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Sea Dog Bamse and the Royal Burgh

The Montrose Heritage Trust took an imaginative and some would say foolhardy decision when it decided, in 2004, to start a campaign to raise money to create a statue of a dog that had died 60 years previously. It was imaginative because if the idea caught on not only might the Burgh have a new and exciting sculpture to add to its portfolio, but the story behind it might help to draw attention (and visitors) to the town. What underwrote the whole concept was the extraordinarily powerful story of Bamse, the Norwegian sea dog.

There was opposition, of course, and scepticism, but that was left behind in a wave of goodwill and support. The hugely successful fundraising exercise and the statue unveiling by Prince Andrew brought national and international press and TV coverage, and thereby, positive attention to Montrose. But was this just a flash in the pan, or are there lasting benefits from the Heritage Trust's efforts?

Wharf Street

Only three years ago Wharf Street was a real mess - a left over construction site, a hideous concrete block-house, overgrown trees and weed infested garden ground. The arrival of Bamse's statue acted as a catalyst for change. All parties - Angus Council, Scottish Hydro,

Montrose Port Authority and the Heritage Trust - pulled together to transform the area, and now Montrose has a waterfront which reflects its historic glory, and a new statue which has drawn international acclaim. There's more to do yet - a new lifeboat station for 2009 - and also perhaps more wharf frontage improvements to link this to the statue area might follow.

The Statue by Alan Herriot

Alan Herriot's iconic statue of Bamse has brought much acclaim. Many visitors and tourists are now coming to Montrose specifically to see it. Even tourist coaches from Norway have come!

A smaller version of the statue in bronze was lent by the Heritage Trust to the Imperial War Museum in London, where it was seen (with its Montrose message) by about 100,000 people. That statue was then sold on to the Norwegian Naval Museum at Horten, where it is now on permanent display.

2009 holds out even better prospects, as the Norwegian North Cape town of Honningsvag (where Bamse came from) is planning to have its own full sized statue on its waterfront, to be unveiled at the culmination of their Summer Festival. Nearly 250,000 tourists a year will see it, and will discover the link to Montrose. There may be other spin-offs from this development.

Sea Dog Bamse - The Book

The Heritage Trust very much supported the idea of a book about Bamse, and saw that any and every copy of a book sold would help to promote the Royal Burgh. The launch of the book attracted TV and press coverage of Montrose in the UK and Norway, and the fortunate success of the book (a best seller) since then has ensured continuing attention to the town. 2009 brings hopes of translations into Norwegian, Polish and Spanish, and possibilities of a children's book. Who knows what else may follow.

So was the Heritage Trust's decision to 'run with Bamse' foolhardy? The achievements seem to indicate otherwise!

Andrew Orr



Norwegian Torists from Bergen, Norway visit Bamse's statue in Montrose in August 2008.

Photograph courtesy of Gable End Photography

MEETINGS

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

Annual membership is £10

Visitors £2.00 per evening.

Juniors are free.

Coffee and Tea available.

Meetings are held from September to March. Details of meetings for the current season are listed on our web-site :-

www.montrose.co.uk/monsoc

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

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.

The Society is registered with the Scottish Civic Trust and membership is open to anyone.



A cute customer for the farrier to shoe. They were often a lot bigger!

Blacksmiths & Farriers

I have often been asked "what is the difference between a blacksmith and a farrier?" The answer to that is much clearer today than it was in the past. With strict registration, compulsory courses and examinations, only the best apprentices with good training make it through. The armed forces also have a training course which augments the national total of farriers to around 2500. In 1976 the figure was 1500 but horses have now increased 5-fold in numbers since then. The average farrier has 350 on his list in Scotland and 250 in England. In the North East we used to have over 400.

When I became an apprentice blacksmith in the 1950's one walked into a workshop with very little idea of what sort of work was carried out - no work experience in those days. James Brown of River Street did many types of work but to my disappointment horseshoeing was not carried out. Mr Brown used to say "part of your training is acquiring the ability to think out how to do jobs and applying the skills you have learned."

I left Brown's and went to the Ben Line Steamship Co. where I worked as a marine engineer officer for nearly three years. I found, to my surprise, that my skills of welding and repairing were very much in demand at all hours of the day and night.

After returning home and getting married I worked in a number of different jobs before meeting a blacksmith in the early 1970's who shod horses mainly at weekends. We went into business, and being keen to learn I was able to carry out horseshoeing on my own within three years. The Farriers Registration Act was passed in 1976 and a Veterinary letter of approval was required for all people shoeing horses within a given period. Many old blacksmiths disliked having to get approval for doing a job they had done for many years but I was quite happy to become a registered farrier.

Most of the horses and ponies that required shoeing were done at the weekends as mums and dads had to be there to transport the horses to and from the smithy - and most were happy to see their children with a hobby that kept them off the streets. There was not a lot of work in this line and no working horses as they had long disappeared from the scene.

On my partner's retiral I ran the business from Victoria Bridge. This was the original smithy built by Aitchison & Taylor in the early 1950's. By 1985, as horse and pony numbers increased, shoeing was more in demand and a new type of mobile farrier evolved with all his equipment and shoes in a van and able to shoe a horse anywhere. I still had a tremendous variety of work but I began to organise myself so I too could carry out mobile farrier work although I still did contract and different types of work which I found very satisfying. I did undertake to build a bridge over the Southesk at Balbirnie Mill. We had no working drawings and the sections were made by measurements only. This was completed in 1985 and was lifted on site by a crane. I'm pleased to see it still stands to this day.

I also used to supply crankshafts for mill looms. This was a hard job as 1 1/2 dia metal bar had to be heated and bent to fairly exacting limits. With the closure of the mills this type of work sadly disappeared by 1981.

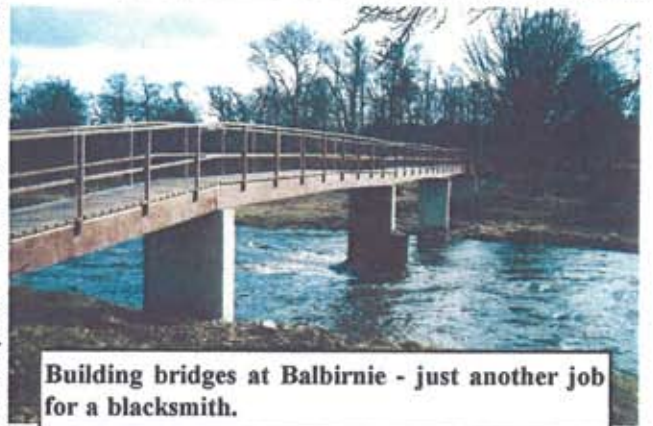
I liked working with brass and inserting a name on the Brechin war memorial was very interesting and quite a challenge.

In the blacksmithing line there was plenty of work but there was always the constant problem of cashflow. Large firms taking long credit times from small firms. Nothing seems to have changed.

Excellent quality foreign-made horseshoes became available from suppliers at very low prices making handmade ones very uneconomical indeed but this helped free up time for other work. On occasions special shoes have to be made by the farrier but generally there are shoes to fit any size and type of horse, even Clydesdales. This also made easier planning for the workload knowing the shoes required are sitting on the shelf.

I now work on a part-time basis as I still have a few horses' and ponies' feet to trim. Most are in the older age bracket with a few around 30 -40 years old. Owners, who prefer continuity of service, have asked me to continue if possible - and I will continue for the foreseeable future.

John Macpherson



Building bridges at Balbirnie - just another job for a blacksmith.

Robert Stevenson in Montrose

Robert Stevenson has two claims to fame. First, that he was Scotland's leading civil engineer in the first half of the 19th century. Among many other enterprises, he was the builder, with John Rennie, of the Bell Rock Lighthouse, completed in 1811. Secondly, he was the grandfather of the celebrated author, Robert Louis Stevenson.

Less well known is his involvement in several projects in and around Montrose between 1811 and 1839. His first working visit to the area was in 1811 at the invitation of the Kincardineshire Farmers Society who asked him to draw up plans for a bridge at Marykirk. This was duly completed, and it spans the North Esk to this day.

During the construction of the Bell Rock Lighthouse, Stevenson had been concerned at the ravages of a wood-boring organism, *Limnoria tenebrans*, which he had first identified in a paper in 1808. In a Report made to Montrose Town Council of in 1811, he pointed out that the same organism had attacked the piles of the first bridge built across the Southesk at Montrose, the Timmer Bridge. At this time the bridge had been in use for only 16 years. This pest was one of the principal causes of its failure after less than 35 years of service.

In 1814 Stevenson was asked by Montrose Harbour Committee to prepare plans to improve the Harbour and increase the number of berths, to avail themselves of the expected increase in trade after the Napoleonic War. His plan was produced in 1816, but due to internal dissention in the Committee and Parliamentary lobbying against it, the plan was never put into effect.

As chief executive of the Northern Lighthouse Board, Stevenson was asked in 1818 to advise on the provision of navigational lights for ships entering the harbour at night. This time his ideas were largely accepted, and the Lights Committee, in recognition of his services, asked that he be made a Freeman of the Burgh.

He was back at Montrose Harbour in 1831 in response to a request, this time from 'The Honourable the Magistrates of the Royal Burgh of Montrose', who were concerned that their pristine newly opened Suspension Bridge might be susceptible to damage from inattentive or unlucky skippers whose vessels might collide with the structure of the bridge and damage both. This plan again was not to be put in place. His final task in Montrose was to draw up a plan in 1839 for new roadway on the Suspension Bridge.

And between 1819 and 1825 he also drew up plans for a 'Proposed Railway from the Port of Montrose to the Borough of Brechin'..... but that's another story. Both his harbour works and his bridge works greatly benefited the citizens of Montrose in the 19th century.

Duncan Macdonald

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