

MORTUARY HOUSE

HISTORIES IN WOOD AND STONE

What can carved objects tell us about the culture of early modern Scotland? A significant part of the country's artistic output during that period consisted of carvings in both stone and wood which could be found in kirkyards, above doors, on gentlemen's fireplaces, set into the walls of public buildings, and in many other locations throughout Scotland's human landscape.



Gentry luxury at Crail: the carved pew of the Cunningshams of Barns as photographed by Erskine Beveridge, c.1890. Crown Copyright: Historic

The Crail kirkyard contains 16 funeral monuments built between 1598 and 1723. These, together with eight carved pews within the kirk (1594 and 1605), reflect the wealth and tastes of the merchants and lairds of east Fife, as elaborate neo-classical monuments jostle for space with baroque architectures carved in newly-imported continental styles. They also map out the power of the burgh elite; parishioners entering at the edge of the kirkyard would pass through a gauntlet of monuments inscribed with laudatory inscriptions to previous generations of burgesses, baillies and town clerks. This patrician elite perpetuated their status by creating a physical space which both memorialised their forebears and quite literally herded the burgh's more humble inhabitants into the kirk like watchful grey sheepdogs.

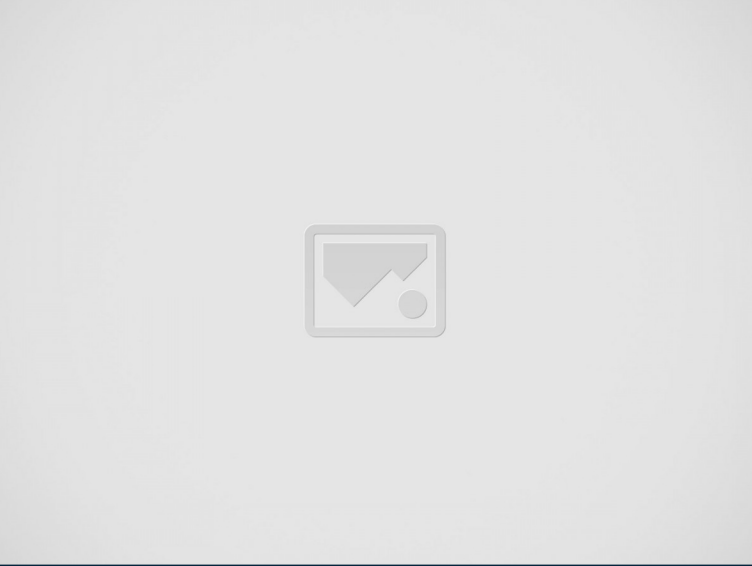
There is a conspicuous absence of gentry amongst these ranks of monuments, only one of the leading landowning families in the parish is represented here; the rest are commemorated in richly carved armorial pews which were erected inside the church a generation after the Reformation.

The Scottish Kirk put pressure on parishes to forbid the erection of artefacts of gentry aggrandisement within kirks, but were not always successful; indeed, the Crail kirk session reported gloomily in 1611 'that the abuse of burial in the kirk was again creeping in'. This offers a window onto a rich material culture of gentry self-representation that thrived even in the iconoclastic decades after John Knox.

It is notable that there are two separate spheres delineated here: the gentry within the kirk, the merchants in the kirkyard. Their segregation highlights the conflicting interests of social groups during this period, as traditional gentry families found their longstanding privileges challenged by nouveau riche shipmasters whose vessels full of Riga hemp, Gothenburg timber and Bordeaux wine once rode at anchor outside the harbour of Crail.

In Crail, at least, they made an uneasy truce, dividing up the spiritual heart of the burgh into separate camps, and leaving the rest of its inhabitants to make their way through that fraught iconographic landscape as best they could. The remains of that landscape—the carvings which still survive—tell us a rich and fascinating story about the life of this community 400 years ago.

Kelsey Jackson Williams



Morbi blandit at enim et consequat. Integer a posuere ligula. Proin viverra leo sed ligula sagittis, eget sodales est ornare. Fusce molestie erat ac risus tincidunt, non commodo ante mollis. Morbi volutpat lectus id velit vestibulum finibus. Vivamus dapibus efficitur dapibus libero non tortor bibendum, eu commodo finibus eu elit eu auctor. Duis vel molestie risus. Etiam at laoreet leo. Quisque dapibus libero non tortor bibendum, eu commodo sem laoreet. Proin nunc lectus, tincidunt eu eleifend sit amet, fringilla non justo.

CRAIL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The Crail Preservation Society (Scottish Charity No 016960) is made up of residents of the historic royal burgh of Crail, in the beautiful East Neuk of Fife, whose goal is to preserve the unique character of our coastal village while ensuring it grows and prospers in the twenty-first century.

OFFICE BEARERS & COMMITTEE

Hon. President – David Mann

Hon. Vice-President – David Jerdan

Chairman – James McCallum

Vice-Chairman – Dennis Gowans

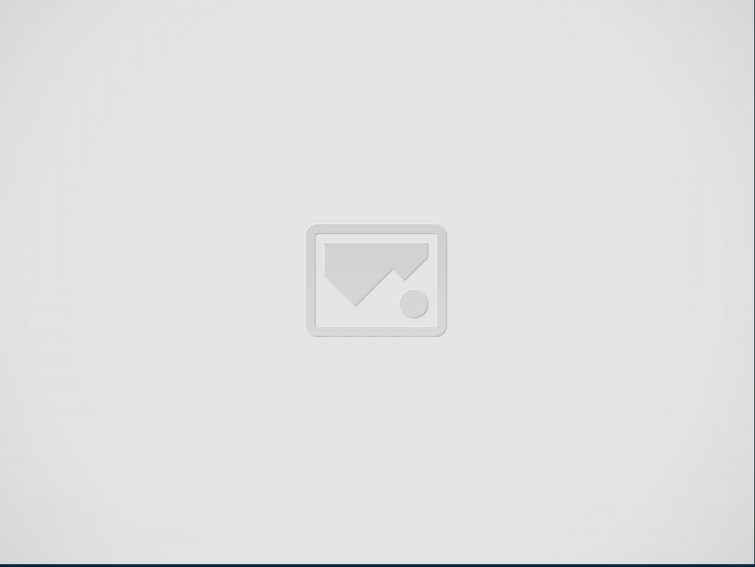
Hon. Treasurer – Derek White

Hon. Secretary – Stephen Illingworth

Committee – Anne Black, Jude Gallon, Paul Hutchison, Kelsey Jackson Williams, Derek Maclean, Sutherland Madeiros, Laura McKay, Ian Ramsay, Sandy Young.

www.crailpreservationsociety.org

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Suspendisse tincidunt, nisi quis porta molestie, turpis dui interdum tellus, quis commodo ante neque sit amet tellus. Donec vehicula placerat viverra. Praesent velit metus, tincidunt efficitur varius sit amet, placerat et odio. Cras a dolor orci. Sed dapibus efficitur elementum. Suspendisse potent. Proin facilisis nisi at dui efficitur, a semper elit gravida. Proin suscipit vestibulum sapien, id imperdiet ex accusan tincidunt. Aliquam accusan semper tellus vel finibus. Suspendisse ullamcorper arcu vitae turpis tincidunt bibendum.



CRAIL KIRK



CRAIL KIRKYARD  
CRAIL PRESERVATION SOCIETY  
Charity No: 016960  
www.crailpreservationsociety.org