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CURRIE & DISTRICT LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY
(founded June 1970)

CURRIE CHRONICLE
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Hello Folks,

It is hard to believe but as I write this introduction, in late August 2019, no decision has yet been made in Parliament on Brexit!! We therefore do not know what the future holds for us all at the moment. But one thing we can do as members in the near future is look forward to celebrating the Society's Golden Jubilee which falls, to be precise, on the 16th June 2020.

The Society's Committee has over the past few months been looking at different ways of marking this event. We will be announcing what our plans are at the Winter Session meetings. Details of the Talks, Events etc. and dates of these meetings are set out in the Syllabus enclosed with the Chronicle.

Ronnie Dickson, Chronicle Editor.

Bletchley Park – A Balerno Connection.

Malcolm Fergusson, a recent past-President, is involved at the moment in researching documentation which he had been given by the family of the late Ronnie Crichton, a former member of the Society of longstanding, who was investigating the connection at the time of his death.

He has given me, as Editor, a short report of his preliminary findings but first an explanation as to what Bletchley Park was all about.

Bletchley Park was the name given to a mansion and estate built from 1883 for an English financier and politician Sir Herbert Leon. It is situated near Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire.

It has received latter-day fame as the central site for British (and subsequently Allied) codebreakers during World War 2 although at the time this fact was a closely guarded secret. During the Second World War the estate housed the British Government Code and Cypher School (GC & CS) which regularly penetrated the secret communications of the Axis Powers – most importantly the German Enigma and Lorenz ciphers; Among its most notable early personnel in the GC&CS team of codebreakers was Alan Turing.

The team at Bletchley Park devised automatic machinery to help with decryption. Codebreaking operations at Bletchley Park came to an end in 1946 and all of the information about the wartime operations was classified until the mid-1970s. More recently Bletchley Park has been opened to the public as an interpretive museum and receives thousands of visitors every year.

Now where does Balerno fit in to all of this? Well until I received this article from Malcolm I was not aware that during the war there was what was known as “Y” Stations set up throughout Britain by Bletchley Park. These Stations were British signals intelligence collection sites established during the First World War and used again during the Second World War. The sites were operated by a range of agencies including the Army, Navy and RAF personnel plus the Foreign Office, MI5, MI6, GPO and the Marconi Company.

The “Y” stations tended to be two types, for intercepting of the signals and for identifying where they were coming from. Interestingly there was a “Y” Station located at Cockburn Farm on the outskirts of Balerno village. The farm was owned at one point by Lord Balerno (who was serving in the Gordon Highlanders during WW2). Main “Y” Stations were situated at ;

Beachy Head Sussex	Brora Sutherland
RAF Canterbury	Cromer , Norfolk
Met office Dunstable Beds.	Scarborough, Yorkshire.
HMS Ventnor , Isle of Wight.	RAF Waddington

Y Service: (Y = WI for Wireless Intercept) clandestine wireless intercept stations for signals intelligence collection across Britain and overseas. It was established during the First World War and used again to great effect during the Second World War.



Operator at
Bletchley Park.

The following are notes written by Malcolm to give you a background to his early research:

BLETCHLEY PARK'S BALERNO "Y" STATIONS

The extracts that follow were from letters which the late Ronnie Crichton, a longstanding member of the Society had in his possession for a number of years. Prior to his death a few years ago he was researching the contents because of the Balerno connection. I am actively continuing the research where Ronnie finished.

*To Postoffice Control Office
36 Broadway
London, S. W. 1.
Sat. 22nd June 1940*

Nora Darling,

After complaining once or twice in previous letters because my luck had apparently deserted me I now feel like apologising to myself, for it has certainly returned to me again, and in generous measure.

On Thursday we sailed in the Beathuan from Le Vorden, roughly sixty miles north of Bordeaux, and we docked yesterday morning at Dzwonport, Plymouth, where we found out that the previous ship (which I ought to have said in) had been sunk by torpedoes in the Bay of Biscay. Please don't spread this piece but I believe more than a thousand went down with the ship.

These letters were sent by Innes Nesbit, a friend of the family for many years, to his wife Nora. The date of the first letter (see below) is important.

The first date is 22nd June 1940 and the ship in question is the Lancastrian which was sunk on 17th June 1940 with a loss of lives estimated today at between 3000 and 5000 people. The following is an extract of part of one of his letters to put you in the picture;

Having survived the sinking Innes was then sent to work at Cockburn farm on the outskirts of Balerno village which at that time was used as a Bletchley Park "Y" Station intercepting German wireless transmissions. There is no clue as to what type of messages these were.

However, after initial concerns about being sent to the ends of the earth (Balerno!), Innes appears to have settled down nicely as you can read from the following extract from the next letter to his wife:

*To Barbara Innes
Balerno
Mid Lothian
Thurs. 1st Aug. 1940.*

Nora Dear,

For a change, I actually am keeping my word in writing to you this morning, but as we were really busy for the past five days, it was hardly my fault.

Now things are going into a normal routine again and it should allow me to sit down and make up for the three or four letters I still owe you.

Yesterday afternoon, after posting my letter, I caught the next bus to Balerno, for I was due to go on duty for an hour at six o'clock. I was finished again by half past seven and walked into Hurin village, nearly three miles away. Then we took the bus back to Balerno again. For half an hour we hung around the tennis courts, engineering about prices and hiring of rackets. The charges are very reasonable, and provided the weather keeps fine, like it is now, I think I'll spend quite a bit of my spare time there.

It's a shame you can't be here, for the weather is lovely, and this spot where I am now

More research to come!

Andrew Peden, another former President of the Society has written a short interesting article about a find in his house, Curriehill House, in Balerno, a few years ago. Here is what he has written.

TWO MYSTERY BOTTLES FOUND AT CURRIEHILL HOUSE

Several years ago electrical contractors working in the top half of our house discovered to my surprise a concealed cupboard contained in one of the walls. The chamber revealed two (unfortunately empty) hefty glass bottles not dissimilar to early champagne bottles. They were retrieved and stored in our garage and over time completely forgotten about.

Last year I was contacted by Associate Professor Craig Kennedy of Heriot Watt University asking my permission to try out a recently acquired hand held device called a Portable x-ray Fluorescence Spectrometer. This device is capable of identifying elements of the Periodic Table contained in glass. Using the spectrometer all the windows of Curriehill House were tested by Professor Kennedy's team and identified the amount of each element in each pane as well as its origin and age.

The results of this comprehensive exercise showed the glass used in the windows of Curriehill to have been manufactured at least 150 years ago. I asked the professor if he would kindly use the spectrometer and look at the two forgotten bottles which had come from the concealed cupboard similar to a Priest's Hole. The results were quite astonishing and produced the following details.



Date of manufacture
– circa 1780 – 1840

Area of manufacture
– Burgundy France

Construction of bottles are robust due to the use of a sizeable mamelon in each bottle. (A mamelon is a round glass ball within the arch shape on the base of the bottle).

The translucent colour of the bottles was due to high levels of iron oxide and potash alkali.

What other potential secrets might Curriehill House conceal?

Andrew Peden CDLHS (with thanks to Robin Murdoch for supplementary information).

CURRIE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

SYLLABUS 2019-2020

Date	Topic	Speaker
7 th October 2019	The Battle of Dunbar Campaign of 1650	Arran Johnston
21 st October 2019	The History of Cramond Island	Ian Rodger
4 th November 2019	A Walk Down the Royal Mile, Castlehill to the Heart of Midlothian	Eric Melvin
18 th November 2019	Mary Queen of Scots	Bruce Jamieson
2 nd December 2019	The Wipers Times	Malcolm Fergusson CDLHS
16 th December 2019	Legion Scotland – as we approach 100 (plus refreshments and snacks)	Martyn Hawthorn
13 th January 2020	John Knox	Eddie Shaw CDLHS
27 th January 2020	<u>John Tweedie Memorial Lecture</u> Picturesque Notes – Robert Louis Stevenson and his Native Town	Hamish Coghill Hon. President CDLHS
10 th February 2020	Women, Work and the First World War	Ruth Boreham
24 th February 2020	Ravelrig House from 1454 to the Present Day. Plus: Another Local Talk	Val Wilson CDLHS Douglas Lowe CDLHS
9 th March 2020	The Last Spike, The Building of the first Transcontinental Railway across the USA	James Waugh
23 rd March 2020	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING	