces for Lorimer drew more directly on Scottish historical sources - one photograph illustrates a Lorimer 'brander-back chair' with Wheeler's name pencilled beside it.

Regional Chairs and Historical Reproductions

One of the most interesting aspects of the Wheeler workshop's repertoire was its reproduction of historical Scottish furniture types, particularly the so-called '*caqueteuse*' chair. One such chair was made for the Estate Office, Balcarres, for the Earl of Crawford in 1904.

Another reproduction *caqueteuse* by Wheeler was kept in the Preservation Society's St Monans office for many decades.

Wheeler is also known to have repaired original *caqueteuse* chairs, very likely including the one held by the Preservation Society in its St Monans office for many decades and now in Fife Council Collections Centre.

An article in the *East of Fife Record* in 1897 describes another reproduction by Wheeler: 'The Warwick chair is perhaps greatest in demand....the chair has three legs and neatly carved back mountings'.

Known as a turner's chair and allegedly of Saxon origin, it is based on a much later example from the 16th century Lord Leycester's Hospital in Warwick. A reproduction of this chair was illustrated in the *Cabinet Maker* magazine c1890, from which Wheeler no doubt made a copy. A chair to this pattern, almost certainly from the Wheeler workshop, survives at Kellie Castle. These command high prices at auction.



image courtesy V&A Museum

The 'Gossip Chair'

Perhaps the Wheeler workshop's most enduring contribution to Fife's domestic furniture is what became known as the 'gossip chair'.

The origin of this charming name was revealed by William Wheeler the second in a newspaper interview. He recounted that Sir Ralph Anstruther's sister-in-law commissioned the workshop to make a scaled-down version of a Chippendale style pierced back chair she owned: 'I carried out her suggestion and the result was a very neat little chair with a fretted back, which I learned was to be used for the fireside'.



image courtesy Sinclair Antiques

Wheeler's gossip chairs proved enormously popular, and he calculated that he had sold several hundred of them over thirty years. Often mistaken for children's chairs they were indeed a perfect size for small persons.

Later Sir Robert Lorimer designed his own version of the gossip chair, playing with the designs of the back splats in characteristic style, as this example.

Interest by Lorimer in furniture design reputedly began when as a boy Wheeler had taught him how to make chairs while on holiday with his parents at Kellie Castle. Lorimer started a tradition of giving these chairs to children on their christenings with this one, again by Wheeler, made for Lorimer's nephew and later donated by the family to Kellie Castle.



image courtesy NTS Kellie Castle

The Second and Third Generations

When William Wheeler the elder died on 4 December 1913, aged 68, his son William Wheeler continued the business, essentially producing the same types and patterns his father had established. The continuity across generations is striking. Alexander Mair, who was apprenticed in 1919 and worked as a craftsman for both the second and third William Wheelers, confirmed that the same patterns and techniques were used throughout the workshop's existence. Mair lived in Arncroach and was latterly the estate joiner at Balcaskie.

Preservation of Skills and Patterns

The Wheeler workshop's legacy continues today. The Wheelers were related through marriage to the Dunsire family, who now run East Fife Joinery Ltd in Colinsburgh. Amelia Dunsire (1903-1974) married William Wheeler the third in 1927, and she was the older sister of Magnus F. Dunsire (1916-1988) known as Curly. Magnus's oldest son, George William Wheeler Dunsire (born 1942), served his apprenticeship with the Wheeler workshop and became managing director of Magnus F. Dunsire and Sons Ltd., which employed craftsmen from the Wheeler workshop after William Wheeler the third's death in 1966.

Remarkably, some of the Wheeler workshop's original working patterns still exist at Magnus Dunsire and Sons, including those for the 'T chair', providing tangible links to nineteenth-century craft practices. The patterns themselves, shaped wooden templates used to mark out components, embody accumulated knowledge about proportions, joinery, and aesthetics that might otherwise have been lost.

A Living Legacy

Today, Wheeler furniture remains a living presence in the East Neuk of Fife. The pieces are still in use, still appreciated for their solid construction and attractive proportions.

Residents often discover that a chair or table that has ‘always been in the family’ bears the marks of Wheeler craftsmanship. At auction, Wheeler pieces are recognised and valued not just as antiques but also as representatives of local craft traditions.

The story of the Wheeler workshop illuminates broader themes in Scottish furniture history. It demonstrates how rural workshops could achieve exacting standards of design and execution, how historical forms were adapted and reproduced for new audiences, and how connections with figures like Robert Lorimer brought Arts and Crafts ideals into application in provincial Scotland where genuine craft traditions already existed.

The workshop’s longevity across three generations speaks to the family’s business acumen and craftsmanship - they understood their market and maintained quality while adapting to changing times.

The Wheeler workshop also exemplifies the consolidation of multiple trades in a small, rural firm. Cabinet maker, chair maker, wheelwright, and funeral director were all roles united under one roof, reflecting the economic realities of serving a small community where specialisation was less viable than versatility. This integration of trades was typical of rural Scotland but is now largely lost, making the documentation of workshops like Wheeler’s particularly valuable.

This article was written by Preservation Society treasurer and Colinsburgh resident Martin Gorrie and reviewed by furniture historian David Jones. The article draws on his *Looking at Scottish Furniture* (1987), *The Vernacular Chair in Fife* (1996), and ex St Andrews University student Lindsay Macbeth's pioneering research, whose original articles in *Regional Furniture*¹ remain the definitive scholarly source on the Wheeler workshop.

Additional information has been drawn from the website of *At the Sign of the Pelican* and *Sinclair Antiques of Thornton* in Fife, dealers in Scottish antique furniture, who have helped keep knowledge of Wheeler furniture alive.

Thanks are also due to George and Murray Dunsire and the craftsmen who preserved oral traditions about the workshop, particularly Alexander Mair.

¹ “The Wheelers of Arncroach: A Family of Furniture Makers in Fife,” *Regional Furniture* Volume V (1991), 69. by Lindsay Macbeth.

TREASURER REPORT

This has been a year of significant project activity, with the Society completing or advancing three conservation and heritage related projects on behalf of the local community.

The Pittenweem Priory Interpretive Panels project drew down £20,529 of the funds held on its behalf, and the Pittenweem Kirk and Pittenweem Tolbooth Viability Appraisal and Architectural Feasibility projects incurred £17,845 in expenditure. All three projects were completed in 2025.

The cash balance on 31 December 2025 stood at £15,433, compared with £31,190 a year earlier. This reduction reflects the completion of the projects described above and the associated expenditure.

The Society's unrestricted General Fund stands at £41,336 after accounting for funds held as custodian.

The Society also holds a Scottish Widows deposit account of £18,281, and the heritable property at 5 Station Road, St. Monans, remains valued at £30,000.

Total assets of the Society at the year-end amounted to £63,714.

General Fund income from members' subscriptions, donations and events remains steady and covers our running costs comfortably. We are grateful to all members who continue to support the Society so generously

The accounts are provisional pending being independently examined by Fife Voluntary Action Finance team, after which they will be submitted to the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator before the closing date of 30 September 2026.

See overleaf for Statement of Receipts & Payments and Balance Sheet and see the following page for Notes on the Accounts.

Statement of Receipts & Payments

Prepared for East Neuk of Fife Preservation Society (SCIO)

1/1/2025 to 31/12/2025 (compared with 1/1/2024 to 31/12/2024)*

	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	Prior Total*
<u>Income</u>				
Donations and Legacies	2,910	19,311	22,222	7,460
Charitable Activities	1,922		1,922	3,797
Investments	320	2,835	3,155	3,010
Total income and endowments	5,152	22,146	27,299	14,267
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Charitable Activities	4,682	38,374	43,056	5,717
Total expenditure	4,682	38,374	43,056	5,717
All receipts	5,152	22,146	27,299	14,267
All payments	4,682	38,374	43,056	5,717
Transfers between funds				
Net movement in funds	470	-16,227	-15,757	8,550
<i>Total funds brought forward</i>	<i>52,685</i>	<i>26,785</i>	79,470	70,920
Total funds carried forward	53,155	10,558	67,313	79,470

Balance Sheet – Comparative

As at December 31 2025

	31 Dec 2025	31 Dec 2024
<i>Fixed Assets</i>		
<i>Tangible assets</i>	30,000	30,000
Investments	18,601	18,281
<i>Current assets</i>		
<i>Cash at bank and at hand</i>	15,433	31,190
Net assets	63,714	79,471
<i>Funds & reserves</i>		
<i>Restricted funds</i>	10,528	26,785
<i>Unrestricted General Funds</i>	53,156	52,686
Funds Provided	63,714	79,471

Notes on the Accounts

1. Accounting Basis: these accounts have been prepared on a Receipts and Payments basis in accordance with the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Charity Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006.

2. Heritable Property: the Society owns heritable property at 5 Station Road, St. Monans, which is used in furtherance of its charitable purposes. The property is included in the accounts at a trustee valuation of £30,000, which the trustees consider to be a reasonable estimate of its value. The property is not depreciated, as the trustees consider its residual value to be at least the carrying value.

3. Cash and Deposit Accounts: cash balances include funds held in the Society's current account and a deposit account with Scottish Widows Bank.

4. Restricted Funds: restricted funds represent income received for specific heritage and community projects administered by the Society. The balance of £10,558 represents remaining restricted funds relating to heritage activities.

5. Funds Held as Custodian: on 31 December 2025, the Society held £11,820 on behalf of the Innes Trust for use on appropriate St Monans related projects. These funds are held by the Society as custodian and do not form part of the Society's charitable funds.

6. Trustee Remuneration: no trustee received remuneration during the year. Trustees may be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out their duties.

7. Post Balance Sheet Event: in January 2026, a payment of £10,430 was made to St Monans Auld Kirk Enterprises Ltd relating to funds held by the Society as custodian.

8. Heritage Property Note: the Society maintains the property at 5 Station Road, St. Monans, as part of its charitable objective to preserve and promote the historic environment of the East Neuk of Fife.

Chairman's note on the Society's contributions to project funding

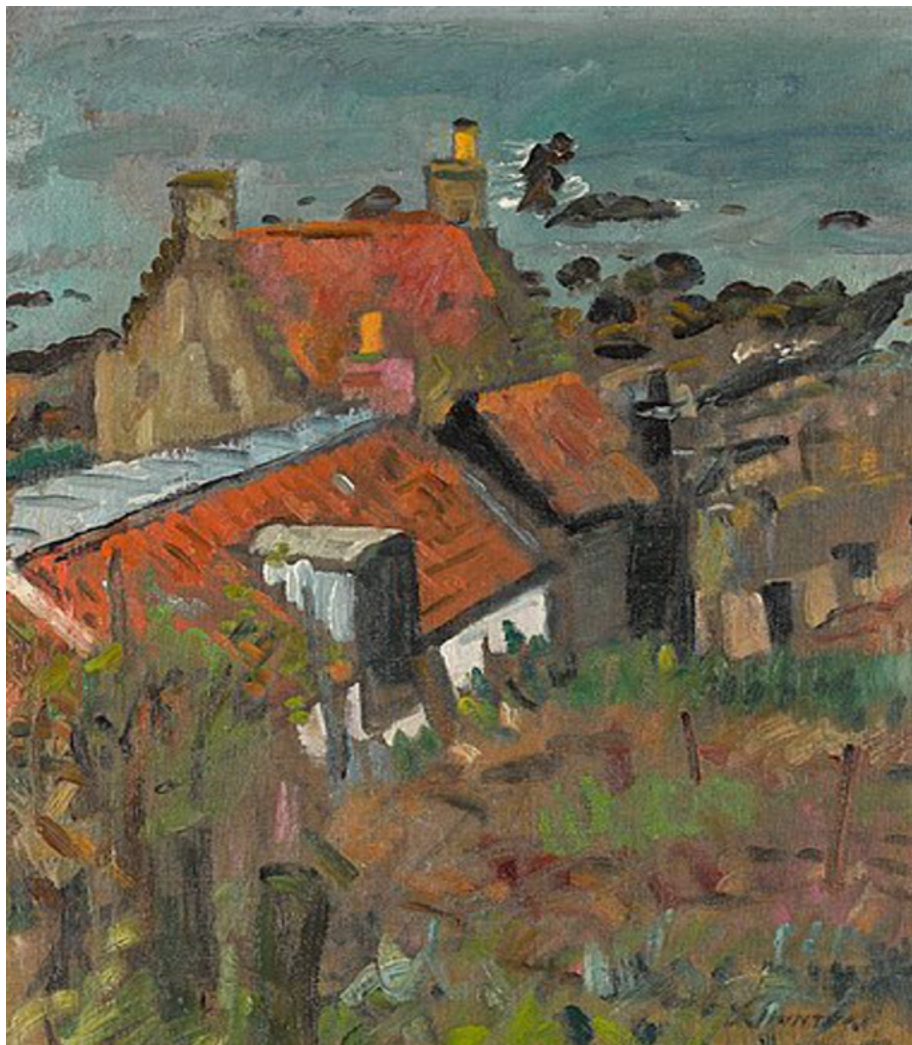
Over the three years of the Pittenweem Priory Interpretive Panels project expenditure was £22,319 against income from sponsors of £21,039, meaning the Society contributed a total of £1280 to the project compared to the originally budgeted contribution of £1000. The increase was due to a second planning application being required for re-siting one of the panels.

The Society contributed £250 to the £17,845 total expenditure on the Pittenweem Kirk and Pittenweem Tolbooth Viability Appraisal and Architectural Feasibility projects, with the balance raised from sponsors.



Self portrait Samuel John Peploe 1871–1935

Fife Council collection



St Monance by George Leslie Hunter 1877–1931
one of the four artists known as the Scottish Colourists