



# THE STEEPLE

Newsletter of The Montrose Society

SUMMER 2006

ISSUE NO. 12

## Committee Members

2006 - 2007

**President**

Tony Sutton

**Vice President**

John MacPherson

**Committee**

Kip Fraser

Alan MacCallum

Wendy Milne

Sandy Munro

Graham Pert

Billy Strachan

Raymond Sutton

John Thomson

## 50 Golden Years

The celebration of our Golden Jubilee was memorably marked by a Dinner at the Links Hotel in April, when members and friends gathered to celebrate 50 continuous and eventful years since the Montrose Society was founded.

Following a brief History of the Society by Sandy Munro, Sandy Jessop, Montrosian by birth, and Sheriff at Aberdeen, gave a highly entertaining account of his memories of the town and its people, in and out of court, and reminded us of the personalities of several Montrose Society stalwarts, such as Frederick Kennedy, Stanley Scott Robinson and Duncan Fraser.

Alex Mouat, Past-President and a founding member, who joined the committee at the second official meeting of the Society in June 1956, then gave the company a wonderful and memorable address, drawing on his long association with Montrose and the activities of the Society.

Extracts from a Montrose Standard of 1956 were on display, recording the events which catalysed the Society's formation. A Souvenir Menu was ably designed by Graham Pert. There are still copies available if anyone left without one.

The Society Jubilee is being marked by two further initiatives.

At the Awards Evening in May, a mounted and framed route map dating from 1776, published by Taylor and Skinner, was located in Edinburgh and presented to Montrose Museum, where it is now on display. This fascinating map illustrates the roads around Montrose prior to the construction of the Parliamentary Roads and the "Timmer Brig".

The Society is also arranging for 20 information plaques to be prepared in partnership with Angus Council. These will be installed later in the year to draw the attention of townspeople and visitors to places and events of interest in the town.

Sandy Munro



## MEETINGS

are held in the Legends Suite, George Hotel, Montrose at 7.30pm.

Annual membership is £8.

Visitors £1.50 per evening.

Juniors are free.

Coffee and Tea available.

Meetings are held from September to March and details of the forthcoming season's meetings are detailed on the back page of this newsletter.

*Do please come along to any/all you are interested in. You will be made very welcome.*

Pictured left is the 1776 route map of roads around Montrose published by Taylor & Skinner



Mr & Mrs Paton's award winning, energy saving house at Hillside

## AWARDS EVENING 19th May

This year we had a major change of format from recent events; no music, auction of pictures, or raffle, minimal snacks, no awards for the shop fronts (Commendations), only one Architectural award and a presentation to mark our 50th anniversary and all in a new venue! However it seemed to go very well and we have had a several favourable comments. We were fortunate to have a most interesting property in Mr and Mrs Paton's house at Hillside as the clear winner, and the talk by Mrs Paton's architect cousin Neil Sutherland on the way it was built, and the energy saving philosophy behind the design, gave an indication of future trends in the industry. It was a great pleasure for me to have a tour of the house and learn about the practical side of its development.

The second part of the evening was the presentation of an 18th century map to the Museum to mark the 50th anniversary of the Society. It was drawn by the surveyors George Taylor and Andrew Skinner in 1776 as part of a scheme to produce a book showing all the roads of Scotland, but the page we chose covered the area around Montrose. Taylor was born in the north east of Scotland and appears to have had a base in Aberdeen. He spent many months away on surveying expeditions, initially working for Sir James Grant of Grant and also the Gordon estates. In the summer of 1779 he left for America with Skinner, and served with Cumberland's Regiment of Foot during the War of Independence. By 1785 George had returned to Scotland, and among other projects made a plan of the salmon fishing of the river North Esk.

The presentation map has been hand coloured and beautifully mounted and framed, and both Sandy Munro, who had organised the purchase from the Edinburgh dealer, and myself, were reluctant to part with it! The map was received on behalf of Angus Council by Norman Atkinson, Head of Cultural Services, and Councillor Joy Mowatt, Convenor of Environmental and Leisure Services, who expressed their delight and appreciation of the handsome gift.

The Montrose Society gratefully acknowledge the sponsorship from RGIT Montrose in the printing of this newsletter

Visit the Society's website - [www.montrose.org.uk//monsoc](http://www.montrose.org.uk//monsoc)

## Alexander Burnes --- 1805 - 1841

In the early part of the nineteenth century, most of India lay under the control of the British Empire but the neighbouring country of Afghanistan was unknown and unexplored. The British government, though, was worried about possible Russian influence there so in 1831, Alexander Burnes was sent on a dangerous mission into the wilds of Afghanistan.

He set off to Afghanistan in December. Burnes reckoned that if Europeans were seen travelling through the country they might be attacked by the natives so he decided to wear Afghan clothes, shave his head in Moslem fashion and wear a turban. Besides this, he also decided to take very little baggage - if he and his companions looked poor, bandits might not bother to rob him.

With barely half a dozen men, Burnes left Lahore in India. His journey was to take him far into the mysterious mountain range and deserts of Asia. His first destination was the town of Peshawar. The road to Peshawar led across several battlefields where Sikhs and Afghans had fought each other. They passed through Peshawar and then through Jelalabad and marched on to Kabul. To make themselves less conspicuous, they changed their clothes again, buying even poorer ones, and slept at nights on mats on the ground.

They did not remain long at Kabul and set off for Bokhara. For the first time in the journey they encountered real danger. The Meer of Kunduz was a powerful tyrant who disliked Europeans and had been known to execute Christians. He sent out word that Burnes's party should visit him in Kunduz.

Burnes stopped at Kulum - halfway between Kabul and Bokhara. He intended to stay there one night and move on. To his horror, he discovered that he would not be let on his way until he had visited the terrible Meer of Kunduz.

Disguised as an Armenian, Burnes travelled the seventy mile journey to Kunduz. Once there he was summoned to the Meer. Knowing his life might depend on it, he had carefully learned the tribal rituals and customs and was ready for the meeting. He bowed, gave the formal greeting, "Salaam Aleikum" (peace be with you) and placed his hands between the Meer's. Thinking Burnes was an Armenian, the Meer gave orders for his safe conduct out of Kunduz.

Having escaped the Meer's clutches, Burnes made for Bokhara. Bokhara was a holy city but Burnes found it very unhygienic. Dysentery and typhoid were rife and cholera epidemics periodically swept the city. The main canal that ran through the city was used both as a source of drinking water and as a sewer.



An impression of Alexander Burnes dressed in Afghan clothing and resembling a nineteenth century Armenian

Burnes then turned west to the Caspian Sea. He would have liked to have travelled through the Steppes but no caravan had been able to cross the Steppes for over a year because of a blood feud between tribes living there. The only alternative was to travel through the Turkoman Desert. In late summer Burnes joined a caravan making its way across the desert on a route which zig-zagged from one well to another. The water from these deep wells was often stagnant but the travellers had nothing else to drink.

Once they made it through the harshness of the desert, the rest of the journey was easy. Burnes arrived safely at the Caspian Sea and then headed south to Persia. A ship picked him up in the Persian Gulf and took him back to Bombay.

More than due for a holiday, Burnes returned to Scotland. He visited his family in his old home of Montrose where he had been born in 1805. The news about his adventures had spread throughout the land and a public dinner was held in his honour at Montrose.

He returned to India in 1835. Little did he know as he set sail, that he would never see his family or his native country again. Nor were his last years in Asia happy ones. British rule in the area was far from firm, despite the efforts of the British army.

Both the Afghans and the Indians hated the British. Burnes returned to Kabul but did so this time as a British Army Officer. He lived for a time in a large house in Kabul unaware that revolution was stirring. A rising broke out when he was still in Kabul. One night his house was surrounded by a Moslem mob. Burnes put on native dress as he had done ten years before and tried to slip quietly through the mob. Times had changed however. This time he was spotted. The long Afghan knives cut him to pieces in seconds.



9 - 11 Bow Butts the family home of Alexander Burnes. This is now a grade B listed building.

## Programme of Meetings 2006/07

September 21, 2006

**LAYERS OF HISTORY - The Urban and Architectural Development of Montrose**

Paul Mitchell, Conservation Officer, Angus Council

October 19, 2006

**JAMES MORRISON EXHIBITION at Montrose Library**

A Scottish Identity in Landscape Painting

John Morrison, University of Aberdeen

November 16, 2006

**IDEAS THAT SHAPED THE WORLD - VISIONS THAT MAKE THE FUTURE**

The John Murray Archive at the National Library of Scotland.

Rev. Giles Dove

December 14, 2006

**REPORTER AT MONTROSE**

Laurie Rogers

January 18, 2007

**HISTORY AND PRACTICE OF SCOTTISH SLATE**

Neil Grieve, University of Dundee

February 15, 2007

**SCOTS POETRY EVENING**

Raymond Vettese

March 15, 2007

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

and **ARCHIVES PRESENTATION**

Tony Sutton

May 11, 2007

**AWARDS EVENING**

Montrose Museum

Meetings are held at 7.30pm in the Legends Suite, George Hotel unless otherwise stated.

Annual membership £8.00, Visitors £1.50 per meeting, Juniors Free  
Coffee and Tea are available

## DIFFERENT, UNUSUAL & AFFORDABLE GIFTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Also: Rustic Occasional Furniture, Interior Design Pieces,  
Mirrors, Lamps, Artificial Flowers, Antique Reproductions,  
China, Glass, Miscellany, Etc.

# Farrago

176A High Street,  
Montrose

Tel. 01674 677602

The Montrose Society was founded in 1956. Its stated aim is to provide a forum for those interested in the town of Montrose and its immediate area, and who want to know more about its history, its people, and the events which have shaped its character and will influence its future.

An important part of the Society's work is the preparation and publishing of research into local history, covering areas such as cultural and social history and townscape.

The Society seeks to encourage the highest quality design and preservation standards within the built environment by maintaining a "watching brief" on new development.

The Society runs an annual CIVIC AWARDS programme.