GRAVEYARDS OF THE FALKIRK DISTRICT:

Introduction & Early Burials

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This is an introduction to a series of articles dealing with the formal burying places of the individuals and communities that have lived in the area which we know today as the Falkirk district (first printed in Calatria Volume 9). The other articles provide more detailed information on the well-known graveyards of the sixteenth century and later, with the main emphasis on the parish churchyards. Here, the opportunity is taken of providing some background information to give an overview. Burial practices will be dealt with elsewhere (see Gordon 1984 for the general Scottish practice).

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The city of the dead is far more populous than that of the living and it may therefore seem surprising that we do not see signs of it all around us. The reason that we do not is that most of the repositories of the dead have long since been forgotten and even where they are known the bodies have been consumed by the combination of acidic soil and damp climate. We need only to look at the rate of growth of the present cemeteries to realise how much has been lost. In most cases the ancient burials will go unrecognised when their sites are disturbed by modern machinery and it is only when the body has been accompanied by some tangible artefact, or when stone has been used to construct or mark the grave, that the burial will come to light.

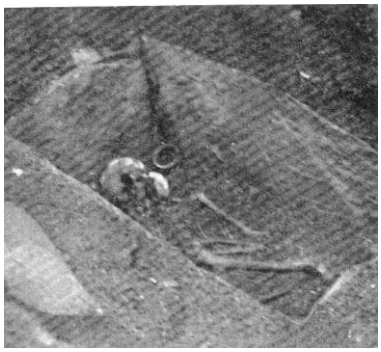
People first settled this area in the Mesolithic, but the earliest known burials are from the end of the Neolithic and into the Bronze Age (roughly 2700-1700BC). Huge ceremonial long barrows in the Stirling District demonstrate the communal nature of the death rituals associated with the interment of the deceased. Tremendously expensive in human effort, these sepulchres display not only a respect for the dead, but also a belief in an extension of the soul beyond the body.

By the Bronze Age both cremation and inhumation were being practised. Upon cremation the ashes and unburned bones were placed in an urn, which was inverted and placed in a pit, often with a stone slab covering the mouth. Sooting on the inside of the burial urn found at Williamson Street in Falkirk shows that the ashes were still warm when placed in it. The location of the pit was probably marked on the surface to avoid future interference when burying new pots in the same area, and

perhaps also to allow members of a family to be buried together. A number of instances are known where the urn contains more than one individual. At Castle Hill, near Kinneil Mill, the main burial area was marked by a circular ditch 11m in diameter. The earth from this probably formed a small mound or barrow over the graves.

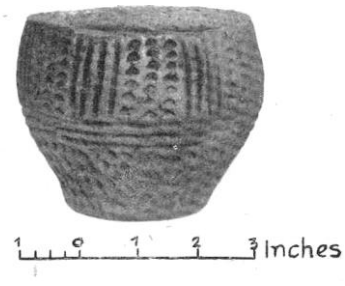
Another burial mound or cairn from this period was removed from Upper Kinneil in 1829. This was known locally as Laughing Hill and was slightly larger at 16.5m in diameter and 2.5m high. Contemporary newspaper reports provide a surprising amount of detail of the cairn's structure. The perimeter was surrounded by a single row of stones, placed on edge, the diameter of which measured 40ft. Within this circle the surface "mould," to the depth of nine or ten inches, had evidently been excavated, and four rude stone boxes or crypts, of from three to four feet long, about two feet broad, and eighteen or twenty inches deep, each covered with a large quarried stone (apparently taken from a quarry about half a mile distant), were discovered, lying in a northerly and southerly direction, all filled with mould, but no bones were discovered in any of them. Within a few feet of these crypts were found four inverted urns of very thick coarse earthenware, all of which contained portions of calcined human bones. One of them was protected by a rude semi-circular arch. It was thought probable that the bodies were cremated and the bones afterwards collected and placed in the urns, and the ashes deposited in the stone boxes or graves (Morning Herald (London) 25 December 1829, 2).

Such cists did occur at Castle Hill, but they were outside the barrow to the east. These cists were quite short and indeed few from this period exceed 1.4m in length. Generally, they contain inhumed bodies laid out with their legs flexed as befitted the size of the chambers. The torso was laid on its side with the head towards one corner of the grave, creating a foetal or sleeping posture. Where a pot was provided it was usually placed in front of the head.



Illus 1: Short cist with skeleton and urn at Bridgeness.

The pots are significant, as they would have functioned as status symbols, demonstrating the social position of the deceased and their family. Two forms of pot are frequently found in this area, the Food Vessel and the Beaker, with the former more prevalent. These are highly decorated specimens, which took a considerable investment in time and skill to create, far more than would be needed to fulfil a simple function as a container. The patterns may have had some tribal significance. They also hint at a degree of cultural uniformity providing an acknowledged pattern of religious and ritual practices based on a belief in an afterlife. Analysis of the contents of one Scottish example has shown that it was full of pollen suggesting that it may have contained honey, perhaps as part of a drink like mead. The contemporary observation of the discovery of the cist at Denny Bridge noting that the accompanying vessel contained a substance like a wasp's nest is perhaps relevant in this regard.



Illus 2: Food Vessel from Bridgeness.

The known distribution of Bronze Age cists in the Falkirk district shows clusters around Bo'ness and Denny. Such patterns are extremely misleading, as they do not in fact reflect the settlement pattern of that time. Rather, they show where recent opencast mineral extraction has taken place (usually sand or gravel) which has facilitated their discovery. Nevertheless, it should be noted that cists have not been found during work to opencast coal, and that it is possible that these early settlers preferred the free-draining soils.

The custom of inhumation continued into the Iron Age, though few of the graves would have been stone built. One possible exception occurred at Blackness where a penannular bronze armlet dates a stone-lined grave to this period. At Denovan, several stone-lined cists may also belong to this time because they were found close to earlier Bronze Age cists which indicates that the sanctity of the site could have continued through to their inception. However, in construction these later cists are similar to long cists of the Dark Age or Early Christian era.

Illus 3: Shield boss and sword from the Roman period burial at Camelon.

In the first and second centuries AD the Roman army brought with it its own diverse customs. The army was made up of a heterogeneous mixture of ethnic groups from throughout Europe. Each regiment had its own cultural identity, which was at its most individual when dealing with death. Both cremation and inhumation were practised, with the balance changing from predominantly cremation in the first century to inhumation in the third. Two neighbouring cremation burials to the north of Nailer Road in Camelon belong to the first century. One was contained in an ordinary pot placed upright in the ground, and the second appears to have been in a wooden casket (cf Partridge, C 1981, 318). A third burial in the same general area harked back to the Bronze Age tradition. This took the form of a short cist containing a crouched body, which was accompanied not by a Beaker or a Food Vessel, but by an iron sword of Roman pattern. Another cist burial of this period, this time to the west of the Roman fort at Camelon, exhibits yet further variety. It contained two males buried with their military equipment, of which a shield, sword, belt and two spears could still be identified. Such burials are unusual in Scotland, and indeed amongst the Roman army. Military accoutrements were usually handed on for further use. Yet, a Roman cavalry sword was also recovered from the vicinity perhaps indicating that the army unit stationed here did things its own way. It is also possible that the burials are of the contemporary Iron Age aristocracy.

The Roman burials at Camelon have been found in two areas outside of the fort. Roman law forbade burial within the fort itself and so it was common practice to place the cemeteries along the main roads a short distance away. It is thus notable that the first century burials occur to the east, between Nailer Road and the railway, along the line of a probable road leading from the fort's east gate towards Falkirk and the main road eastwards. On the other hand, the second century burials lie to the west, along the road leading to the bridge over the Carron Water. In this area a number of pits were found containing alternating bands of charcoal and burnt soil which led the excavator to suggest that they might have been cremation sites. Subsequent work has, however, shown the existence of several ovens in close proximity and the function of the pits may be seen in connection to these.

Illus 4: Forged Roman tombstone from the site of the Roman Bar in Camelon.

Roman tombs were usually marked above the ground and, when the money was available, commemorated with a stone. Camelon may boast of a Roman tombstone found in 1901, but alas it is a forgery. According to the reports published in the following year this stone was discovered in the roots of a tree when it was being removed in preparation for the building of the Roman Bar. It depicts a classic scene showing a Roman cavalryman riding down a barbarian. The

forger, however, used a naive but modern style (Buchanan, M 1902). An authentic tombstone was found near to the south gate of Mumrills fort. It is of particular interest because it appears to commemorate a native Britain serving in the Roman army. It reads:
"Dis M(anibus) Nectovelius f(ilius) Vindicis an(norum) XXX stip(endiorum) VIIII nationis Brigans militavit in coh(orte) II Thr(acum)"

Illus 5: Roman tombstone from Mumrills.

"To the Spirits of the Departed Nectovelius, son of Vindex, aged thirty, a Brigantian by tribe, he served for nine years in the Second Cohort of Thracians" (Collingwood & Richmond 1965, RIB 2142).

The style of the inscription would be most apt at the end of the first century in the Trajanic period (Birley 1985, 116), but we can be sure that it is contemporary with the early Antonine fort. 2m to the east of the stone a samian pot containing ashes came to light, its mouth covered by an upper quernstone of German lava, indicating that there was once a more extensive cemetery in this area where the road issued from the fort. No other Roman tombstones are known from the Falkirk district, though there are some from elsewhere along the Antonine Wall - one at Kilsyth and four from Shirva Farm near Auchendavy (RIB 2172; and RIB 2179, 2181-3). It can be assumed that most of the Wall forts had their own cemeteries, which still await discovery.

The most remarkable Roman burial from the area was found during the construction of the Midland Junction Railway to the west of the fort at Camelon in 1848. What was described as an alabaster urn containing cremated bone was discovered and its significance was initially broadcast to the public. Parts of it made their way into private hands but a significant portion went to the Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, a curator there reassigned it to a later period and so it lay neglected in storage until recently when Fraser Hunter reassessed it (Hunter 2020). Rather than being made of alabaster it was found to be of Egyptian travertine and the form of the urn, though rare, is certainly Roman. It must have belonged to a very significant individual, such as a general, who died on campaign in Scotland.

Illus 6: The Camelon urn (National Museums of Scotland).

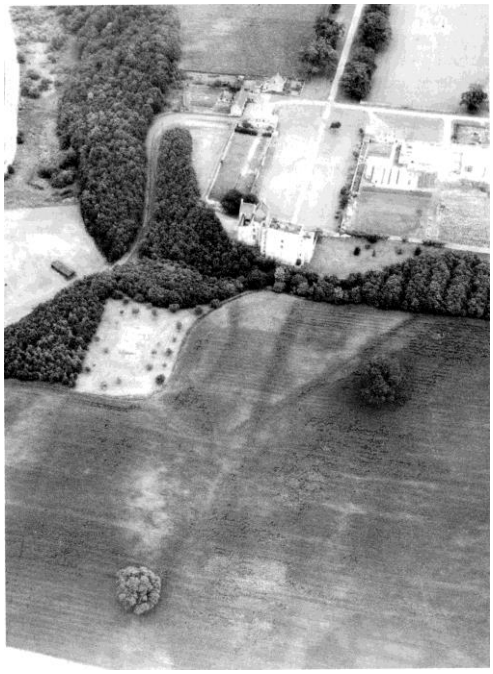
Equally tantalising is the possibility that the area to the west of Arthur's O'on at Stenhousemuir was used as a large burial ground for Roman soldiers. In the 1830s the public road west from Stenhouse Castle to Stenhousemuir, known as the Broom Loan, was: "*dug up, and he who was contractor reports that the workmen, while excavating, came upon many gravestones which had been erected, centuries before*" (Stirling Observer, 5 March 1863, 6). The monumental domed building known as Arthur's O'on may then have been a tropaeum to commemorate a major Roman victory such as that at Mons Graupius.

Illus 7: Long cist burials at Kerse Hill.

For several centuries after the departure of the Romans there is little evidence of local burial practices. Then, in about the 5th century, there was a return to the use of cists. A recently re-discovered cemetery at Linlithgow Bridge has produced radiocarbon dates of that century and later (Dalland 1993, 343). The cists are often little more than stone lined graves, poorly constructed, but frequently with stone slab paving. The new custom involved full-length graves, which allowed the body to be laid out fully extended. These long cists are found mostly on the southern side of the Forth (Hanshall 1956) and may represent the infiltration of Christianity with its belief in the resurrection of the body. Such an influence would have been injected from Northumbria and can be echoed by place names as well as being reflected in the pages of Bede. Generally, the long cists are found in larger clusters than the earlier short ones, perhaps a sign of the greater communal discipline imposed by the new order. They are often found associated with known or suspected early Christian sites such as the Catstone at Edinburgh Airport where the cemetery used a standing stone with a cross engraved on it as its focus. In our area we have a long cist from the Snab, not far from the important early ecclesiastical site of Kinneil, and one from the Blackness promontory near to the traditional site of St Ninian's Chapel. The largest conglomeration is at Avonglen/Avondale, which is not far from another site at Kerse Hill. As a group these may be associated with the enigmatic chapel of the 'Blessed Virgin Mary', which is recorded as late as the 15th century. Long cists passed out of fashion in the 9th century, though some were still constructed after that.

During the first half of the seventh century, exogamous dynastic marriages with various native groups were an important strategy of the Berenician royal family. It has been suggested that such marriages may have taken place between other social groups and that the Blackness burial is evidence of this (Cessford 1996). The chapel of St Ninian at Blackness stood on a knoll located on a peninsula or ness jutting out from the south shore of the Forth Estuary. As its dedication suggests, it was one of the oldest ecclesiastical sites in the Falkirk district and was one of many such along the coast – others occurring at Carriden, Kinneil, Bothkennar, Airth and Abercorn. It is therefore not surprising that there should be early Christian burials around the chapel and that they should be concentrated to the south of the chapel. However, the site chosen for the church was already sacred and Bronze Age burials are also found in the locality. Latterly the chapel stood at the extreme north-eastern boundary of the royal burgh of Linlithgow, and another chapel of the same name is said to have stood at St Ninian's Road in Linlithgow Bridge on the west boundary, where long cists have also been found.

Illus 8: Chapel Hill at Blackness.



By using a sanctified man-made feature in the landscape as the focus for an extensive burial ground the church was continuing a long tradition. In the Bronze Age the focus was often a cairn or barrow, and the Romans had centred their cemeteries upon wayside shrines. Another early feature of Christian sites was the circular shape of the allotted ground, which would also appear to have been a Celtic inheritance. Aerial photographs of Kinneil Church show a large circular ditch encompassing an area larger than that of the present graveyard boundaries, but still clearly centred on the church. Slamannan churchyard still retained its circular shape into the nineteenth century, and several of the other old parish churchyards contain hints that this was also their former shape.

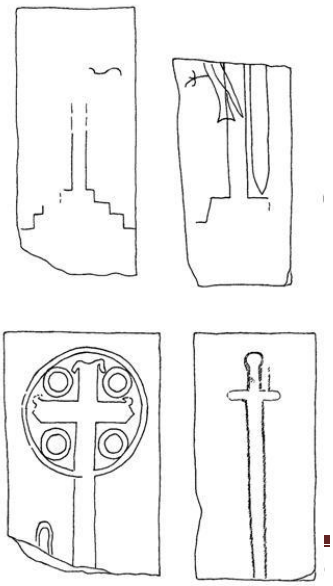
Illus 9: Aerial photograph of Kinneil Church showing the early circular ditch around the graveyard (courtesy of the Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography.

As the ecclesiastical organisation grew in strength and importance, it grew in complexity. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the parish system was firmly established in Scotland. There were probably already churches at Airth, Bothkennar, Carriden, Dunipace, Kinneil, Falkirk, Slamannan and Larbert.

Their influence on the life of the populace was considerable and it is not surprising that after the Battle of Falkirk in 1298 the corpses of the most distinguished casualties were taken to the hallowed ground around the religious sanctuary in whose parish they had perished. How many of the dead, from either side, were buried in that holy ground we do not know, for today the names of only two have come down to us. The circumstances of history have only preserved the memories of the major Scottish officers slain on that occasion, Sir John de Graham and Sir John Stewart. The rank and file would have been disposed of on the battlefield itself in large pits, their sites unmarked and now lost.

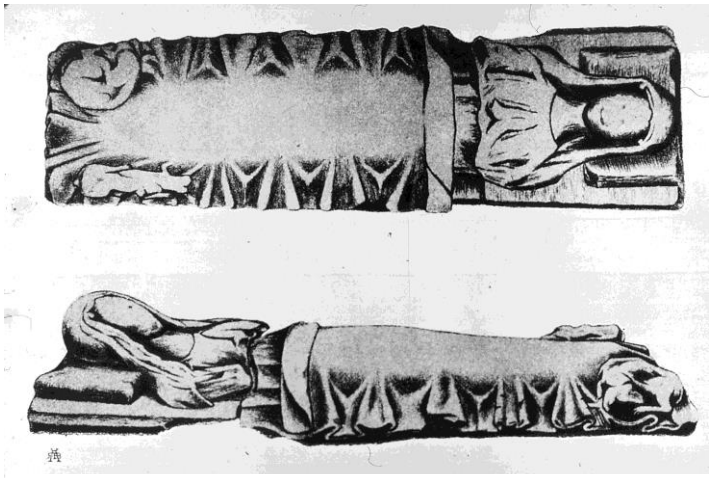
Illus 10: Sir John Stewart's gravestone. The lettering is 18th century but the stone is probably early 14th century.

Medieval gravestones are not common. The stone marking Sir John Stewart's grave is probably original, but that of Sir John de Graham has been considerably embellished over the centuries. Kinneil possesses the greatest quantity of grave slabs from this period. Most of them are quite small with simple incised decoration usually featuring a Calvary cross or a sword. These are powerful and emotive symbols. One shows a bird, perhaps representing the ascending soul of the departed. Another 13th century gravestone has been built into the old parish church at Airth. It has a cross-hilted sword, a circle with rays, and a cross.



Illus 11: Some of the 13th century gravestones from Kinneil.

Illus 12: Gravestone at Airth.



Illus 13: The 14th century female effigy at Airth

Also at Airth is a well-carved effigy of a wealthy woman, which is dated stylistically to the early part of the fourteenth century (RCAHMS 1963, 147). The quality of the sculpture is very high and reflects the hand of an artisan from the Yorkshire or Durham workshops. Who it depicts is unknown, though clearly it was an important person. In the following century the Livingston family of Callendar became very powerful in Scottish affairs and in accordance with their rank they too commissioned effigies which stand in their church at Falkirk. A century later, and another two effigies were produced. These are thought to represent William 6th Lord Livingston, who died in 1592, and his wife Agnes Fleming. His father, Alexander 5th Lord Livingston, is commemorated by a grave slab bearing a shield below a clumsy representation of an earl's coronet of an early Scottish type. The inscription refers to the French Court where Alexander died in about 1550 (Scott 1992, 52).

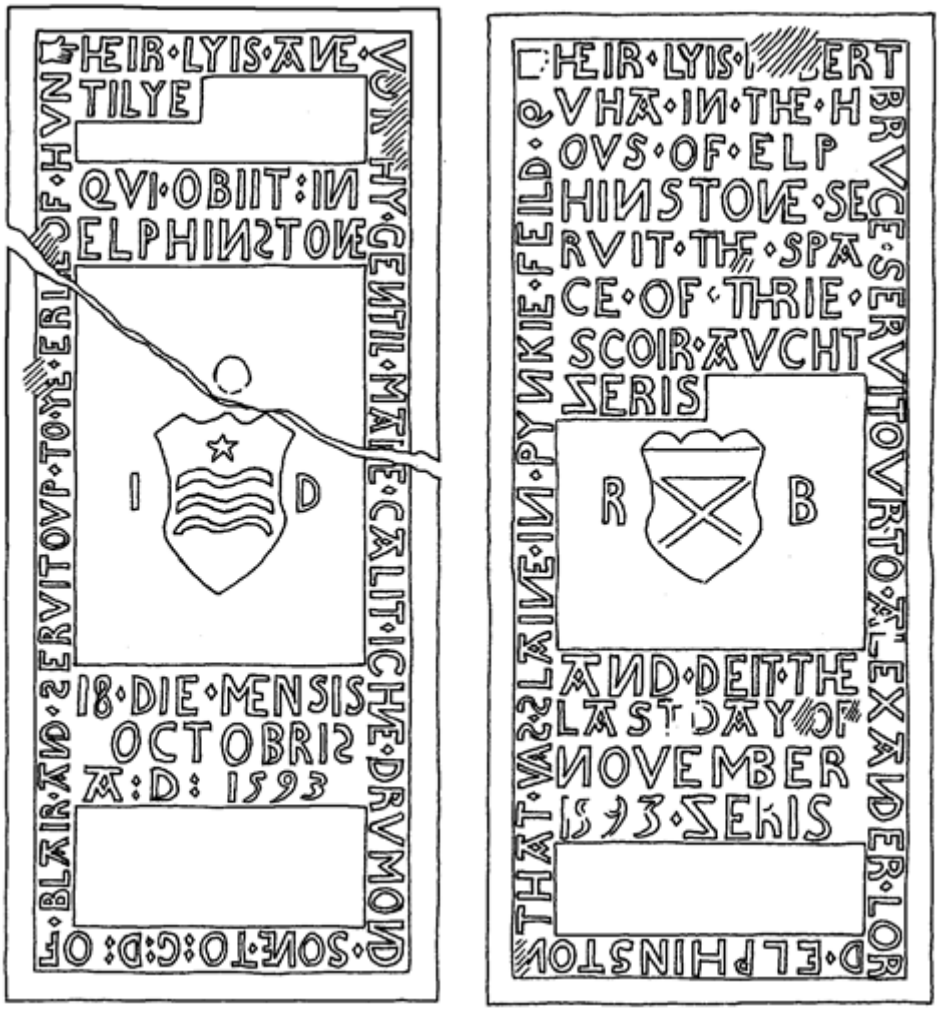
By this date burial at any other place than the church was almost unthinkable. The prominent citizens lay inside the church itself while the poor were in unmarked graves outside. Even had they been able to afford monuments they would have found it difficult to obtain permission to clutter up the graveyard. This land was used over and over again for burials with no individual or family being able to claim ownership of any specific part of it. This meant that when a grave was dug to receive a body, several earlier, much decayed ones, were disturbed. When the situation became intolerable, fresh soil was dumped over the yard, creating an upper tier for new burials. This is particularly noticeable at the old church buildings of Airth and Kinneil whose floors lie well below the levels of the surrounding graveyards. At Dunipace and Carriden, by contrast, the churches have long since been demolished, but their floors are preserved over 0.6m below ground. One major problem with this graveyard solution was that it made the churches themselves much damper. This contributed to the factors that caused many of the churches to be entirely rebuilt in the early 19th century. Even in these latter cases it is still possible to discern how much higher their attendant graveyards are than the surrounding land. Falkirk may be taken as typical of the churches in our area: as late as 1626 there were few, if any, stones in its graveyard. On the 17th August of that year William Muirhead of Greenrig made an application for *"libertie to place ane stane in the churchyaird upone his buriall pt, qlk the Session altogedir refusit, all in ane voice"* (Murray 1887, 46).

As graveyards were open spaces, which lay near to town centres, they became focal points for all sorts of activities. In 1457, for example, an Act of the Scottish Parliament decreed that in every parish a weapons inspection be held four times a year in the churchyard, and also that provision be made for weekly arrow practice on Sundays. Fairs and markets were regularly held in churchyards. A pedestal stone at Dunipace graveyard houses a socket in its upper face, probably for a market cross (RCAHMS 1963, 158). In Medieval times houses were erected with doors opening on to the churchyard as a matter of convenience for selling goods at these markets. Such may have been the case in Falkirk where the north side of the High Street from Lint Riggs to Kirk Wynd backs onto the graveyard. This is the oldest part of the street. Lint Riggs bounds the west side of the graveyard and acts as a reminder that this open space could, on occasion, be used for treating linen. In 1623 one Falkirk resident was rebuked for tethering his horse overnight in the churchyard so that it could graze the grass, and in 1652 the trees there were cut down and sold for timber (Murray 1887, 29, 187).

Illus 14: Socket stone at Dunipace.

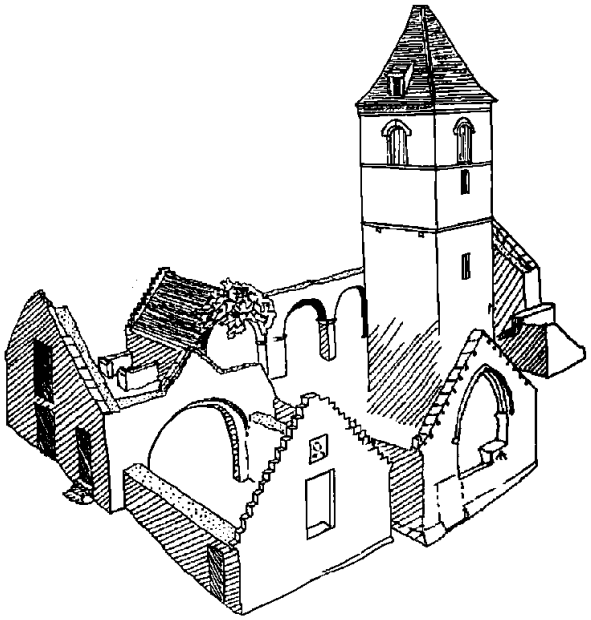
The priory at Manuel also possessed a graveyard. The priory was established in the twelfth century and eventually closed in the sixteenth. During this time the nuns would have been buried in their own private yard. It is also likely that some of the local barons would have obtained permission to use that restful spot, for an appropriate commitment. However, in 1785 the River Avon shifted its course and much of the cemetery and priory were washed away (Grose 1797, 236).

With the coming of the Reformation there were moves to reform burial practices. The sickening odour of decaying corpses within the churches had occasioned the burning of incense and this was to be stopped. In 1576 an Act of Assembly was passed that no burial should take place in the churches and that the contraveners be suspended from the church benefits until they publicly repented. A similar act of 1588 declared that every minister should oppose burial within churches and suspend from church ordinances all inbringers of the dead. An Act of Parliament was recommended, but only came much later. Partly to circumvent these regulations a number of the noble families built private aisles onto the churches. At Airth in 1593 the Elphinstone Aisle was added on to the south-west end of the nave. The date of construction is given on the gable and it was also in that year that the first grave slab was laid down. Robert Bruce, servant to Alexander Lord Elphinstone, died on 30th November 1593, some 46 years after his master had been killed at the Battle of Pinkie. There are six other monumental slabs in this aisle, ranging up to 1638 and forming a most interesting collection. They have lengthy inscriptions around their margins and a shield or emblem in the centre. They are characteristic of this period and may be compared, for example, with the stone at Kinneil Church of John Hamilton, the son of the Kinneil Chamberlain, who died in 1605, or with a stone bearing a Latin inscription of 1600 in Falkirk Parish Church.



Illus 15: Two of the grave slabs from the Elphinstone Aisle, Airth. They are both just over 1.7m long.

The middle years of the seventeenth century were disrupted by wars and famine. Again, the Elphinstone family was involved and a stone in Larbert churchyard commemorates Michael Elphinstone who died as an officer at the Battle of Kilsyth in 1645. By the e
nd of the century the grave slabs had become much briefer, with the lettering reduced to little more than the date and two or more sets of initials. More of these recumbent stones were, however, slowly appearing in the graveyards and people were now claiming ownership of burial plots or lairs. The poor folk were buried in 'common land' away from the church and never on the immediate south, that being considered the prime choice of the wealthy. Another favourite area for those who could afford it was against the enclosing wall. These walls were extensively remodelled in the 17th century to reduce access. At Airth the roll mouldings on the two entrances suggest a date in the middle of the century, while at Falkirk we have a reference to the building of part of the wall in 1629 and the date of 1659 still appears on the gateway onto the High Street (Murray 1887, 73).



Illus 16: The old Parish Church at Airth owes much of its form to the burial aisles that were added on to the main building.

Despite the Reformation it was still fashionable for the noble families to be interred within the church buildings. In 1631 the Rev Robert Bruce was buried at the foot of the pulpit of Larbert Church which he had built. At Airth the Bruce Aisle had been added in 1614; and in 1682 a vault was dug under the Airth Aisle, making three such chambers there. Falkirk was in a similar position. William Callendar of Dorrator was fined for damaging the church floor when he attempted to bury one of his children there in 1624 (Murray 1887, 46). Then in 1639 Richard Burns of Clerkston (now Avondale House) was accused of "*breaking the Kirke floore for the buriel of his father against the ordinance of the General Assembly*". A subsequent meeting of the kirk session "*ordained that whosoever has broken the Kirk floore for burying their dead in tymes bypast shal pay 5 libs*". At the same time it was resolved "*that non brak the Kirk ground at all tyme cuming*". It was about this time also that the session granted liberty to parishioners, on making payment for the privilege, to erect gravestones in the churchyard. Among the first to whom liberty was granted was Thomas Booge, who is stated to have "*supplicat the Session for to get leave to lay on a through stone upon his grave, the qlk desire the Session granted upon the payment of 3 libs to the box*" (Murray 1887, 117).

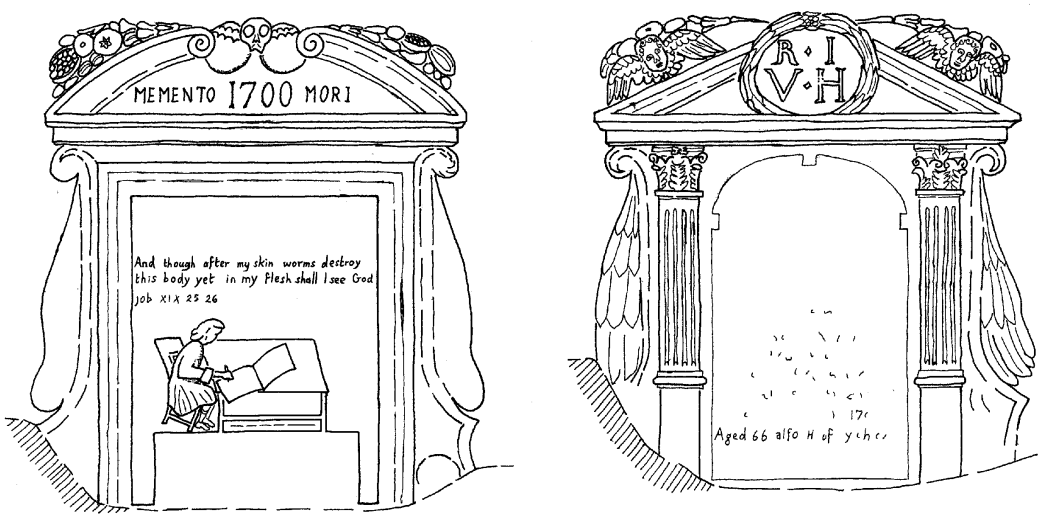
The two main heritors in Falkirk parish were the Livingstones of Callendar and the Hopes of Kerse. By custom and usage, the Livingstones buried their dead in the South Aisle, while their Kerse neighbours used the east end of the church beyond the chancel. On 6 April 1645 the kirk session received intimation of the death of Helen, one of Sir Thomas Hope's daughters. Two days later, on the 8th, the session met and "*una voce concludat that no buriall should be grantit unto the Lady Ker's chyld in the eister ile, in respect that ile was standing in controversie betwixt the Earl of Callendar and the Laird of Kers*". They emphasised their point by restating "*that no buriall should be within the kirk in any tyme coming*". However, the Earl of Callendar had passed his rights concerning the east end of the church onto Thomas Hope, and when Lady Kerse appealed against their decision it soon became evident that the east end of the building was separated from the main body of the church by a rail and had not been used for public worship within living memory. Consequently, it did not formally constitute a part of the body of the kirk and was not covered by the Act of Assembly. It was decided that the session should "*mak no stop nor impediment" thereafter to the free use of the aisle by the relict or children or utheris interested in the said Sir Thomas*" (Murray 1887, 138). In the meanwhile, the child had been buried in Larbert Churchyard (Love 1906, 50).

Part of the reason that the Falkirk Kirk Session was so adamant not to permit the burial of Helen Hope was that they suspected she had died from the plague. The victims of this scourge were normally buried in isolated locations away from churchyards due to a well-founded apprehension that the infection might burst out and spread if the graves were re-opened. A remote location on Grahams Muir was thus chosen for the many plague fatalities from Falkirk and as a reminder and warning the site was enclosed in October 1647 with a stout wall. As an added disincentive large stone slabs were placed over the graves. These were removed in c1787 and today the site lies under housing on the north-east corner of the junction of Russel Street and George Street. Another victim of the 1646 plague was James Heugh. His solitary grave was marked at Stenhousemuir until this century by a stone bearing that date and known locally as the 'Plague Stone' (Love 1906,

53). Some of the latest plague deaths were in 1871 when the Campbell family of Millfield in Polmont were struck. The nanny and four children died and were buried in a small enclosure on the estate (where the Texaco petrol station now stands).

Most early seventeenth century grave slabs were relatively featureless, but there are some fascinating exceptions, notably at Kinneil. At this time trade and commerce in the port of Bo'ness were rapidly expanding and consequently several of the grave markers display trade symbols. A stone of 1627 portrays an anchor; in 1632 we have a hammer below a crown, the emblem of the hammermen's incorporation; there are two or three stones with maltster's shovels; and later that century there are several bearing sledge-hammers and picks representing colliers. Many of these stones have texts in Lombardic lettering, reflecting the external influences to which the port was open.

These interesting trade stones at Kinneil anticipate the ornate stones of the next century elsewhere. After the blank stones of the seventeenth century the variety and number of headstones of the eighteenth comes as a great relief to tombstone enthusiasts. Headstones, that is flat stones that stood erect, rather than the huge through or recumbent stones, were introduced towards the end of the 17th century because they were cheaper to make and the church fees were less. They reached the pinnacle of their design in about 1745 in our area. As well as being sculpted in high relief there is evidence on some of the stones that they were brightly painted. White and red are the colours which are often noted on them today, but these are the most stable pigments and are merely the residue of those that were placed there some 250 or so years ago.

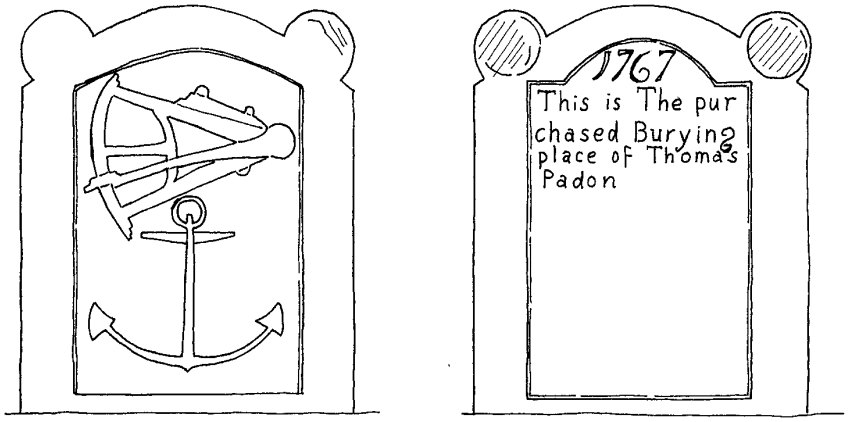


Illus 17: A tombstone from Carriden with a Biblical quote. The clerk writes the names of the righteous in the Book of Judgement.

The borders of the stones are often heavily sculpted with geometric designs to provide frames for the all-telling inscription, but they also carry an immense quantity of symbolism. The laurel wreath or the serpent biting its own tail form convenient oval panels. Foliage of various kinds was also used in the same way, as was classical architecture or drapery. Skulls and bones have obvious associations with death. The hourglass is a reminder that time is running out or tipped on its side that time has run out. A common inscription in our graveyards reads: "My glas is run and yours is runing be feird to sin for judgment coming" (this version from Muiravonside). It paraphrases a line from the Bible "And as it is appointed unto Men once to die but after this the Judgment" found on a stone at Carriden. There are numerous other biblical references. Adam and Eve are depicted at Falkirk and Polmont along with the line, *"Solomon in all his Glory was not arrayed like one of these"* (Willsher 1995); the sower and the reaper can be found at Polmont and Muiravonside; and trumpeting heralds sounding the resurrection are numerous. Indeed, if we were to list all the biblical connections here it would be of considerable size. The most often used line is Job chap xix, v25

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God" - an understandable sentiment for a religion believing in an afterlife.

The variety of trade stones is remarkable, with many unique examples. There are ploughs and coulters for farmers; hammers and crowns for incorporated hammermen; planes and chisels for joiners; ships, anchors and sextants for sailors and merchants; scissors and irons for tailors; picks and hammers for colliers; shuttles and looms for weavers; cold chisels and hammers for stone quarriers; rakes and spades for gardeners; the number 4 for merchants; malt shovels and bushel measures for maltsters; adzes for shipwrights; horseshoes, tongs and hammers for farriers; squares, levels and three castles for masons; rinds and millstones for millers; hammers for coopers; knives and sharpeners for butchers; muskets, cannon and swords for soldiers; dividers, squares and hammers for wrights; all within the district.



Illus 18: An example of a mid-eighteenth century tombstone illustrating a trade, from Bo'ness Churchyard.

The increase in trade and commerce brought greater wealth and independence to the communities. The increase in self-awareness went as deep as religious values and in the eighteenth century there were three notable splinters from the established church which led to the establishment of the Erskine Church, the Relief Church, and the Reformed Church. The first meeting of the Erskine Church was at Lochgreen Farm in 1739. In 1742 a meetinghouse was built in Silver Row, Falkirk, and land was acquired for a cemetery of their own. However, when their minister, Rev Henry Erskine, died in 1754 he had to be buried in the parish churchyard because it was not yet ready (Kirk 1987, 14). Another branch of the Erskine church at Dennyloanhead also insisted upon its own burial ground. The Relief Church had their inaugural meeting at Mumrills Farm in 1767 and seven years after a meetinghouse was constructed on West Bridge Street in Falkirk. This was to become the West Church. Again the first minister was buried in the parish churchyard in 1785 and it was only in about 1805 that permission was sought and obtained from the feudal superior to have an adjoining graveyard. The 409 lairs on offer were soon snapped up and in December 1819 the first burial, that of Isabel Steel, took place with great ceremony. A stone still in the churchyard records the event: *"the first laid in this burial ground/ You who read this/ Remember that as her glass is run,/ yours is running, prepare for death, as judgment's coming".* In 1784 the Laurieston Reformed Presbyterian Church came into being and built their church in 1789 in James Street, Laurieston. Their first minister was Rev John Reid of Bonnyhill. Shortly before his death in 1820 he expressed the wish not to be buried in the parish churchyard but on his own estate beside the Rowantree Burn. An enclosed family graveyard was then established there.

Illus 19: The Scott family tomb at Woodend.

Other reasonably well-to-do dissenters likewise chose to be buried on their own land. In 1750 the Spiers family of Lochgreen started their family plot in a favourite spot (Bailey 1993). Lochgreen, it will be remembered, was the site of that early meeting of the Erskine Church. Other meetings had been held on the nearby farm of Woodend, and here we find the Scott family tomb, commenced in 1758. There are similar 'tombs' at Greenhill and Babbithill. These all consist of a high stone wall surrounding a rectangular open courtyard of around 25 square metres.

A somewhat different tomb can be found on the road from Airth to Airth Station. Called 'Club's Tomb', it takes the form of a stone pyramidal roof raised on oval walls. It is said to be the resting place of James Club who, in his will of 1757, wished to be buried in it, with his dog, beyond the reach of the Resurrectionists. These body-snatchers made a business of stealing newly buried corpses from graveyards and selling them to teachers of anatomy, a practice prevalent in this part of the world during the latter half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. As a consequence, a new feature appeared in churchyards across the country - the watch-house. Today only that at Dunipace can still be seen in the Falkirk district, beside the south-east gateway. At Slamannan the collecting house by the gate was used and is still in good repair, and traces of the Denny one can be identified near the entrance. Falkirk's was put up in 1820 and lay near the Manse Place entrance. Until c1890 a small watch-house also stood at the south gate of the churchyard at Church Wynd, Bo'ness (Salmon 1913, 420). Every householder took their turn to watch, or else they found a substitute.

Another method of defeating the Resurrectionists was to secure the body in a large iron coffin or mortsafe until the corpse had decayed beyond the usefulness of the physicians, when it could be safely buried. Three late examples of these mortsafes can be seen at Airth. Each has the word 'AIRTH' cast on it, together with the individual dates of 1831, 1832 and 1837. A fourth safe that lay at the North Church, Airth, has been removed to the care of the National Museum of Scotland. The celebrated case of Burke and Hare, labourers on the Union Canal and once resident in Brightons, revealed that the more unscrupulous Resurrectionists might also be systematic murderers, and led to the passing of the first Anatomy Act in 1832.

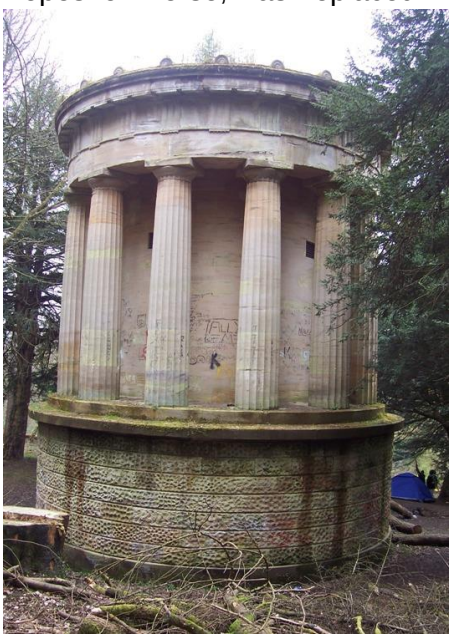
The mortsafes were not the only huge iron monuments to be found in churchyards. In the 1780s a giant obelisk was made of this material and erected at Larbert to commemorate James Bruce, the Abyssinian traveller. Cast iron frames were also introduced to hold the stone slabs upright. For the smaller purse small iron markers were also available.

Illus 20: A small cast iron grave marker at Carriden new churchyard.

The beginning of the nineteenth century was a great time of church building. In 1806 the anti-burgher church building known as the 'Tattie Kirk' was erected, and almost immediately a graveyard was opened alongside of it. The anti-burgher church at Charlotte Place, Bo'ness, also had a graveyard. The Denny Associate Presbyterian Church, Broompark, followed suit. Older churches were rebuilt in large numbers, their old decaying fabric made worse by the raised damp graveyards. Strangely there seems to have been little opposition to disturbing the graves around these old buildings when the sites were enlarged or re-aligned. It was a different story when an entirely new site was chosen and when people were coerced into using the new churchyards provided. At first all went well and the early closures were unopposed. In 1669

the kirk and parish of Kinneil were suppressed by an Act of the Scottish Parliament. The old building became the private chapel of the Hamilton family and the parishioners used the new ground at Bo'ness. They still retained their separate identity by being buried in the southern part of the churchyard, the part nearer the church being reserved for the people of Bo'ness itself. A century later, in 1766 the church at Carriden, which stood near to the old house of that name, was removed to the foot of Carriden Brae. The following year a riot broke out when there was an attempt to 'persuade' a family not to bury their child in the old site (Salmon 1913, 172-6). The people triumphed on that occasion, but slowly the new ground came into general use and the old one became neglected. It was still used for the occasional burial as late as 1853. However, in 1819 the boundary walls were demolished by the occupants of Carriden House. Once again, the locals were up in arms (twice since 1767 they had resisted attempts to close the graveyard and had received money from Carriden people abroad). Fortunately the walls had only been taken down because they had become unsafe and were soon rebuilt with the upper part being replaced with a cast iron railing. Similar problems occurred at Airth when the North Church was commissioned in 1820 and the access roads to the old yard subsequently altered to their detriment.

When Falkirk Parish Church was rebuilt in 1810 the east end, which had been the burial place of the Hopes of Kerse, was replaced with the grand Zetland Tomb. By then the Livingstone family connection with the church had been severed, their place as the chief heritor taken by the Forbes family. In common with many wealthy families of his rank, William Forbes had a monumental mausoleum built on his own estate. Built in 1816, it takes the form of a large Doric temple and is one of the best examples of its kind in Scotland. The Earl of Dunmore was able to achieve a similar effect for a considerably smaller sum. He had the old tower of Elphinstone converted into a mausoleum in 1851 by using the ground floor as a burial vault and finishing the top with a new parapet wall. The middle floors provided convenient summerhouses and gazebo-rooms. Beside the tower stood St Andrews Episcopal Church, built by the Earl for his family and estate workers.



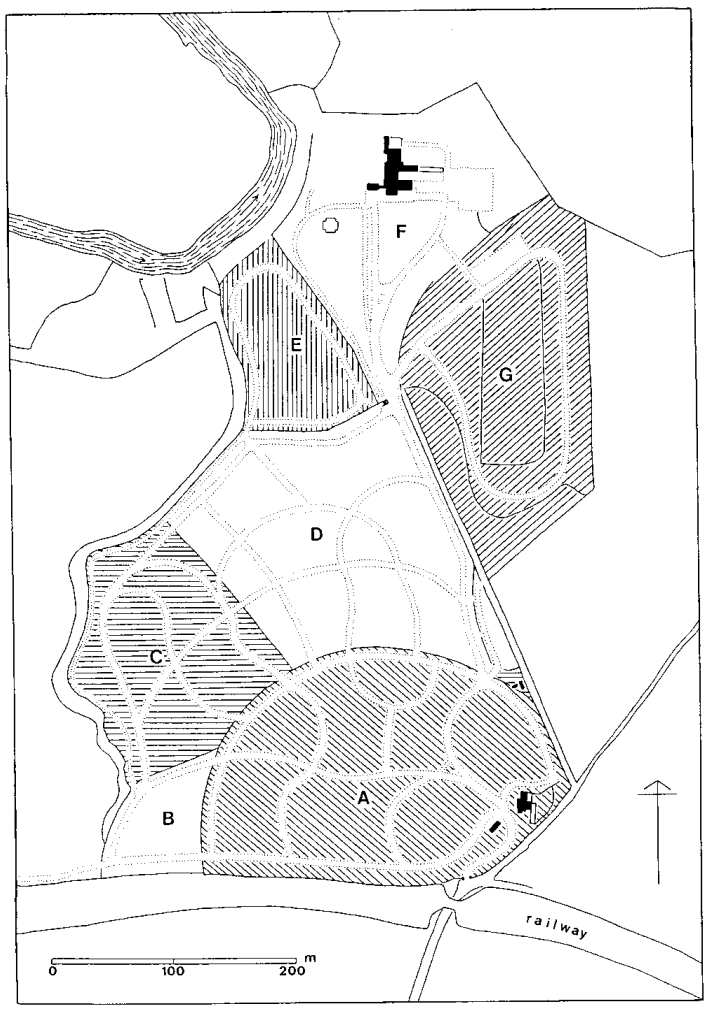
Illus 21: The Callendar Park Mausoleum of 1816.

Large estate mausolea were not in the reach of most landowners and merchants. These middle ranking people were, nonetheless, able to construct grandiose buildings in the churchyards. A line of simple vaults appeared on the north side of Falkirk churchyard. Only that at the north-west corner survives today, hidden by the new hall. At Dunipace a vaulted building, the family tomb of the Spottiswode family, stands along the east wall. There are many such structures around the district. Perhaps the most elaborate are those of the Carron Company managers at Larbert.

In 1843 the Disruption occurred, giving rise to the Free Church. Few of these came to possess their own graveyards, Larbert East being an exception. At the same time a programme of church extension produced more church buildings for the Established Church. Camelon was a product of this scheme and soon had a graveyard attached. The newly established Episcopalian church in Falkirk, Christ Church, set aside land in 1864 for a graveyard that was bigger than that of the West or Tattie Kirks. However, due to the proximity of dwelling houses the church reconsidered its position and consequently only one burial, that of a child, ever took place there.

Falkirk Parish Church	0.787 acres
East (Erskine) Church	0.240 acres
West Church	0.225 acres
South (Tattie) Church	0.166 acres
Christ Church	0.320 acres
TOTAL in 1870	1.738 acres

It was readily apparent by then that the provision for burial places in most Scottish towns was woefully inadequate. So in 1868 the Falkirk Parochial Board became one of the first in our area to adopt the Burial Ground (Scotland) Act of 1855. This act empowered them to raise loans to be offset by future burial fees. 11.4 acres of land were purchased from the Earl of Zetland and in October the following year work began on laying out the new cemetery at Dorrator. It opened in August 1870, having cost £6,000, and in July 1871 it was enacted that the five Falkirk Churchyards were to be closed down. The only exceptions were for the burial of those whose spouses were already buried there, or who were in possession of vaults. Denny soon followed suit, acquiring 5.2 acres of land by arbitration from William Forbes in 1873; Bo'ness opened its cemetery in 1881. All these new sites were in open country with plenty of room for expansion. They were beautifully designed with formal paths, lodges to serve as offices, benches, fountains, and superb floral displays and shrubs. The standard of maintenance was exceptional and they soon took on the appearance of public parks. In the ranks of monuments, the Victorians broke from tradition. The new monuments were of a completely new style. Celtic crosses, columns and obelisks were revived, Gothic arches were brought in, three-dimensional figures of angels, animals and birds abounded. Most strikingly, the materials changed. Granite and marble replaced the local sandstones as the commonest medium. Machinery permitted these rocks to be easily cut and transported. Duplicates were also possible using copying machines (a technique used even more widely today). They are elegant, even opulent, vulgar yet full of pathos, and provide a wonderful insight into the Victorian world. These were cemeteries in the true sense of the word in that they were designed to take people of all denominations.



The Falkirk cemetery at Camelon was intended for usage by the inhabitants of a very large area, which included Grangemouth and Bonnybridge. There was already an ancient burial ground at Bonnybridge called the 'Chapel Yard', but it was extremely small and little use was made of it. It was finally officially closed in 1915, and now forms part of the car park for the community centre! By 1928 Falkirk cemetery had received over 31,000 interments.

Illus 22: Plan of the Falkirk Cemetery showing its gradual growth. A - 1870 at 11.408 acres; B - 1896 at 12.586 acres; C - 1901 at 22 acres; D - 1944 at 24.629 acres.

The burial duties of the parochial boards were passed to the parish councils when they were set up by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1894. For smaller communities, like Slamannan, that were still using the old churchyard this made little immediate difference. Nonetheless it provided a further impetus and in 1904 Slamannan added a massive extension onto its graveyard. In 1901 Grangemouth Parish Council decided to have its own cemetery at Grandsable. Larbert too opened a cemetery in 1904. The powers of the parish councils were again extended by the Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Act 1925, which transferred responsibility of the churchyards to them. At this date many of the churchyards were in a deplorable condition and received immediate attention. The rank grass was cut, fallen gravestones reset, the ground levelled, and engine ashes spread on the paths.

Unfortunately, some of the subsequent maintenance strategies for our churchyards can best be described as over zealous and have robbed us of much of our heritage. In 1962, for example, the historic marker stones at Falkirk Parish Church which commemorated the tradesmen and feuars of the town were all removed and broken up for use as road bottoming into the new crematorium at Camelon. The West Churchyard was turned into a garden of remembrance, though the names of those to be remembered have gone. In 1964 Dennyloanhead Churchyard had a similar fate; the ground was excavated and levelled for a car park. The result is that these areas look like so many public parks and only faint traces of their unique past have been left. All trace of the graveyard at Corbiehall was removed during landscaping improvement in 1980. Redevelopment has also taken its toll. In 1960 the Erskine Churchyard in Horsemarket Lane was removed to make way for the Callendar Riggs Shopping Centre. Today those that remain, (except for the old parish churchyards at Airth and Carriden) are in the trust of the Falkirk Council. In general, they are well tended, though the use of strimmers and large mowers has to be carefully monitored as without due care the old stones can be easily chipped. The trend is now towards cremation, which requires less land and fewer markers. The modern cemeteries are regulated and orderly.

APPENDIX

INVENTORY OF ANCIENT BURIALS IN THE FALKIRK DISTRICT.

BRONZE AGE

Bell's Knowe, Bo'ness (NS 9986 8134) - SMR 102
A stone coffin and an urn were found prior to 1841 on the south side of this eminence. The site is marked on the 1855 Ordnance Survey map as "Stone coffin or Kistvaen found here." and appears on the eastern edge of a whinstone quarry which presumably accounts for its discovery.
NSA Bo'ness, 129; RCAHMS 1929, 199.

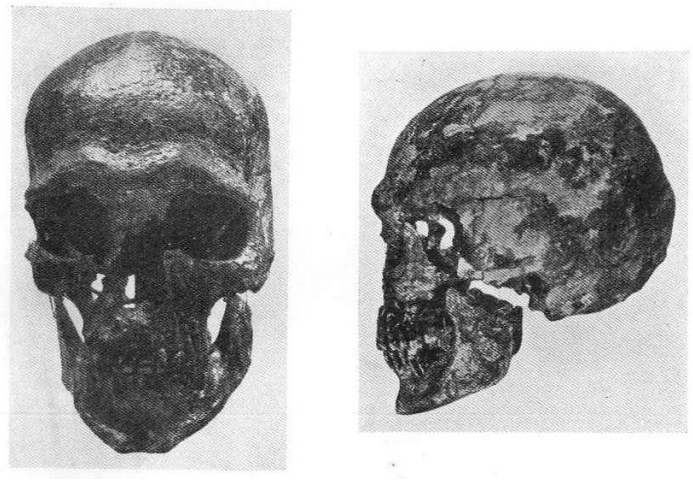
Blackness (NT 054 801) – SMR 103
Two burials were found in 1944 during the excavation of a trench on the crest of the hill to the south of Blackness Castle. They were not dug under archaeological conditions and the guardian at the castle rescued the remains from the spoil tips beside the trench. One burial was of the cremated remains of an adult and a child, which may have been in a cist (Low 1945, 174.). The second consisted of two adult inhumations accompanied by a Food Vessel (now in the National Museum NMAS no EQ 369).
The site is that normally associated with the chapel of St Ninian and it is probable that there was an early Christian graveyard on the same site – see St Ninian's.

Blaeberry Muir (NS 84 79) – SMR 521
Fragments of an all-over corded Beaker were found on the muir. These may have come from a burial or from a dwelling site.

Bridgeness (NT 013 814) – SMR 104

1. A short cist was found in 1896 on the north side of what is now a bowling green. It contained a crouched adult male inhumation accompanied by a Food Vessel.
Turner 1917, 171-255; Callander 1924.

2. Two more cists were found in November 1923 during the construction work for the bowling green. The first one was only 0.76 m long and was found to be full of soil with no sign of any human remains. The second was discovered c15m SSW of that of 1896. It was formed of four thin slabs of sandstone set on edge in a rough rectangle and sunk into the natural gravel. It measured from 1.19 m to 1.08 m by 0.65 m to 0.72 m internally and was 0.46 m deep. The ends had been inserted between the sides, which projected about 0.10 m to the west, but were flush at the east end. The tops of the edge stones were almost level and had been covered by a long thin slab on the north side and by two short ones on the south. The openings between these were closed off with smaller slabs. Inside were the crouched inhumations of an adult male probably in his early thirties and a child of about five or six years old. Beside them was a Food Vessel (NMAS no EE 113). The bones and vessel were placed in the National Museum of Scotland (Callander 1924; Cadell 1925, 293).



Illus: Skull from the 1896 cist at Bridgeness.

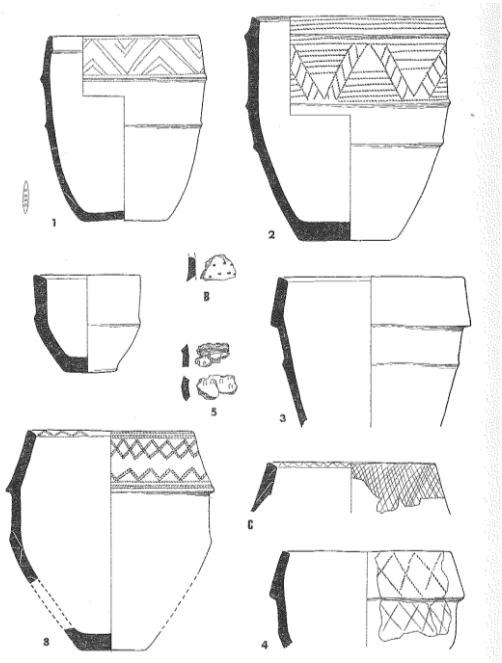
3. About 20yds downhill, ie north, from where the Bridgeness tablet was found a possible stone coffin was exposed in 1937 (West Lothian courier 2 April 1937, 5).

Camelon I (NS 866 804) - SMR 105
A short cist was found during housing construction at the junction of Hamilton Street and Brown Street in 1921. It contained a cremation associated with a flint scraper. Internally it measured 0.69 m by 0.28 m and was 0.30 m deep. The sides were of rough stones covered by a large slab, which overlapped the whole of the mouth.
Buchanan 1922, 65-66; Buchanan & Callander 1923, 243-44.

Camelon II (NS 8699 8068) – SMR 106
In April 1922 a short cist was found in a sand pit north of Nailer Road and near to Camelon Railway station. The east wall of the cist was formed of a single large stone; the west by four stones arranged in two courses; with the north and south end walls also having two courses of irregularly shaped stones. The whole of this was then covered by a large stone slab. Internally the chamber measured 0.92 m by 0.48 m and was 0.46 m deep to the gravelly bottom. The cover stone projected by 0.23 m on each side. Round the margin of the cover stone on the same level there had been carefully placed boulders, averaging 0.30 m long, which effectively made the covering 0.15 m wider. Inside was a Food Vessel (NMS no EE 111) and the skull of an inhumed female together with a cremated adult (Buchanan & Callander 1923, 244-245, 247).

Camelon Urn (NS 86 80) – SMR 107
A food vessel was found in 1935 during the construction of a housing scheme described as the west end of the suburb of Camelon, a few yards south of the Glasgow Road. With it were two or three rounded boulders. The whole probably represents a cremation burial.
Hunter 1936, 276-77.

Castle Hill, Kinneil Mill (NS 974 782) – SMR 108
Cists were found on the Castle Hill in the early nineteenth century according to the New Statistical Account. Then in 1965, during gravel extraction, several more were removed leaving archaeologists to record just two remaining ones. These were short cists, one containing a crouched inhumation and the other a Food Vessel (NMAS no EQ 750).
The excavation also revealed a ring-ditch, 11 m in diameter, within the area of which were several cremation burials and four cinerary urns. Three more urns were found in the vicinity (NMAS nos EQ751-63).
Marriot 1968; NSA.



Illus: The Castle Hill urns.

Cowdenhill (NT 0132 8145) - SMR 109
A short cist was found in September 1905 containing fragmentary bones and a Food Vessel. Internally it measured 1.02m long by 0.53m wide and was covered by a heavy slab of freestone. The cist had been dug into the underlying sand on the raised beach and was just 18ins below the ground surface. The cist was later re-erected behind Old Grange House (NT 0152 8140).

Coles 1906, 317; Callander 1924;
Linlithgowshire Gazette, 29.9.1905, 5.

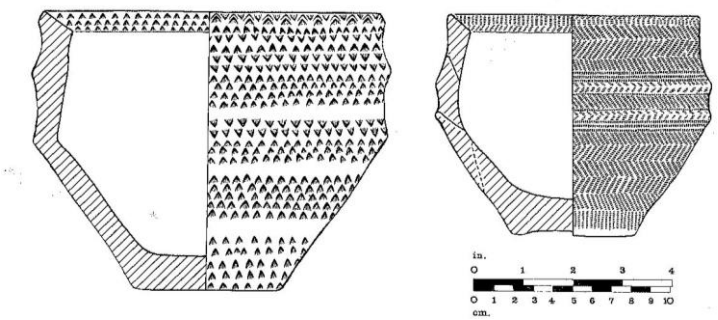
Illus: The beaker from Cowdenhill.

Illus: Cowdenhill cist as re-erected.

Deacon's Stone, Bo'ness (NT 009 812) – SMR 728
Cists are recorded in the Ordnance Survey Name Book near to the Deacon Stone. They were found in 1833 when the earthen tumulus covering them was removed. The Deacon Stone is said to have surmounted this mound but was only around 2ft tall.
OSNB: NSA 1845, 68: RCAHMS 1929, 199.

Denny Bridge (NS 808 830) – SMR 110
In about 1830 a cist was discovered when a large mound was removed near Denny Bridge. The cist lay near the top of the hill and consisted of five large rough stones. Inside was an inhumation with a Food Vessel. This pot contained a substance that resembled a wasp's nest.
NSA Denny, 379-80.

Denovan (NS 815 835) – SMR 111
Two short cists were found in 1967 during gravel extraction, but one, which contained a Food Vessel, was too badly damaged to be recorded. The remaining one was coffin-shaped, 1.37 m long by 0.33-0.46 m wide. Two slabs formed each of the long sides with clay and small stones used to plug the gaps between them. The cover stone was 1.30 m long by 0.56 m wide. This also contained a Food Vessel. More cists may have been destroyed without being observed.
Hunter 1971.



Illus: Drawings of the two Food Vessels found at Denovan.

Goshen, Stenhousemuir (NS 870 823) – SMR 112
A short cist was found during the digging of a sand hole at the Goshen by the Carron Company in February 1882. It measured 1.12 m by 0.36-0.42 m and contained an inhumation. It was constructed of rough stones with three large stone slabs forming the roof. The skull was in a poor state of preservation (TSNHAS 1882, 35-36; Falkirk Herald 9 February 1882, 4).

Falkirk, Williamson Street (NS 8899 7977)

A shallow 0.9m wide ring ditch with an internal diameter of 8.3m was discovered during archaeological excavations at Williamson Street in Falkirk in 2019. Within this enclosed space a pit had been dug towards one edge and an inverted urn placed in it. This was a tripartite collared urn, 37.5cm in height, decorated with two bands of impressed cord. This is from the Early Bronze Age (1900-1600BC) of a type known as Longworth's North-West Style. It contained the cremated bones of an adult male and an adult female along with six worked animal bone objects – bones and beads (Hills 2021).

Illus: The collared urn from Williamson Street, Falkirk.

Grahamsdyke Road, Bo'ness (NT 0084 8123) – SMR 113
A number of cists or coffins were found about 4 chains south of Grange House about the year 1850 during improvements. They were formed of rough interior flags and chiefly contained mere dust, although in some instances bones were present (OSNB).

Headswood – SMR 161 (NS 8280 8190) – SMR 161
An urn of Beaker or Food Vessel type containing cremated human bone was found in a sand pit to the west of Headswood Farm in 1888. The site was on a prominent knoll called the 'Kames' or 'Roman Camp'. This was a natural hill with a dished centre. The urn was found near the summit at one edge about 2ft under the surface. At the time of discovery it was attributed to the Romano-British period but was clearly a typical Bronze Age beaker. It was described as being "*of the customary pear shape, and measures 11 inches in depth and 10½ inches diameter at the mouth, and composed of sun-dried clay. By way of embellishment, the outside is freely covered with zig-zag lines and arrow-pointed marks, while the inside had been carefully smoothed down*." Within a few yards of the spot where the urn was discovered the bones of an animal were also dug up, but it is not possible to say if they were associated. The beaker was retained by the tenant farmer, James Shanks, and was inspected there by the minister of Kilsyth in 1892. It has subsequently been lost (Falkirk Herald 26 May 1888, 6; Stirling Journal & Advertiser, 25 May 1888, 5).

Laughing Hill, Upper Kinneil (NS 977 793) - SMR 114
A small knoll called Laughing Hill was levelled to improve the drainage of the area in 1829 and found to consist of a cairn of stones surrounded by a stone kerb some 40ft in diameter. The cairn contained four stone cists and four urns were found associated with cremation burials. The urns had been inverted and placed upon flat stones. The burial mound measuring about 16.5 m in diameter and 2.5 m in height.
NSA Bo'ness, 129; Horsley 1732, 175, Morning Herald (London) 25 December 1829, 2.

Meadowbank (NS 9278 7835) – SMR 2249
In an addendum to Professor John Anderson's account of the Antonine Wall, John Hart mentions an otherwise unknown tumulus: "*Meadowbank House is built upon the side of it* [the gravel ridge running from Westquarter to Polmont Station]. *On the lawn in front of the house stood one of the*

circular mounds, it was about 20ft higher than the top of the wall. This mound was removed in 1795, 2 or 3 stone coffins and part of a Skull with a few teeth and some other fragments of bones were found in them" (Bailey & Mearns 2020, 412).

Parkhouse, Falkirk (NS 881 804) – SMR 144
In about 1798 two urns containing cremated human bones were discovered at Parkhouse.
Stirling Journal & Advertiser 6.4.1828.

Walton (NT 026 792) – SMR 116
In June1892 a number of coffins containing human remains were found by workmen employed by a local contractor to extract gravel for road metal from the small flat-topped hillock to the south of Walton farmhouse near Carriden. The stone coffins were about 3ft from the surface and their sides were constructed of shale and stone slabs about 2ins thick. The skeletons were very much decayed, although some of the bones and teeth were in a comparatively good state of preservation. At least seven coffins were encountered as well as a grinding stone (Falkirk Herald 2 July 1892, 5). The site was earlier noted as a barrow (Haverfield 1910, 321; Salmon 1913, 9).
"Several years ago when digging for stones to build a park wall, a number of axes, pots and vases, evidently of Roman workmanship where discovered at a place called Waltoun and sent to the Advocates Library in Edinburgh." (Fullerton's Gazetteer of Scotland). The "vases" were presumably Bronze Age urns.

Woodgate - SMR 126 (NS 8290 8233) – SMR 126
"In digging at Woodgate, on the Carron, for the foundation of the newly built house there, a rude stone coffin, made of flags, about two thirds of the ordinary length, placed nearly perpendicular, and containing the bones of an adult person, was found. It is dated, as we have learned, 1301" (Nimmo 1817,741).
The house mentioned in this early account was Headswood Cottage and the stone bearing the date was placed in the lobby of the cottage where it could be seen by everyone who entered it (New Statistical Account; Aberdeen Weekly News 2 April 1881, 3). Some of the bones found were, for a short while, in the manse of Denny. Most of the bones "crumbled to dust" but four teeth survived. One tooth was incorporated into the same lobby and the other three were held there for inspection. The minister at Denny conjectured that the remains were of some distinguished person who fell in connection with the invasion of Edward I in 1298 and its aftermath. However, the 1301 date was questioned as early as 1888 and it does seem at odds with the description of the cist.
The date was evidently inscribed at the time of discovery and came about as the result of local tradition which had long associated Gil Maurice in the early fourteenth century with this immediate area. The famous ballad of Gil Maurice was first published in Glasgow in 1755 but was of a much older date. The first two verses of the ballad run:
"*Gil Morice was an earl's son,*
His fame, it waxed wide,
It wasna for his great riches,
Nor for his muckle pride.

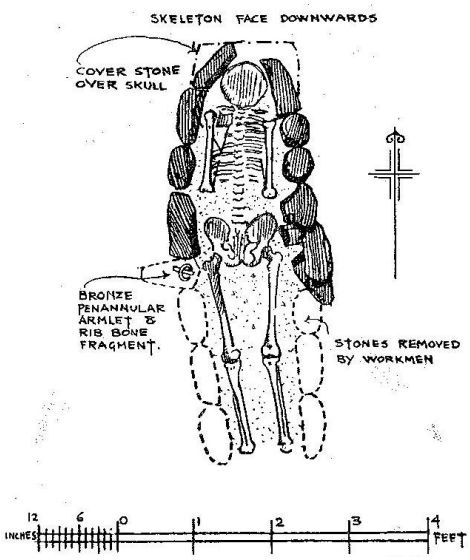
His face was fair, lang was his hair,
In the wild wood whaur he stayed
But his fame was by a lady fair,
That lived on Carron-side."

In the ballad Gil Maurice is slain by his father-in-law who mistakes him for his wife's paramour. In the 1750s John Home based his tragedy "Douglas" on the ballad, locating the castle connected with the story at Herbertshire Tower. Further associations with Ossian's poems helped to muddy the waters.

The site of Headswood Cottage, now Headswood House, occupies a prominent knoll on a promontory on the south bank of the River Carron. The house is now hidden amongst the trees but was once a conspicuous feature for miles around. Other knolls in the vicinity also possessed cist burials and a polished stone axehead was found at the Kames immediately west of Headswood Farm in 1878.

Woodyett (NS 82 81) – SMR 2250
In April 1857 workmen constructing the Denny branch railway discovered the remains of a human skeleton, in a tolerable state of preservation, on the top of a sandy knoll about 2ft under the surface, covered with a large flagstone. The body appeared to have been interred in a doubled state, with the knees near the head (Stirling Observer 20 April 1857, 3). This strongly suggests that it was a Bronze Age cist.
The newspaper report states that it was found on the farm of Woodyett which lies to the north of the railway. It is possible that there was some confusion with Headswood as Headswood Cottage was built on the lands of Woodyett; though it is also possible that the men were extracting gravel at Woodyett for the construction of the railway embankments. This latter is made more probable by a reference to the "1301" Cist having been found on an "neighbouring" knoll.

IRON AGE



Blackness Castle (NT 055 802) - SMR 117
A long cist burial was found in 1924 on the north side of the south range of barracks at Blackness Castle. It was aligned roughly N-S and contained an extended female inhumation lying face down with the head to the north. The sides of the grave were formed by a setting of small sea-worn stones. A penannular bronze armlet (now in the National Museum) found in association with it might date it to the Dark Age or the Iron Age. The cist was at least 1.5m in length and 0.5m wide.
Richardson 1925.

Illus: Sketch plan of the Blackness Castle burial.

Denovan (NS 815 835) – SMR 118
At least three long cists were found at Denovan during gravel extraction in 1967. They were shallow and badly made. Their proximity to two short cists with Food Vessels suggests that they may be of Iron Age date rather than of the early Christian era.
Hunter 1971.

Illus: Bottom slabs of a long cist at Denovan.

Goshen (NS 869 823) – SMR 112

During sand extraction by Carron Company at Goshen in 1887 a stone-lined cist burial was found 5ft below the surface. The skull mouldered away on exposure to the atmosphere but the lower jaw and teeth were in good preservation (Falkirk Herald 14 September 1887, 5). A copper alloy brooch (SMR 1428) was found "beside" the burial but it is not clear if it was actually within the cist. It was a typical Romano-British trumpet brooch of the late 1st-2nd century AD (Hunter 2001, 117). A bronze spearhead was found nearby and slightly deeper down. It was described in 1888 during a visit of the British Archaeological Association as being "*ornamented up the edges with brass studs sunk in flush with the surface of the surrounding metal.*" Cowie has pointed out that this is unlikely to have belonged to the Bronze Age (Cowie 2001, 97) and it may have been part of a Roman standard.

Illus: Trumpet brooch from Goshen drawn by Mungo Buchanan.

The clasp or brooch and the spearhead were taken into the care of the Carron Company, the former being drawn by Mungo Buchanan in 1891.

Stenhousemuir Chariot Burial (NS 881 830) – SMR 2251

Two iron tyres found in the mossy ground near the present Carron Recreation Centre in 1800 may have been part of a chariot burial. Such tyres, along with lynch pins and terret rings, are all that usually survives the centuries. The tyres were discovered along with three or four mill stones during the digging of drains in that peaty area and were reported by Rev. Bonar. The mill stones were of the type of lava found in Andernach in Germany and commonly used by the Roman army on campaign. Bonar pointed out that this was the same type of stone as was used in a Roman burial just outside the south gate of the Antonine Wall fort at Mumrills.
Bonar 1845.

ROMAN

Camelon Fire-pits (NS 860 810 & 859 811) – SMR 136

Six pits were found containing bands of charcoal and burnt soil. They were roughly circular and varied from 1.45m to 1.90m in diameter and 0.25m to 0.66m in depth. A radiocarbon date from the charcoal produced a date of either the first century BC or AD. The excavator thought they were cremation sites, but in view of later discoveries of Roman ovens in this area this theory should be discounted.
Breeze & Rich-Gray 1980.

Carmuirs Roman Cist (NS 860 810) – SMR 137

In 1975 part of a cist was found in the face of a gravel quarry. It was aligned WNW-ESE and measured 1.6m by 0.8m and 0.5m deep. Four sandstone slabs formed the sides of a box, with probably four covering slabs. It contained two inhumations with their heads to the ESE. These were extended and lay side by side, accompanied by two spearheads, a possible belt fitting, a shield boss and a sword. One individual was aged approximately 16 years, and the second was over 20 years.
Breeze, Close-Brooks & Ritchie 1976.

Illus: The two spearheads from the Carmuirs cist.

Carmuirs Sword (NS 859 811) – SMR 138
A Roman sword was found in 1975 during gravel extraction. It probably came from a burial in the area.
Breeze, Close-Brooks & Ritchie 1976.

Camelon East Graveyard

Carmuirs I (NS 8651 80 82) - SMR
The Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1860 shows "Human remains found AD 1848" at this location. These were evidently discovered during the construction of the railway. The site lies just outside of the east gate of the southern camp of the Roman fort.

Camelon II (NS 8702 8058) – SMR 2252
In October 1859 the remains of a human skeleton were found by labourers employed in excavating sand for moulding purposes for the Falkirk Iron Works "in the extremity of a large garden about one hundred yards on the north side of Camelon" (Falkirk Herald 3 November 1859, 3). The remains were 6ft from the surface and consisting of the under jaw and teeth, a part of the skull, and about twenty-four other small bones. They were identified as those of a person under 20 years of age, but there was no indication of date (Glasgow Herald 31 October 1859, 5). The sand pit is shown on the 1864 Ordnance Survey map close to the find spots of further graves in 1922 and was probably part of that extensive cemetery.

Camelon III (NS 8718 8056) – SMR 139
In April 1922 a cist made of two courses of large boulders was found near Camelon Railway Station. It was aligned NW-SE, and the interior measured 4ft in length, 18ins in width and was 2ft deep. It was covered by three thin, rough slabs covering the 4ft cavity. Inside was a crouched inhumation placed on its side with its head to the south. Normally this would have been attributed to the Bronze Age, but this contained several pieces of an iron sword of Roman pattern at its south end (Buchanan & Callander 1923, 246, 248). Another burial nearby contained a Bronze Age beaker

Camelon IV (NS 8694 8067) – SMR 140
In December 1922 an almost complete first century Roman pottery vessel was found upright 2ft below the surface. A few inches to the east three sheet bronze bosses occurred, together with fragments of another sheet bronze object and two iron hinges with wood adhering to them. Although no bones were found these would be appropriate items to associate with cremations. The bronze and wood represent a casket for the reception of cremated bones as often found in Roman cemeteries (Buchanan & Callander 1923, 246, 249-250).

Illus: Roman vessel used as an urn at Camelon.

Camelon West Graveyard

Three Bridges, Camelon (NS 8580 8091) – SMR 141

A rectangular pit measuring 1.85m in length, 0.65m wide and 2.4m deep, was excavated in 1995 in an area associated with Roman temporary camps. The size and shape suggest a grave, but this is far from certain and there were no finds.

Lochlands (NS 8576 8143) – SMR 2253
'Roman Urn found here AD 1848' is marked on the first edition of the OS map at this point. The discovery would have been connected with the construction of the Midland Junction Railway in that year.
This may be the famous "alabaster" urn which found its way into the collections of the National Museum of Scotland and which must have been associated with a Roman individual of very high status (Hunter 2020).

Mumrills Tombstone (NS 917 793) – SMR 159
A Roman tombstone was found in 1834 during work on the main road to Falkirk not far from the south gate of the fort at Mumrills. The lettering still bore traces of red colouring. The text of the stone may be found in the article above. It was donated to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland by Sir Thomas Livingstone of Westquarter suggesting that the find spot lay to the south of the Polmont Road.
Stirling Journal & Advertiser, 4.6.1834, 4; Stuart, R 1852, 358.

Mumrills Urn (NS 917 793) – SMR 160
A samian vessel filled with ashes was found 2m east of the tombstone above. The mouth of the pot had been covered with an upper quernstone of German lava. A similar quernstone was used at Stenhousemuir.
Stirling Journal & Advertiser, 4.6.1834, 4; Stuart, R 1852, 358.

EARLY CHRISTIAN

Airngarth Hill (NT 005 794) – SMR 119
While making the 17th green of the West Lothian golf course in 1925 several graves were found about 366m north-east of the Hope Monument. Whilst these lay just metres outside of the Falkirk District the burial ground probably extended into it originally. Two long slab-lined graves aligned NNW-SSE occurred only 2.1m apart. They were found close to the surface and had lost their cover slabs. The bottoms were paved with sandstone slabs, forming cists measuring 1.58m by 0.36m and 1.37m by 0.33m, and 0.28m deep. Both had sides that converged slightly towards the east.
Nearby, a small cist-like paved structure had been formed. It was triangular in plan being 0.51m long internally, and 0.23m deep. About 7m west of these some incinerated bones were found together with a sandstone slab, possibly representing another much damaged cist. There was also an oval chamber built of small boulders with a large block at the east and west ends, 1.07m by 0.61m internally and 0.76m deep, containing a few fragments of bone. Adjacent to this was a deposit of bone beneath three small flat stones. The only associated object was a jet ring, now in the National Museum.
Burials had been discovered in this area in the previous century.
OSNB; Callander 1926.

Avonglen I (NS 959 784) – SMR 120
A number of stone cists containing human bones were found during the years 1838-52 on the north side of the main road from Falkirk to Linlithgow, 640 m WSW of Avonbank Farmhouse, during gravel extraction.
NSA Muiravonside, 210; OSNB under Sight Hill.

Avonglen II (NS 957 786) – SMR 121
Further cists were found at Avonglen when gravel extraction was renewed in 1973. Discoveries continued up until 1980, when work finished. Most of these cists were recorded as they eroded out of the working quarry face and so details are scarce.

1973 Three long cists found, two examined and found to be slab built with one of them paved. Both contained extended inhumations.

1974 Two more long cists were exposed. The larger was 1.80m by 0.56m in size and contained an extended inhumation; the smaller was 0.97m by 0.36m and contained a child.

1976 The quarry face collapsed taking with it an unrecorded long cist.

1980 Part of a long cist recorded before it too was destroyed. It was slab built and paved, measuring 1.32m by 0.44m. In it was an extended inhumation of which the skull was removed to the National Museum.
DES 1973, 53; DES 1974, 66; DES 1976, 63; DES 1980, 3.

Blackness – St Ninian's Chapel
A. During the erection of a new cottage at the east end of the village of Blackness (NT 0528 8005) in May 1902 the workmen found a human skeleton on a fairly good state of preservation. It appeared to be of a man 6ft tall (Falkirk Herald 8 May 1902). This was near the site of the new chapel of c1600.
B. Four skeletons were found in February 1931 near the top of Castle Hill (NT 0545 8010) just south of St Ninian's Chapel by workmen employed by H M Office of Works. They were about 3ft below the surface and the first was discovered when the skull was crushed by a wheelbarrow. The bones were well preserved, and the teeth were white. Two of the bodies were of children around six years of age and one of the adults was female. Professor Robertson considered them to be 17th century, though no reason was given for this attribution (Linlithgow Gazette 6 February 1931, 4).
C. During the discussion surrounding finds in 1939 a reference was made stating that "Several years ago, three stone cists containing skeletons were unearthed almost at the same part, which appears to have been a burial ground in connection with St Ninian's Chapel. The skeletons were all of men of huge physique" (Falkirk Herald 2 December 1939, 3). Whilst this may refer to the 1931 discoveries the details are incorrect and so it may be another set of cists.

D. In was reported in December 1939 that when excavation work was being engaged in on the Castlehill at Blackness (NT 0545 8010) a stone cist containing a skeleton was unearthed (SMR 103). The teeth were in a good state of preservation. The discovery was reported to HM Office of Works (Falkirk Herald 2 December 1939, 3). It must be assumed that the work was being carried out in connection with preparations for the defence of the castle during the Second World War and was repeated in 1944.

Falkirk Pleasance I (NS 887 797)
In April 1862 William Turner, market gardener, found a human skeleton in his garden in the High Pleasance. "*The greater portion of the bones on becoming exposed to the air crumbled into dust. The skull, however, and especially the teeth, were in a state of comparative freshness. The position of the skeleton when discovered, was at full length, with the back downwards, head to the south, right arm extended outwards, and legs crossing each other. It was found embedded in red sand at a depth of about 4½ feet from the surface; about half a dozen yards from the line where the wall of Antoninus was situated*" (Glasgow Herald 10 April 1862, 4; Stirling Observer 17 April 1862, 5).
The posture of the body suggests that it had been placed in a partially backfilled ditch and then covered over. Unfortunately, the exact location is not discernible from the description but this may have been a ditch for the Roman fort annexe. It may be a coincidence that the probable early Christian burial found in 2006 is close by.

Falkirk Pleasance II (NS 8875 7970)
Part of a broad circular ditch cutting through Roman timber buildings was excavated in 2006 (Bailey 2021, 449-452). Incorporated into the fill of the ditch was a small cluster of quartz pebbles and a wrought iron cauldron. The ditch appeared to have an internal diameter of 2m with the upcast material thrown into the centre to form a burial mound. Any interment in the ditch would therefore have been secondary. The stratigraphic sequence, the pebbles and the cauldron, would suggest a date in the middle of the first millennium AD.

Kerse Hill (NS 9440 7876) – SMR 123
A small cemetery was discovered inside the annexe to the Roman temporary camp immediately before the construction of the M9 motorway. Four of the graves were stone built using dressed stone from an earlier building. Two of these contained skeletal material, and one was short, possibly for a child. There were also four unlined graves. McCord & Tait 1978.

Illus: The long cist burials at Kerse Hill under excavation.

Manuelhaughs (NS 980 770) – SMR 124
Two possible long cists were discovered in 1840 at the west end of the Avon viaduct, 0.25 mile north-east of Manuelhaugh farmhouse. One of these is noted as from 'Brakes'.
NSA Muiravonside, 210; OSNB.

Snab, Kinneil (NS 985 810) – SMR 125
In October 1946 a cist was found 4.6m south of the Grangemouth Road, 46m south-west of the Snab Brae Crossroads. It was at least 1.5m long, with the head to the south, and 0.66m deep. The cist was badly damaged at the time of discovery and only three slabs forming the east side were recorded. The stones had been covered by comminuted shell showing that it had lain near the original shoreline.
Stevenson 1947.

MEDIEVAL

Haining Valley (NS 957 772?) – SMR 2254
A ploughman at Haining Valley Farm encountered a stone coffin a short distance from the ruins of Almond Castle in January 1873. The cap of the coffin was cleared off and the stone lifted revealing a skeleton with the skull entire and the teeth in the upper jaw in good order. The body ay with the feet towards the south-west. A search found two further stone coffins within 50yds. Mr A Reid, the tenant of the farm, had them covered so that they could carefully examined at a future date (Scotsman 9 January 1873, 4). No record of such an examination is known.
The proximity of the coffins to Almond Castle and to Muiravonside Church hints at an early medieval date for the burials.

Union Bank, Bo'ness – SMR 115 (NS 9988 8163) SMR 115
A cist containing human bones was found at the rear of 54 South Street during building work on the Union Bank. The remains were said to have been those of two children (and possibly an adult). The coffin was hewn from a single piece of sandstone and measured 3ft by 2ft, and 1ft 6ins deep

(Linlithgowshire Gazette - 16 Nov 1900, 8; Scottish Antiquary 15, 1901, 154). This suggests that it was late or post- medieval in date and not prehistoric as previously reported.

UNKNOWN

Callendar Park I (NS 9043 7952) – SMR 143
In 1849 workmen digging the new east avenue at Callendar Park came across the bones of between fourteen and sixteen bodies lying close to the Antonine Wall. They seemed to have been buried in a trench about 0.61 m deep. At the time it was thought that they were the remains of troopers from the Battle of Falkirk in 1746, but this is far from certain. That the skeletons were evidently clearly recognisable indicates that they were of post-Medieval date, though they may also be associated with the siege of Callendar House in 1651. In 1991 a musket shot was found in this area during excavations by Falkirk Museum. There is also a slight possibility that they were associated with the tenth century timber hall of the Thane of Callendar.
Falkirk Herald 13.12.1849, 3; Bailey 2007.

Callendar Park II (NS 898 794) – SMR 164
A large number of human bones were unearthed at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the old barbican gateway at Callendar House was levelled during landscaping work to produce the north lawn. These were thought to be victims of the 1651 siege of the House. The small mound to the NW of the house may represent their final resting place.
Kier, R 1827, 209; Burns, J 1879, 40.

Callendar Park III (NS 8965 7930) – SMR 2255
Early editions of the OS maps show 'coffins' to the SW of Callendar House.

Denny Junction Railway (NS 81 82) – SMR 2256
During railway construction in April 1857 a human skeleton was found 6ft below the surface. The date of burial was not determined, though it may have been 'modern' and was assumed to have been the body of a local man who had disappeared several years earlier (Falkirk Herald 9 April 18857, 3.)

Falkirk Iron Works (NS 889 811) – SMR 1262
In April 1868 workmen at the Falkirk Iron Works found a human skeleton whilst digging clay from the grounds of the foundry. The remains were found about 10ft down and were identified as those of a muscular adult. The skull was complete and the teeth large (Falkirk Herald 7 May 1868, 4). Given the location and the tradition that Brien de Jay had been slain giving his name to Bainsford, there was much speculation at the time that the person had been involved in the Battle of Falkirk. However, the depth of 10ft seems excessive. Part of this overburden may have been connected with the construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal. It may also suggest that the deceased was a plague victim.

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