



Auchenblae Messenger

Founded in 1999 by Donald B. Rennie

Summer Edition

VOLUME 27 ISSUE 2

JUNE 2025

From The Editors—Summer edition

Chris and Keith Ridgway

Dear Readers,

It doesn't seem long since we were talking about the start of spring, and now we are more than halfway through the year, and soon we will be thinking about Christmas. It is a true saying that the older you get, the shorter the days get and time passes quickly. As a guy in his eighties once told me "All I seem to do is eat breakfasts"

So what have we in this edition? Well with the holidays starting it has been hard to pull the contributions together. But we have our regular features and updates from local groups, highlights from recent events, and a look ahead at what's to come.

Once again our resident poet, Peter Morriss, provides two seasonal poems. Fiona Gammie gives us an update on the activities at Westerton Farm. So much going on there, we needed a rest after just reading the article.

We have carried out some research with the Heritage Society on Smuggling on the Mearns Coast and the clandestine role Auchenblae played. We never think of Auchenblae of being into smuggling, but its strategic position close to the Cairn O'Mount packhorse route made it an ideal drop-off point and a good place to hide contraband.

In future editions we will look at some other interesting history around the village including; weaving, whisky distilling and local landmarks. For a small village there is a lot to go at.

The Youth Club continues to thrive and this edition describes the vast array of activities the group are running. They have been lucky with the weather in recent weeks and we regularly see them down at the Den on Friday evenings.

We also have our regular updates from the Golf Course, Bowling Club, Friendship Club and Community Cafe and Kevin Newstead gives us a review of the Gala, Our local political representatives provide an overview of the activities they are involved with. As we have pointed out

The Messenger— e-Newsletter

Due to costs & 'staying green' The Messenger continues to be published online at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/auchenblaenoticeboard>

The very few printed copies that have been requested are provided by the very kind assistance of **Hazel Horrigan, Lynn Brodie and Alastair Macphie.**
All the best, Kevin (Publisher)

previously, the Messenger has no political affiliations and is happy to receive articles from any of our political representatives.

New to this edition is Carol Shea, who kindly responded our request for someone to write a regular gardening article, what is happening in the garden and what should we be doing at this time of the year? Carol also offered to write an article on dishes to make with the excess summer produce. One of the problems with gardening is planning when produce is ready and coping with everything ripening at the same time.

On the home front our hens are back laying but our old Cherry Valley duck hasn't started laying this year. She has now reached the stage where she is a pet who quacks when she hears the car and grumbles when she is put to bed. Still trying to find a Cayuga wife for the drake but he seems quite happy with the situation as it is.

We have had some bad luck with the Peking bantams hatching chicks. Usually they sit solid for three weeks but two of them gave up before chicks hatched. I think the weather may have had something to do with it.

The garden has delivered well but veg have gone to seed very quickly. In the greenhouse we have two mini cucumber plants that are delivering well, and it looks like a good crop of tomatoes are on the way. On the fruit trees the plums and apples look good, the raspberries have delivered well, but the gooseberries don't seem as plentiful this year. This week we emptied out our first container of new potatoes. With the lack of rain the crop was disappointing, but there is something special about home-grown new potatoes

On a sad note we lost our retired greyhound, Izzy. She was twelve and adopted from the Greyhound Trust in Sheffield. She was being treated for pancreatitis, we were winning, and she was putting weight back on. Izzy was playing with the younger dog "Bryn" in the garden and appears to have had a heart attack. A shock but nice that she went playing with her best friend. Izzy ran under the name "Rockmount Fizz" and had 72 races before she retired aged four.

Bryn was lost without Izzy so we have adopted another four-year-old, retired greyhound, "Swift Rosemary". Now called Rosie she raced successfully in Dundalk and then Sunderland and after 52 races she will now enjoy a well-earned retirement, enjoying leisurely walks and sniffs in Denlethen, Drumtochty and the Den. Despite what many people think greyhounds don't like to walk too far, don't like to get their feet muddy or go out in the rain. They mix well with other dogs and are very placid and laid back. They like nothing more than a sofa or comfy bed to stretch out on, but they are terrible thieves when it comes to food. It is amazing how high they can stretch if there is any chance of a taste snack. As a former racing greyhound Rosie will have had little affection and has no road sense or idea how to treat washing machines, stairs or TVs. We are just settling her in and helping her to adjust to life outside a racing kennel.



Izzy and Rosie in typical greyhound position

We'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all our contributors, volunteers, and readers. Thanks to Kevin for publishing, Jenny for distribution and Macphies for printing. Your support keeps the Messenger thriving. If you have a story to share, an event to promote, or simply a photo that captures village life, we'd love to hear from you.

Wishing you a joyful, sunny, and safe summer.

Warm regards,

The Editors

The Auchenblae Messenger

Auchenblae Bowling Club



The warm weather has been good for bowling if not ideal for the green. This year we are holding more competitions and hope to increase our competitive performance. We have already played in two local competitions and held our own seven ends competition as part of the Auchenblae Gala.

In the Renny Tailyour competition we were beaten in the first round (23-9) by a very strong and experienced St Cyrus team. In the Hutchinson Trophy we were definitely the under dogs but surprisingly came out winners (19-14) in a very exciting match. In the second round we were beaten (22-6) by a strong Park View team Brechin.

Yet again the weather was perfect for the Gala and an excellent competition was won by a lady from Newgate who beat our own (and defending champion) Ralph Currie in the final.

Several club members have also played in local competitions in Brechin and Edzell so the good weather has brought plenty of opportunities to play this summer

We are playing bowls at the Den every Tuesday afternoon from 1.30 and every Friday from 6.30. Visitors and new bowlers are always welcome. Tuesday sessions always break for a cup of tea and a biscuit so a good chance to meet new people and have a chat.

Auchenblae Community Cafe

Just a wee reminder that the Auchenblae Community Cafe will be open all through the summer/school holidays held in the village hall 10-12noon Mondays, all welcome! Free come and have a cuppie and cake, games and colouring for the kids, take a break, meet your neighbours- would be great to see some new faces -come have a cuppie or volunteer if you want to get involved in the community- we welcome all, come join us x Community cafe team—**Elizabeth Shand**

Auchenblae Friendship Group

Since we last wrote in the Messenger the Friendship Group has been continuing to meet every Wednesday morning at the Church Hall from 10 to 12 during the school term time. We have had a variety of speakers, from April to July, ranging from the history of the Quakers and the Quakers Quilt to the benefits of seaweed and for our last talk of the season we welcomed Adam who lives in Fordoun who spoke about his salamanders and he brought along a few of them for us to see. We have also had crafting sessions along with music, bingo and games plus lots and lots of laughter.



We are on a short summer break but we open our new season on **Wednesday 20th August at 10 a m in the Church Hall** when one of our members, George Wilson, will present music from the 1950s and 1960s for us to sing-along to. We will also have our usual fare of music, quizzes, crafts to explore, bingo and games sessions along with talks. The Group celebrates its 25th anniversary this Autumn and we are hoping to celebrate this in some way.

If any of you wish a bit of company on a Wednesday morning please come along and meet us. A warm welcome, a cuppa and chat will always be on “the menu”. We do make a small charge of £3 to cover our costs.—**Karen Martin**

Auchenblae & Dist. Heritage Soc.

The Auchenblae Heritage Society has had a successful season during 2024/2025. Since our last article in the Messenger, in Spring, we had Dr Fiona-Jane Brown from Aberdeen giving a talk about the smuggling along the Mearns Coast which was interesting. In June we held our annual outing when we visited the Montrose Air Heritage Museum which was enjoyable to explore.



We commence our new season for 2025/2026 on **8 September 2025** at the **Auchenblae Church Hall at 7.30 p.m.** Our Speaker will be **Jenny Thomson** who will give us a talk about the oldest part of the village, **Kirkton of Fordoun**, where the Church and Hall are situated. Weather permitting there will be a walk around the area too. There will be a short AGM prior to commencement of the talk.

All are welcome to come along and hear the history of this fascinating area of our village.

We will be collecting membership fees on the evening and there will be a small charge for visitors. (For those of you who were at our outing you were told that the first meeting would be on 1st September – we have had to change the date). —**Karen Martin**

Farming Update By Fiona Gammie

Summer edition – has summer been and gone? I hope not – what a spell we had in May this year! I don't know if you can recall May last year when we were behind with a lot of planting/sowing in our pumpkin patch and market garden, that certainly was not an issue this year! In fact, we found ourselves needing to irrigate a lot to keep everything happy. Pumpkins are looking great, and we have a new hive at the farm which Brawliemuir honey are trialling to see how the bees like life at Westerton. The cereals didn't like the dry spell much and it will have impacted their yield this year – water is pretty important at those early growth stages and it wasn't nearly enough. I think we would all be happy with a wee sump of rain between midnight and 4am each night?! The grass is in impressive condition given the dry May and the tatties are doing ok too – we are lucky in dry years we have clay/heavier soils and they retain moisture much better than the sandy/loamy ones. The Mearns is starting to look like a patch work quilt with all the crops at different stages – showing the diversity of growing in the area.

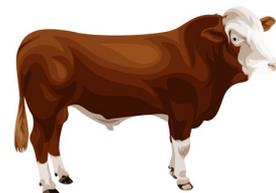
The tunnels are bountiful at the moment with salads, herbs, peas, beetroot, salad tatties, spring onions, chard and outside has seen the start of courgette harvest, kale and some beetroot. As we mentioned in the last newsletter we have started serving salads on our menu now with our own produce – they have been a big hit! We have recently advertised for a chef position at the farm too, we are going to be delivering some new menu items, more feasts and pop up dining options as well as some more home baked goodies in the shop. Whilst we are on the theme of feasts – we won an award! How exciting! We were recognised at the North East of Scotland Food and Drink awards for our long table feast which we held in September 24. The judges said they were very impressed with the story behind the food, local collaborations and focus on provenance. There will be another feast coming up in 2025, and hopefully many more opportunities to dine at Westerton.

The Animals are all doing great – we have 13 chickens now and in April we got 5 chicks who are growing like weeds and nearly ready to join the rest of the flock. Our two alpacas are doing well with their halter training, and getting much braver at coming to eat out of our hands. We have a start at the farm too – Christina. She started working with us in May and we are all loving her enthusiasm, ideas and energy! Welcome to the madhouse Christina! Christina has really elevated our animal experience options which are now bookable online, and have been really popular so far. They allow you to come and get up close to all our animals, learn how to feed and care for them, collect eggs and walk our alpacas. We have also been running some empowerability sessions with local charity Oakley ASN – these have been run alongside Mearns Academy as a trial and have gone so well, exceeding all expectations. We love working so closely with Oakley and are excited to keep building on this project.

We had a great team day out recently to Fettercairn Distillery where Claire took us round and told us all about the history behind Fettercairn and its whisky – such a fascinating tour and we all learned a lot about the processes used. You'll remember me talking before about our special relationship with Fettercairn and their 200 club – hopefully some more exciting news on the front in the future. After our tour we went along to Edzell for lunch at Sinclairs – we were very well looked after and had a delicious lunch. It was great for the whole team to be together as it doesn't happen very often. We are away to start the school holidays here which always means the team pulling together to cover shifts etc – we are so lucky to have such an accommodating and helpful bunch working with us.

Hope you all have a cracking summer – shop local and eat fresh!

Fiona



Auchenblae Youth Club



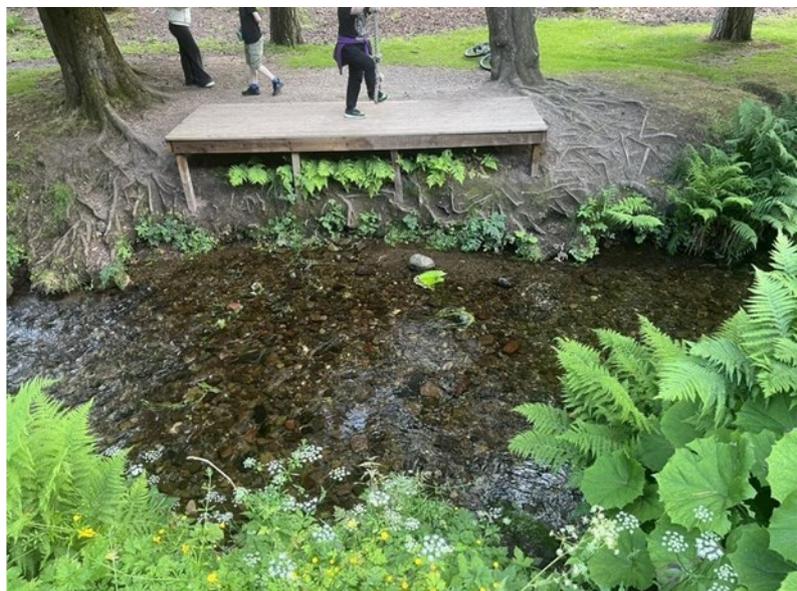
Club Highlights Spring/Summer term April to July 2025

By; Ginette Biau (Auchenblae Youth Club)

New opening hours: Fridays nights at the Village Hall 6:45pm - 8:30pm.

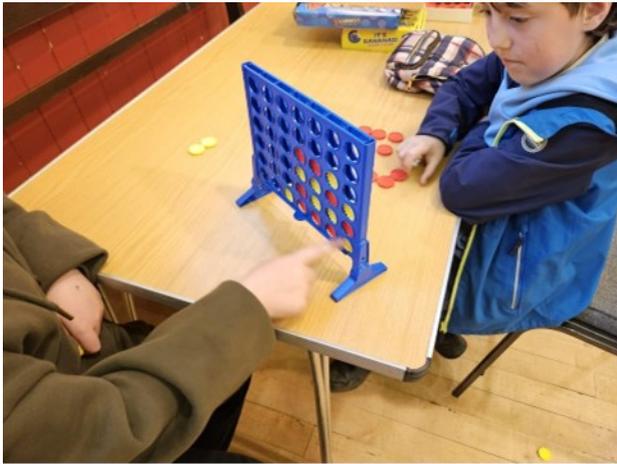
Please note that we are exceptionally running sessions on Friday nights in July from the Pavilion at the Den. Last week, we had ice cream and free tuck, the best way to celebrate the summer holidays. The sun was out too!

The Den: we have been very lucky to have access to the Pavilion this term. The Den is a fantastic community asset in Auchenblae and our members feel very privileged to be able to enjoy all that it offers.









Auchenblae Youth Club offers a safe place to relax and socialise for young members of our community. We encourage our members to connect and form new friendships through games, music, dancing and food of course. This term, our members tried their hands at whipping cream with a mechanical whisk with fabulous results. We had a special Nuggets and Fries night which was a huge success. Members also enjoyed the usual chocolate toasts served with hot chocolates. We had a special toastie night with a great variety of fillings to choose from. Going forward and after consulting with our members, we are happy to say that toastie nights will become a permanent feature of youth club.



This term, we also had plenty of mellow sessions because we recognise that our members need time to chill, away from the pressures of studying and exams.

Gala day

Thank you to our energetic AYC youth volunteers who helped at the Auchenblae Gala Duck Race. They supported Gillian in running this all important race and major fundraiser for the Gala. They didn't hesitate to jump in the water and rescue runaway ducks,

Gala day was also a fantastic opportunity for our members to display their amazing talents. They ran a table selling gorgeous homemade jewellery and fantastic temporary tattoos, raising money for our great youth club in the process.





Drumtochy Highland games

Team AYC smashed it at the Drumtochy Highland Games.

A team of young members and youth workers were helping out in the car park on a bright and sunny day to raise money for a Youth Scotland residential trip to Stirling this August. You'll be pleased to know that skills acquired playing Tetris and Rush Hour came in handy that day. Our collection buckets raised £350 thanks to the generosity of attendees at the Games.





Auchenblae & Dist. Community Association

GALA 2025 **By Kevin Newstead**

The weather imps were kind to us and we enjoyed intermittent sunny spells with a light breeze. Unfortunately, one of our vendors cancelled at the last moment based on a bad weather reports from the Met office (!). The same report may have accounted for the drop in numbers attending and we banked about 20% less than last year (before expenses). A big thank you to all who attended the Community Associations biggest fund raiser of the year. We enjoyed live music from 5 Foot Rooster who have said they would be delighted to come back again. That and various events throughout the week made for a good Gala overall.

Of course, events such as this cannot happen without all the volunteers both seen and unseen; so a great big thank you to all the people who gave their time and materials at no cost. There are two many to mention individually but thanks go to The Parks Committee members, the Cinema Club, Youth Group, footballers, Scouts, Community Cafe, cyclists, bakers, stallholders, prize donations. Apologies if I have missed anybody but we couldn't do it without you!

Auchenblae Golf Club

Golf Course Update **By Bob Cattnach**



The Golf Course has been busy with both members and visitors during our fine spell of warm weather. A lot of hours have been spent hand watering the greens to keep them alive with the lack of rain. Unfortunately the rain did appear on Saturday the 19th for the annual 18 hole Open, kindly sponsored by Maven. Most of the 72 competitors got round relatively dry, only some of the last few groups had to give in. Congratulations to 14 year old Jack West on winning the Maven trophy, a week after him and his Dad Neil came 4th in the R&A 9 hole challenge at Royal Portrush, the venue for this weeks Open Championship. A fantastic performance putting Auchenblae and Scotland on the map in an international field.



Auchenblae Newsletter – Summer 2025

Summer has well and truly arrived and after another busy few months in the Scottish Parliament raising your concerns – including accessing rural healthcare, new transmission infrastructure, and the state of our public services – I’m delighted to be back in the North East for the recess.

The summer always means visits and events, and the Mearns is incredibly well represented when it comes to Gala Days and Shows. These days would not happen without the tireless work that the committees and volunteers do all year round, and I would like to thank them for all they do. We are so lucky to have them and to be able to show off our beautiful home in all its glory.

So far this summer I have had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with so many of you at the opening of Stonehaven Open Air Pool, the Auchenblae Gala day – where a highlight was meeting Oscar, the winner of the dog show – Gourdon’s Party in the Park, the Fettercairn Show and the Drumtochty Highland Games. Luckily the sun shone on all these days and a good time was had by all.

I look forward to meeting those attending the Glenbervie Amateur Hortus Club on Saturday 16th August. It’s always a lovely day with so many talented people and produce on display.

If you would like to discuss any issues with me in person then please send an email to Tess.White.MSP@parliament.scot and we can arrange a meeting in the village. Alternatively, my summer surgeries are still to take place, please do get in touch if you would like to make an appointment to speak with me at any of the dates and locations below.

Tess



TESS WHITE MSP

MEMBER OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT FOR NORTH EAST
REGION

POP-UP ADVICE SURGERY

MONDAY 21ST JULY
BUCKSBURN

WEDNESDAY 23RD JULY
BRECHIN

FRIDAY 25TH JULY
LAURENCEKIRK

MONDAY 28TH JULY
INVERBERVIE

TUESDAY 5TH AUGUST
STONEHAVEN

TUESDAY 12TH AUGUST
MONTROSE

FRIDAY 15TH AUGUST
FORFAR



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



To book an appointment please call 0131 348 6218 or email:
Tess.White.MSP@parliament.scot

The cost of this publication has been met from parliamentary resources.

Update from Andrew Bowie MP



It has been a busy term at Parliament, during which I have been pleased to speak up in support of oil and gas workers who have contributed, and continue to contribute, so much to our country and region.

The announced job losses in the industry are incredibly concerning and the UK Government need to change course. They need to remove the EPL as soon as possible and get rid of their bans on licences.

They are making it significantly harder for UK-based businesses to operate, whilst they happily watch imports from other countries rise. This is worse for our finances, worse for our environment, and – importantly – worse for our workforce here in Aberdeenshire.

Crucially, it also puts us in a weaker position to invest and compete in the technologies of the future.

I have also been holding the UK Government to account on the closure of oil refineries, including Grangemouth and Prax Lindsey, visiting both and raising Urgent Questions in the Chamber. The UK used to have over 20 oil refineries, soon that number could become as low as 4.

Labour were elected on a promise to reduce bills by £300, yet they are getting higher. Meanwhile, they are also hiking everyone's taxes and forgoing £20 billion in tax receipts by forcefully shutting down the North Sea.

The cost of sacrificing rural Britain at the altar of net zero as soon as possible is set to cost the taxpayer an eye-watering £800 billion by 2050. We need a more managed transition with a pragmatic outlook, where value for money and our countryside are more fairly prioritised.

I have been pleased to hold meetings with OEUK and businesses to work towards pragmatic solutions and to speak up for these at Parliament.

While Parliament is on recess, I am looking forward to conducting a surgery tour including Laurencekirk, Fettercairn and Auchenblae. However, as always, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Contact andrew.bowie.mp@parliament.uk (or **01330 705013**) if there is ever anything I may be able to assist you with.

SUMMER

Using Your Summer Produce.

By: Carol Shea

In the vegetable (and fruit/herb) garden the main tasks are to keep watering, keep watch for pests, keep harvesting and enjoying.

But I know that sometimes a glut is as hard to deal with as too little, and the vagaries of our weather means there could be one or the other.

Freezing is brilliant if you have the space. Or making jams and chutney's, especially for fruits including tomatoes.

But if you're over run with cauliflower, peas, lettuce, courgettes for example, here are a few ideas.

Cauliflower. Soup with cheese and mustard. Cut a small head of cauliflower into florets. Save a couple for garnish (these are nice roasted in oven with olive oil spray or dry fried). Put rest in pan with milk, bring to boil and simmer until tender. Mash together a teaspoon of flour and warm butter to an uncooked roux which can be gradually stirred in to thicken. Add a dollop of mustard (English is best but Dijon ok). Blend. Then add a handful (or three!) of grated cheese: Cheddar, gruyere, comte, parmesan – all good or mix of whatever you have – though mozzarella will change the texture. Melt through. Serve with the cauliflower garnish or garlic croutons. Enjoy. NB. If you have mustard seeds, frying a teaspoon in butter before the cauliflower and milk is nice).

Courgettes and Peas with lettuce. The French way. Ooh la la. Chop and lightly fry a couple of spring onions in a little butter or olive oil, chop courgette into small cubes, add and cook until just softening, then a cupful or so of peas, a small amount (100ml or so) of stock. Bring to boil. Simmer for 2 mins, then add shredded lettuce, seasoning. Warm through. Nice with a tablespoon of crème fraiche or quark stirred through, and a little mint at the end. Serve as an accompaniment to grilled fish or chops. It shouldn't be soupy, but best served in bowl not plate.

Pea puree. Pour boiling water over peas for 2-4 mins. Drain. Season. Add some grated parmesan, lemon rind/juice and extra virgin olive oil, blend until smooth. Mint can be added to. And as with the previous example, a little crème fraiche or quark or plain Greek yoghurt added for creaminess. A lovely summer fresh dip with vegetables, or on sourdough toast as a lunch or used like a spread before adding chicken or fish topping. Or make this and mix with mashed avocado for a zingy and lighter variation of guacamole. I love this served as a vegetable with fish, but can be a spread on canapes.

Bon Apetit.



WANDERING FREE

Where can I wander? I asked the wind,
Come-
Wander with us, shouted the clapping winds.

Where can I roam free? I asked the distant hills,
Come-
Roam free among us, beckoned the distant purple headed hills.

Where can I walk free and at will?
I asked the open moorlands,
Come-
Walk freely among us, the wild wind swept open moors called.

Where can I meander free? I asked the rushing rills,
Come-
Meander free with us, the chasing pebbled rills called.

So! Once more up to the high country under their epic skies-
I roamed free.

© Peter Morriss 27.09 2017

LISTEN

Over the Hill of Garvock a peaceful dawn slowly breaks,
A warm morning Sun teases tree, hedgerow and shrubberies feathered choirs awake. Listen to the morning bird song of beautiful sounds,
Springing up from Pitnamoon's greenery their melodious bird songs abound.

Listen to the bird song arias the feathered choirs sing,
Listen to a feathered symphony of sounds that to Pitnamoon day break brings.

Listen to our feathered friends symphony of choirs,
Bursting forth with an orchestral sound of sweet lyres.

Listen....

© Peter Morriss 18.06.2020

SEAGULL SKIES

TALL SHIPS

Riding the white blown spume crests of the open sea,
Tall ships follow a star to Aberdeen;
Sails brimmed with wind release the onlooker's hippocrene,
Into the harbour sails furled they berth these Queens of the sea,
Here you find Masefield and his call to the sea,
Among the magnificent Tall Ships that follow a star ploughing a wake to the deeps where they sail free.

© Peter Morriss 24 07 2025

Note
John Masefield- Sea Fever.

To some they are classed as vermin,
To some they are classed as a pest;
But to me the seagull epitomizes Britain at its best.

Every time I see a seagull I think of how Britain was saved,
When these islands against the Axis stood alone, defended by the few so brave.

Every time I see a lone seagull, in my minds eye it's a Spitfire that I see,
And flocks of seagulls courting the plough, are squadrons of Spitfires and Hurricanes, who's pilots fought to keep these islands free.

Then, as the fading day draws to a close and I espy a lone seagull cross an open sky, I raise a glass in salute to R.J.Mitchell who's inspiration the seagull, designed the most famous fighter aircraft of all to fly.

© Peter Morriss



SEA TALE or Dry Dock of a Kind

The old Ship Inn, Stonehaven harbour, Scotland

On a moonless night that was cold and black as sin,
 Through the old inn's window, oil lamps' homely light
 beckoned the weary traveller in;
 A skipper with his crew stood at the bar downing a grog
 of rum,
 While the wind around the old inn's chimney pots suddenly
 began to hum;
 When the squall hit, the sea became a foaming caldron, a
 boiling, seething mass,
 While in the harbour their boat *Sea Devil* strained at her
 anchor, one of the best of her class;
 For these men of the sea hunt a harvest created by God,
 These men of the sea that follow the way of the deeps to
 the watery home of the cod.
 The foam dripping harbour wall trembled under the heaving
 green water's furious lash!
 As the Sea-Devil broke free of her moorings, the bow of the
 boat through the old inn's window entered with an almighty
 crash!

And the old inn was filled with the sound of the storm that would
 have filled many a heart with dread,
 Then, the skipper with a drink in his hand steady at the helm of the
 bar, turned and in a controlled voice said,
 'Blimey! I'm used to the wife sending the dog to fetch me home to
 dinner with a note,'
 'But Hell! something must be seriously wrong 'cos it's the first time
 she's ever sent the boat!'

There's many a tale that would turn a grown man pale,
 About the watery ways of the sea,
 But the strangest of all is about one stormy night when a boat
 went to fetch its skipper home for his tea...

© Peter Morriss



Shadows on the Shore: The Smuggling Legacy of the Mearns Coast and the clandestine role of Auchinblae.

Research By Keith Ridgway and Members of the Auchinblae Heritage Society

The Mearns coast, with its jagged cliffs, secluded coves, and winding inland tracks, has long been a place of natural beauty—and secretive enterprise. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, this stretch of the North Sea coastline was a hotbed of smuggling activity, where contraband flowed as freely as the tides.

A Coast Made for Concealment

From the fishing villages of Johnshaven and Gourdon to the rocky shores of St Cyrus, the geography of the Mearns was ideal for smugglers. Hidden caves and narrow inlets provided perfect landing spots for small boats arriving under cover of darkness, often laden with brandy, gin, tea, tobacco, and fine textiles from the Low Countries and France.

Johnshaven, in particular, has a rich oral tradition of smuggling. Local tales speak of tunnels beneath cottages and cellars used to hide barrels of spirits. The Benholm and Johnshaven Heritage Society has preserved stories like that of “Johnner Jack,” a legendary figure said to have outwitted excisemen with clever disguises and local knowledge.

Johnner Jack is the creation of local musician and storyteller Andy Shanks (<https://www.andyshanks.co.uk/johnner-jack>), brought to life through *Tales from the Smugglers’ Coast*—a multimedia celebration of fishing communities such as Johnshaven. Through music, video, and live performance, Jack channels the grit, humour, and resilience of coastal folk facing the slow fade of traditional livelihoods.

Inland Routes and Auchinblae’s Role

Though Auchinblae lies several miles inland, it was not untouched by this underground trade. Smuggled goods were often transported by packhorse along old drovers’ roads and forest tracks, passing through the Howe of the Mearns en route to Aberdeen or Dundee. Inns and farmsteads in and around Auchinblae may have served as temporary storage points or safe houses.

The village’s proximity to the old Cairn o’ Mount road—a historic route over the Grampians—made it a strategic waypoint for smugglers moving goods northward. Oral histories suggest that some local residents, knowingly or not, benefited from the trade, whether through cheaper goods or quiet bribes.

Dr. Fiona MacRae, a historian of rural Scottish trade, notes: “The Cairn o’ Mount Road was a key artery for moving goods inland. Villages like Auchinblae were part of a wider network that helped distribute contraband discreetly and efficiently.”

Secrets Beneath the Kirk

Although Auchinblae Kirk stands as a symbol of faith and community, local folklore hints at a more clandestine past beneath its foundations. Persistent rumours suggest that the church—or the land it occupies—may have once served as a hiding place for smuggled goods.

Shadows on the Shore: The Smuggling Legacy of the Mearns Coast and the clandestine role of Auchinblae (2)

The current church, built in 1829, is believed to stand atop older religious structures, and nearby St Palladius's Chapel, with its now-sealed crypt, has long been the subject of ghost stories and whispered tales. Some villagers claim that the crypt was once used to conceal barrels of contraband, hidden among the tombs.

Adding to the intrigue are stories of underground tunnels said to connect the Kirk to other parts of the village, including the old mill. While no physical evidence has confirmed these passages, they remain a staple of local legend—passed down through generations as part of Auchinblae's shadowy heritage.

Given the village's strategic location near the Cairn o' Mount road and its role in inland smuggling routes, it is not inconceivable that the church grounds offered a discreet and trusted location for temporary storage. Whether through sympathetic clergy or unwitting concealment, the Kirk may have played a quiet role in the region's smuggling legacy.

Smuggling and Rebellion

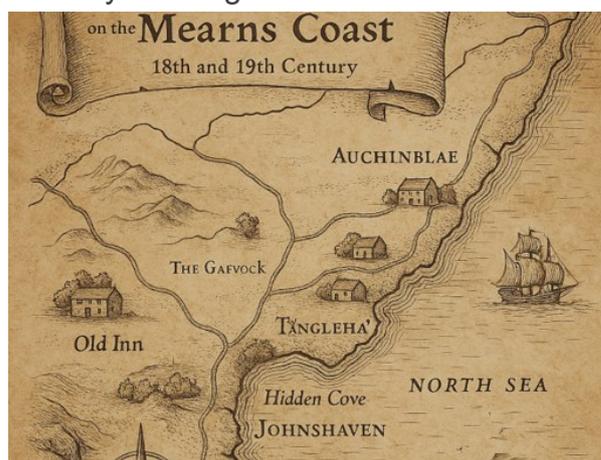
Smuggling in Scotland was not just about profit—it was also political. In the early 1700s, many smugglers were sympathetic to the Jacobite cause. Smuggling was seen as a form of resistance against English-imposed taxes and customs duties. Some even transported Jacobite agents and messages across the North Sea to France.

The government responded with increasingly harsh laws. The 1718 Hovering Act banned small vessels from loitering near the coast, and by the 1730s, smugglers faced transportation or even execution. Yet enforcement in rural areas like the Mearns was patchy at best. Local communities often protected their own, and excisemen were viewed with suspicion—or outright hostility.

The Decline of the Trade

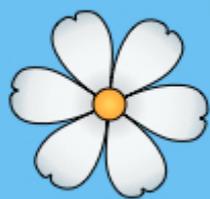
By the mid-19th century, improved policing, the establishment of coastguard stations, and changes in taxation began to curb smuggling. The romantic era of the "free trader" faded, but its legacy remains etched in the folklore and geography of the Mearns.

Today, walkers along the cliffs near Johnshaven or the wooded paths near Auchinblae may pass unknowingly over the very routes once trodden by smugglers. The stories live on—in whispered legends, in the names of old buildings, and in the quiet pride of a region that once defied the Crown by moonlight.



Dates for your diary

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Met Office

FORECAST COURTESY OF THE MET OFFICE

Monday 4 Aug - Thursday 28 Aug

Early next week (4th onwards) there is the potential for an unseasonably deep area of low pressure to affect the UK, which would bring widely windy and wet weather, especially for the west or northwest of the UK. The forecast around this is rather uncertain, however, and it is also possible that this will turn into a less windy but still wet spell further south. Following this, a continuation of the broadly changeable pattern is expected, with spells of rain or showers, some drier, brighter interludes and temperatures mainly near average. As we move towards mid-month, there is an increased chance of high pressure becoming more dominant, leading to drier, warmer and more settled conditions becoming more widespread.

High pressure, and therefore fairly settled conditions overall, appears most likely for the second half of August, though the northwest may see more in the way of occasional rain than other areas. For most, predominantly dry weather is likely to continue, although short periods of showers and thunderstorms cannot be ruled out. Above average temperatures overall seem most likely, with the potential for hot spells to develop, especially in the east and south, these more probable further into August.

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