

Currie Toll 1897

## CURRIE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

CURRIE CHRONICLE  
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*Hi, Folks,*

2014 has been quite a busy year for the country since Society members last met in March.

For instance in parts of northern Europe, and throughout the United Kingdom, special events have been held to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War.

In July a most successful 20<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Games took place in Glasgow (Glasgow 2014) with UK heading the medals table.

The Society's Committee has also been busy arranging the 2014/15 Syllabus which is enclosed with this Chronicle. They hope you will find the subjects sufficiently interesting to come along in the record numbers we experienced last session.

Probably most of the senior members of the Society will be aware that a Friendly Society was established, in Currie, in the 1800s in a building at the top of Riccarton Mains Road (now demolished).

Were they also aware, however, that Balerno village also had a Friendly Society - established in 1810?

Val Wilson, our Librarian, explains the details in the following article.

*Ron Dickson, Editor*



## Balerno Friendly Society

*Who aids a brother in his need  
That labours not in vain;  
The merciful are blest indeed,  
Their mercy shall obtain.*

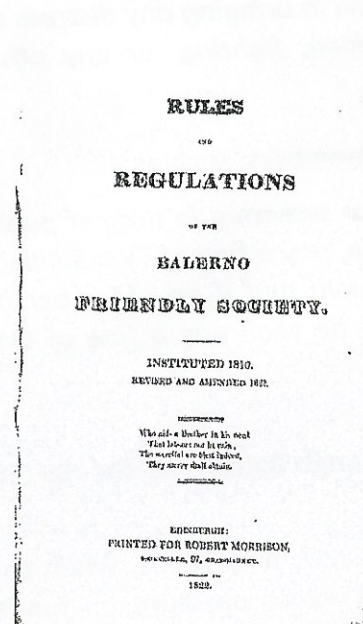
As part of the adjustment to a more urban life style in Scotland, the early 1800s saw an enormous growth in Friendly Societies. These societies were set up as mutual self-help organisations either by people of the same trade or profession, or, as in the case of the Balerno Friendly Society, by people who lived in the same local area. Primarily they were insurance institutions, set up at a time when there was no state funded benefits or health service. As the name suggests, the societies were also a form of social club for working men.

The Balerno Friendly Society was set up in 1810. A copy of the handbook from 1822 has survived and was kindly donated to the CDLHS.

The handbook begins:-

*We, of the different callings and occupations in the village of BALERNO, its adjacent neighbourhood, and others, knowing the distress and misery human life is subject to in this sublunary state, and the sufferings and hardships that many in indigent circumstances have experienced in days of calamity and distress, did, in the year 1810, form ourselves into a Society which has already mitigated, and will yet, (we trust) under the blessing and guidance of Divine Providence, mitigate and relieve the sufferings and wants of ourselves and brethren.*

The Society had premises with a meeting hall upstairs located at the top of Main Street, between the surviving buildings and the Balerno



Bank Mill buildings. The papers and money belonging to the Society were kept in a Box. There was then a Box Master and a Preses (essentially chairman), three Key Keepers and six other assistants who ran the society. Interestingly no member who kept a public house was allowed to be the Box Master.

There were 21 rules covering the operation of the Society. It was not specifically stated but presumably only open to men and they had to be between the ages of 18 and 35. Members paid ten shillings and sixpence to join and had to follow a

trade or occupation. This was at a time when a married ploughman could expect to earn about 11 shillings and sixpence per week (£30 per year). All members then had to pay one shilling per quarter. This equates to about 0.67% of the quarterly wage of a ploughman. Even allowing for the initial joining fee, this is a fraction of what we pay today in National Insurance contributions (about 8.5% of the average wage).

Benefits were then paid out as follows:-

*Members in distress shall receive the sum of Four Shillings per Week for six months, and if still sick the sum of Two Shillings and Sixpence for other six months; and if still unfit to earn a subsistence, shall be reckoned superannuated, and allowed Two Shillings during he time their situation requires it. And every Member's Widow, who has been entitled to the above rates, shall receive in full Four Pounds at her husband's death, or Twenty Shillings annually as long as she remains a Widow. No Member shall receive any benefit from the funds of the*



*Society who has had an active hand in bringing any distress on himself, either by whoring, drinking, fighting, or any other species of bad behaviour.*

Other income came from fines paid by members, such as:-

*If any Member be heard cursing or swearing in time of public meetings, he shall, upon conviction, pay a fine of Two Shillings and Sixpence for each transgression; and if any Member be found drunk on the Sabbath-day, he shall pay a fine of One Shilling, to be added to the funds*

Once a year there was a procession through Balerno of the Society members, followed by a dinner.

Many Friendly Societies closed in the 1820s and 1830s, when the increasing age of the membership put severe pressure on funds, which had stagnated because of under-subscription or because subscription rates had not kept pace with inflation. In 1831, the building belonging to the Balerno Friendly Society was sold to William Handyside for the sum of £92. It is not clear if this was when the Society closed down but the New Statistical account for Currie parish, written in 1845, notes that there had been two Friendly Societies (the other in Currie):-

*One of them has recently been dissolved and the funds divided among the members. It was but of short duration and never could boast of more than sixty supporters.*

It may be true that there were only sixty members at any one time, but the handbook has the signatures of 140 members in total.

[If anyone has any more information or artefacts related to either the Balerno or Currie Friendly Societies, I would be very interested in seeing them.]

Val Wilson  
Librarian DCLHS