



Auchenblae Messenger

Founded in 1999 by Donald B. Rennie

Spring Edition

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MARCH 2026

From The Editors

After what seems to have been a never ending winter we are at last seeing the arrival of spring. The local daffodil fields are in full bloom and the many of the roads are flanked with displays of daffs.

For some reason this has been a difficult edition to pull together with several of our regular contributors unavailable. We have our regular features from the Heritage Society, Friendship Club, Community Cafe and Youth Club. Our poet in residence has produced a seasonal poem and we have our regular update from our local politicians; Councillor George Carr gives us an update on the challenges facing the local Council and Tess White MSP provides an update on her activities. Unfortunately, Tess is standing down as a Member of the Scottish Parliament for the May elections, and this is her final contribution as our local representative in Holyrood. Whether we agree or disagree with a particular party's policies it is always good to hear about their activities and we thank Tess for her work as MSP and wish her well in any future activities.

The literary highlight of the winter was the publication of Jenny Thomson's book "Auchenblae Reflections". It has turned out to be a popular read with copies snapped up as soon as they came available. To date there has been three print runs with nearly 600 copies purchased. With only few copies left it is looking like a fourth print run will be needed.



On the home front the new retired greyhound (Rosie) has settled well and as she has grown in confidence her desire to steal anything in reach has increased. If it is edible and in reach, it's fair game as far as she is concerned. One bantam has gone to the great hen cote in the sky and two new hens (one Rhode Island cross and one Maran cross) and a new Maran cockerel have arrived as well as a new duck. All have settled well.

At work we increasingly use Artificial Intelligence (AI) and there has been some controversy over its use and misuse. The article on gardening was produced with the help of Claude AI and

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)

as we have some space in this edition, we include an introduction to some well-known AI tools and a humorous short story written entirely by Claude AI in around 20 seconds. In general AI can produce 900 words in 20 to 45 seconds. AI can produce fictional stories and images of things that may not exist. Sometimes it is just fun to build images of impossible things like a roller coaster down Drumtochty Glen, or an aircraft carrier moored in Loch Saugh.

At its best AI will have a positive impact on society and future jobs, removing repetition and accurately analysing medical data, and we are only scratching the surface at the moment. At its worst it can violate privacy, spread disinformation and become a major disruption. We are always on the lookout for new contributors particular on hobbies, crafts and unusual things happening in the village.

Please contact us if you would like to submit an article for the summer edition, due out in July. Best wishes **Chris and Keith**

Council Changes

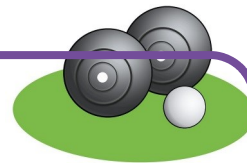
The biggest item of the year in the Council calendar is setting the budget and as budgets reduce, and service demand increases, Councillors were adamant that roads could not be subject to further cuts, and especially in view of the severe January weather which took its toll on the road network with frost and excess water. 1% of the Council Tax rise will be allocated to repair pot holes and road defects. Hopefully this will make a difference as we all know areas needing attention. Stonehaven's Evan St was resembling a lunar landscape and was great to see that work to resurface stretches take place as soon as the budget was agreed.



Another change coming is the Council management for marches. Instead of these coming to Area Committees, the decision will lie with the Licensing Sub Committee although local Councillors will be asked for their views. Aberdeenshire Council is now launching its new 'Public Processions Notification' portal which can now be used to make a representation about a procession. The process for directly notifying the Council (and the Police) of an intended procession has not changed.

Cllr George Carr -Conservative Mearns Ward





Auchenblae Bowling Club

Auchenblae Bowling Club: Ready for the Season Ahead

Pre-Season Preview 2026

As the greens at Auchenblae Den are prepared for another season, the club looks ahead with a mixture of anticipation and reflection — eager for the competitive challenges that lie in store, yet carrying with them the profound sadness of having lost one of their own during the close season.

The Season Ahead

It promises to be a busy and exciting campaign for Auchenblae Bowling Club. The club will be entering the Champion of Champions, the Rennie Tailyour Trophy, and the Hutchison Trophy — three competitions that will demand the best from the squad and give members the chance to test themselves against the finest bowlers in the area. Each represents a fantastic opportunity, and the club will be approaching all three with genuine ambition and purpose.

A highlight in the early part of the season will be the Auchenblae Gala 7 Ends Bowling Competition, taking place on Saturday 30th May as part of Auchenblae Gala. It promises to be a wonderful occasion — a chance for the club to be right at the heart of the community it serves, showcasing the sport to familiar faces and new ones alike. Events like this are the lifeblood of a village club, and the Gala competition is sure to be one of the highlights of the summer calendar.

Away from the summer greens, the close season brought a new experience for the club when Auchenblae took part in their first ever season in the Mearns Indoor Bowling League over at Stonehaven. Stepping into an unfamiliar environment for the first time is never easy, but the club embraced the challenge, and it proved to be a rewarding addition to the club's calendar — one that will no doubt have sharpened a few skills and strengthened the bonds between members during the winter months.

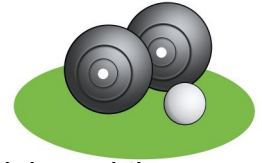
Looking further ahead and depending on how recruitment progresses over the coming weeks, the club is also considering entering the Mearns League — the outdoor competition — over the summer. New members could be the key to making that happen, so anyone with an interest in joining the club would be very warmly welcomed at the Den.

A Fond Farewell to Colin Hay

Yet before thoughts can turn entirely to the season ahead, it is right and proper to pause and remember a man who meant so much to this club and to the wider Mearns community.

During the close season, Auchenblae Bowling Club sadly lost Colin Hay — a true stalwart of the club and a figure who was known and respected throughout the Mearns. Colin was one of those rare individuals who gave generously of his time and knowledge, and many members of the club today had the pleasure of being shown the ropes by him. His patience, his experience, and his warmth made him the kind of person that clubs simply could not function without, and his presence on and around the green at Auchenblae Den will be

Auchenblae Bowling Club



deeply and genuinely missed.

Colin's passing is a loss that will be felt far beyond the boundaries of the club, and the thoughts of everyone at Auchenblae Bowling Club remain with his family and friends at this time.

When the first bowls of the new season are delivered on the green at Auchenblae Den, they will be delivered in his memory.

Auchenblae Bowling Club welcomes new members. If you are interested in joining, please get in touch with the club.

Auchenblae Community Cafe

The Auchenblae Community Cafe has had a busy start to the year celebrating its third birthday in January with lots of cake. We hosted the patient participation group from the new Stonehaven Medical Practice who took notes on your concerns to feed back to the practice. This was followed up by a visit from doctors and management team to address and reassure the community of continued good practice. We were also joined by Hannah from Abilitynet who talked through internet safety and the online eform for the surgery.



March brought Mother's Day so we had an afternoon tea lunch to appreciate all our mums. For Easter this month we had a few wee treats and crafts for the kids.

Our next special event will be on Monday, 25th May where we will host a sandwich and dessert lunch as part of Gala week. The community cafe team will host the tearoom and cake stall on Gala Day, Saturday 30th May so look out for requests for baking donations nearer the time. We are also planning a summer outing, date and destination yet to be finalised, weather dependent. We are lucky enough to have received some lovely, generous donations recently and these will be put towards our outing to make some treasured memories.



Getting to Grips with AI

Produced with the help of Claude

You may have heard a lot of talk lately about "artificial intelligence" or "AI tools". But what actually are they, and could they be useful to you? We asked around and put together this plain-English introduction.

Whether it was on the radio, in the papers, or from a grandchild trying to explain something on their phone, chances are you've come across the term "AI" more than once recently. It can sound complicated — even a little unsettling — but the reality is that many of these tools are surprisingly straightforward, and quite a few people in communities like ours are already finding them genuinely helpful in everyday life. So let's have a look at what they actually are.

What Is AI, Really?

At its simplest, an AI tool is a computer program you can have a conversation with. You type (or sometimes speak) a question or a request, and it gives you a thoughtful, written response — much like asking a knowledgeable friend. The best-known examples include ChatGPT (from a company called OpenAI), Claude (from Anthropic), Gemini (from Google), Co-Pilot (Microsoft) and Grok (founded by Elon Musk). You can access most of them for free through a web browser, with no special equipment needed beyond a phone, tablet, or computer. They all do much the same thing with various add-ons to produce illustrations and videos.

What Can They Help With?

Quite a lot, as it turns out. Here are just some of the things people are using them for:

- Writing letters and emails — whether it's a formal complaint, a letter to a local authority, or a thank-you note, AI can help you find the right words.
- Understanding documents — medical letters, legal terms, council notices. Paste in the confusing text and ask for a plain-English explanation.
- Looking things up — like a search engine, but instead of a list of links, you get a direct answer.
- Recipe ideas — tell it what's in your fridge and ask what you could make for dinner.
- Planning and organising — packing lists, event schedules, budgets.
- Learning something new — want to know how your boiler works, or what a particular bird's call means? Just ask.
- Creative writing — poems for a birthday card, ideas for a village event, a script for a short play.

Is It Safe?

Reasonably, yes — with a bit of common sense. The main things to bear in mind:

Don't share personal details. There's no need to give your full name, address, bank details, or passwords to an AI tool. Treat it like you would any online service.

It can make mistakes. AI is impressive, but it isn't infallible. If it tells you something important — a medical fact, a legal point, a date — it's always worth double-checking with an authoritative source.

It doesn't know you. Each conversation generally starts fresh. It has no memory of who you are from one session to the next, so there's no personal profile being built up.

The Good the Bad and the Ugly? The problem with a lot of good and helpful technologies is that they can be abused. Images and videos can be created of things and people in places that never existed. It can do your homework, such as write an essay, which might seem

CONT:.....

helpful but defeats the object. My particular favourite is Claude and it has been used to write the gardening article. I am not a gardening expert but the advice seems correct. To demonstrate the good and the bad Claude was asked to write a humorous short story about Auchenblae. It produced the story in around 20 seconds. It used fictional characters but it also made mistakes. For instance it didn't pick up that the Drumtochty Arms no longer exists, and it didn't recognise that there is already a golf course in Auchenblae. Similarly AI can create images that have never existed and could not possibly exist. As far as I know the aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales has never sailed up the burn and moored in Loch Saugh. Aircraft Carrier HMS Prince of Wales moored in Loch Saugh?

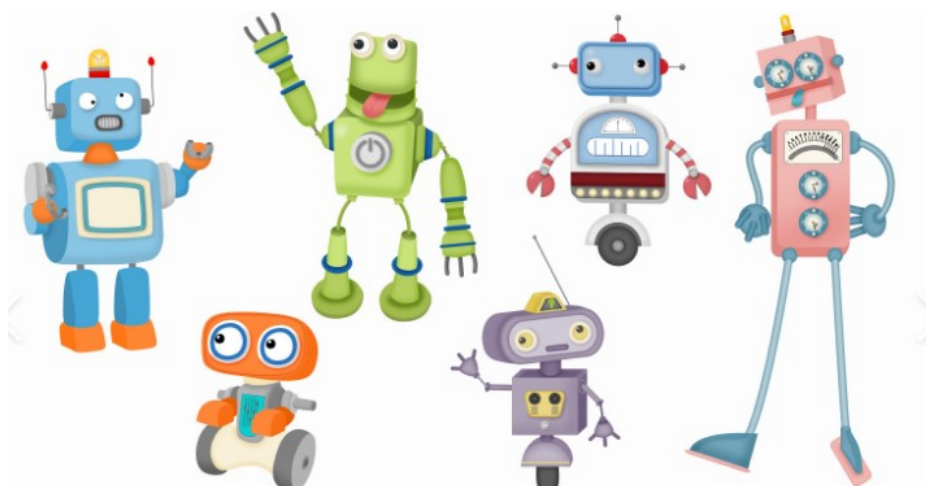


Aircraft Carrier HMS Prince of Wales moored in Loch Saugh?

Aircraft Carrier HMS Prince of Wales moored in Loch Saugh?

How Do I Get Started? The easiest way is simply to visit claude.ai or chatgpt.com in your web browser. You can often try them out without even creating an account. Once you're there, just type your question as if you were asking a person — there's no special language to learn. If you'd like a hand getting started, why not ask someone at the next community gathering, or keep an eye out for any local digital skills sessions. Many libraries also offer help with this sort of thing.

A Final Thought AI tools won't replace your own judgement, your doctor, your solicitor, or your neighbours — nor should they. But for many everyday tasks, they can save time, reduce stress, and open doors to information that might otherwise have been hard to reach. Like any tool, the key is knowing when it's useful and when it isn't. And the best way to find that out? Have a go. If you have questions, discoveries, or experiences with AI tools you'd like to share in a future issue, we'd love to hear from you.



Auchenblae Messenger – Easter 2026 - Tess White

After the past few months - particularly the recent spell of bad weather - it has been a real pleasure to get back out across the Mearns and spend time with local residents, volunteers and community organisations.

One recent highlight was hosting my final constituency event in Laurencekirk alongside the Women's Rights Network Scotland. We discussed how to break down the barriers still facing women and girls in sport, with a fantastic panel that included the inspirational sailor Tracy Edwards MBE, who skippered the first all-female crew on *Maiden*. We were also joined by leading academics, Professor Sarah Pedersen and Dr Claire Methven O'Brien, as well as local voices. It was wonderful to see so many sporting bodies, community representatives and local residents in attendance, including Councillors Agnew, Smith and Carnie.

The Mearns also has a proud connection to the history of the Scottish suffragettes. Professor Pedersen spoke about the important role Laurencekirk played in that story. The suffrage movement in Kincardineshire formed part of a wider campaign across Scotland, with local activists contributing to the national effort that led to women securing the right to vote in 1918.

This will be my final contribution to the Auchenblae Messenger as I prepare to stand down as an MSP ahead of the Holyrood election in May 2026. It has been a genuine privilege to represent the North East, and I have been continually inspired by the kindness, resilience and strong sense of community I have encountered over the past five years.

During my time in the Scottish Parliament, I have worked to ensure the voices and achievements of communities across the Mearns are heard at a national level. This has included 47 First Minister's Questions, over 1,000 committee contributions and 116 speeches in the Parliamentary Chamber. I have raised key issues affecting the area - from the proposed "monster pylons" and the Laurencekirk junction to rural healthcare and the future of the North East energy sector



One of the most rewarding parts of the role has been lodging more than 250 Parliamentary Motions recognising individuals, groups, businesses and organisations. From community volunteers and schools to local enterprises, it has been important to ensure that the hard work and successes of people across the Mearns are formally recorded and celebrated in Scotland's national Parliament.

For my last visit as an MSP, I was delighted to be invited back to Mackie Academy. I have always valued visiting local schools over the last five years and engaging proactively with our future talent. It was also a pleasure to attend the recent Drumlithie Spring Flower Show.

Thank you to everyone who has stopped for a chat at events, shared their experiences or taken the time to get in touch. It has meant a great deal, and I wish everyone all the very best for the future and a very Happy Easter.

In the Garden This Spring

Produced with the help of Claude AI

Spring in the north-east of Scotland tends to arrive on its own schedule — cautious and occasionally chilly, with late frosts a real risk well into May. That said, there is still plenty to be getting on with, and now is a good time to lay the groundwork for a productive and colourful growing season ahead.

Prepare Your Soil and Beds

If you haven't already, now is the time to dig in well-rotted compost or manure to revitalise beds that have sat idle over winter. Our soils can be heavy after the wet months, so working in organic matter will improve drainage and give plants a better start. Clear away any remaining dead growth and weeds, taking care not to disturb emerging bulbs.

Our own compost heaps of alternate layers of poultry bedding and grass are a rich addition to the vegetable deep beds.

Sowing and Planting

Indoors or in a cold frame, you can sow seeds of tomatoes, peppers, and leeks in early April. Hardier crops — broad beans, onion sets, early potatoes, and shallots — can go outside from mid-April, but keep an eye on the forecast and be ready to protect young plants with fleece if a frost threatens. A few practical tasks for this time of year:

- Chit seed potatoes in a light, frost-free spot before planting out in late April.

- Sow hardy annual flower seeds — such as calendula, larkspur, and cornflower — directly into beds.

- Plant onion sets and garlic cloves if not done so already.

- Divide and replant established perennials to reinvigorate clumps and fill gaps.

The Lawn

Once the ground firms up and temperatures are consistently above 7°C, you can begin mowing again — but keep the blade high to begin with. Scarify and aerate any areas that suffered compaction or moss over winter, and oversow bare patches with a grass seed mix suited to our cooler climate. A spring lawn feed in April will help things green up nicely.

Trees, Shrubs, and Fruit

Early spring is the last chance to plant bare-root trees and hedging before the season gets under way. Prune roses on a mild, dry day — cutting to outward-facing buds and removing any dead or crossing stems. Soft fruit bushes such as currants and gooseberries benefit from a tidy-up and a dressing of general fertiliser. Check fruit trees for signs of canker or dieback and remove affected wood promptly.

A Thought for Wildlife

As hedgehogs emerge from hibernation and birds begin nesting, it's worth leaving a wilder corner of the garden undisturbed. A small pile of logs, a patch of long grass, or an uncultivated bed edge can make a real difference to local wildlife. If you have a pond, top it up carefully and avoid disturbing any frogspawn.

Personal Update



CONT:.....The mixed weather seems to have been good for the rhubarb and the lawn. The rhubarb is looking strong, and we already have enough for a first take. This is natural growth and not forced. We are on the second cut of the lawn and the grass is starting to grow quickly. The only problem is...we have been plagued by moles. Not wanting to set traps we are hoping that inserting a few toy windmills in the lawn will discourage them. We understand they don't like the vibration and move on but any other ideas gratefully received.

The first early new potatoes have been chitted and planted in potato bags and the main crop are chitting at the moment. They will be planted in rough ground we want to clean up. In the greenhouse the tomato seeds and cucumber seeds are in small pots as we wait patiently for the first signs of growth.

Most of all, don't be discouraged by a grey or blustery day — spring in Aberdeenshire rewards patience. Even a short spell of sunshine in April can work wonders on the garden and the gardener alike.

Auchenblae & Dist. Heritage Society

Karen Martin
On behalf of The Heritage Society



Our next meeting will be on Monday 11 May 2026 at 7.30 p.m when we welcome David Clark, Photographer, Laurencekirk to show us photographs of Laurencekirk and the Howe of the Mearns old and new. Some of the readers will remember David's dad, Reg, when he was a photographer with the Press & Journal and who had a photography business in Laurencekirk, David inheriting the business. The photographs that David will be showing will be a mixture of both his and his father's collections. The meeting will be held at the Auchenblae Church Hall. All are welcome to attend. If you are not already a member then we do make a charge of £5 per visitor - this includes light refreshments.

Auchenblae Friendship Group

Karen Martin
On behalf of The Friendship Group



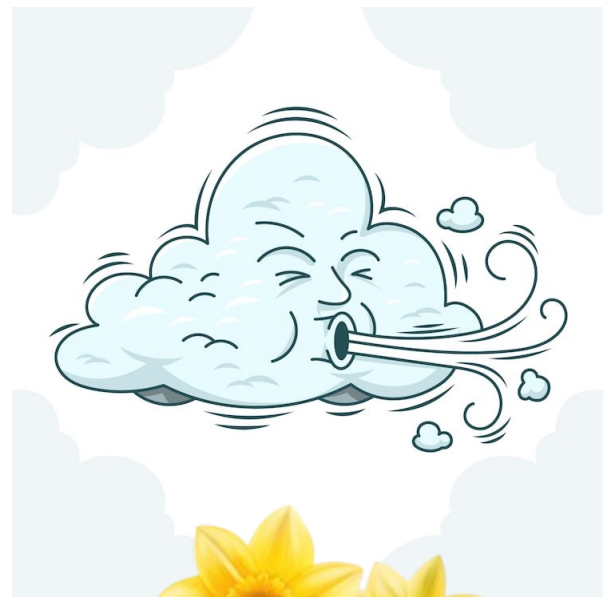
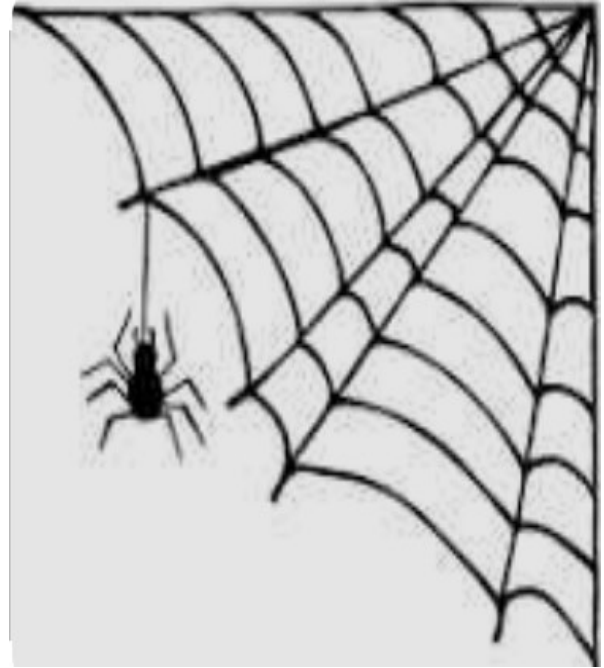
We are now on our Easter break but we welcome people to come and join us on Wednesday 15 April 2026 at 10.00 a.m for a cup of tea/coffee and biscuit and a blether. We meet at the Auchenblae Church Hall. We kickstart our Spring/Summer season with a Sing-a long featuring music from the 1950s. This session has been curated by one of our members, George Wilson. In May we have another member, Jenny Thomson, giving us a talk on Auchenblae Memories and showing us photos of the village and Gillian Siddons on the Art of Basketry. In June we welcome back a good friend of the Group, Phil Smith, with a selection of music memories. When we don't have speakers and entertainers then we will have a quiz morning (in April), monthly bingo and games. A small charge of £3.00 is made to cover costs. If any of you are at a loose end and wish a bit of company on a Wednesday morning then please do come and join us. We will be delighted to see you.



SPRING STROLL

By Peter Morriss

When spiders busy their lacy webs
along the dewy hedge,
And to the teasel bows the wind
blown sedge;
When the song of spring comes
skipping on the breeze,
And from long rest a warm Sun
the dapper daffodil has teased;
When Sun reclines from an open sky,
'Tis then, along a narrow lane
to the woods stroll I-
To clamber o'er a rustic style,
And there to savour the peace
of the woodlands for a while.



Auchenblae Gaming Club

New Club in Town – Auchenblae Gaming Club
By Bruce Stevenson



Auchenblae Gaming Club meets on the last Sunday of the month in Auchenblae Village Hall from 1 – 5pm.

Entry Fees for Non-Members:

- Adult - £3
- Child (under 18) - £2
- Family (up to 2 adults and 4 children) - £6
- Over 70 – Free

Annual Membership Fees:

- Adult - £30
- Child - £20
- Family - £60

Note – children must be accompanied by an adult.

Tea, coffee, juice and biscuits are provided in the entry fee. We also have a tuck shop, which provides a small income to the club, and helps to subsidise entry fees.

General Format: We aim to provide a supportive, social atmosphere, where people can take part in card, board and/or tabletop games.

The club is aimed at everyone – whether they are interested in learning a new game, playing an old favourite game, or just meeting up with likeminded people for a fun, interactive afternoon. All ages, abilities and interests are very welcome at Auchenblae Gaming Club.

Regular games we have at the club (these usually run every session):

- Chess
- Board Games – Risk, Carcassonne, Scrabble, Monopoly, Rumikube, Connect 4
- Dice Card Games – Dobble, Magik, Yahtzee
- TTRPG, monster of the week
- Pokémon
- Warhammer 40k & AOS
- Killteam, Bloodbowl & Necromunda.

If there is a game that you love to play that isn't mentioned above – bring it along to a session, and we will endeavour to find you an opponent.

We have a regular cohort of volunteers who love games and are always happy to help others learn something new or hone their skills, whether it be chess with Shiblu, Pokemon with Cary, TTRPGs with Sam, Warhammer with Mike, or learning about any other game with Bruce, Carl or Bob.

Warhammer Tournament Success: On March 21 st Auchenblae Gaming Club hosted it's first ever Warhammer Tournament, and it was a huge success! 22 opponents arrived at Auchenblae Village Hall with their carefully constructed and excellently painted armies for a gruelling day of tabletop battles. The day concluded after 10 solid hours of Warhammer, lunch and socialising.

A prizegiving ceremony was held to award the winners (1 st place – Chris Aitkin, 2 nd place – Craig White and 3 rd place – Jon Starr) and best painted army (Emma Thompson).



Community Connections: Community is at the heart of Auchenblae Gaming Club, and we are lucky to have so many wonderful opportunities to collaborate:

Redcaps Montrose: AGC has built a strong connection with Redcaps Montrose, a fantastic café and game shop on Montrose High Street. Redcaps have provided AGC with invaluable advice and support, helping to shape our club and giving us the confidence to dream big and pursue our first tournament!



- **Stonehaven Chess Club:** A few of our members regularly attend the Stonehaven Chess Club. This has helped us to hone our skills and meet more chess enthusiasts. In February, we had the exciting opportunity to play a 12 person simultaneous match against Grandmaster Jacob Aagaard!





- **Dundee Gaming Guild:** A few of our members travelled to Broughty Ferry in February to learn how to play Killteam – we love learning new games, and bringing them to AGC!



- **Angus Wargaming Club:** We were pleased to welcome members of the Angus Wargaming Club to our Warhammer Tournament in March, and look forward to attending some of their events in the future.



Auchenblae Youth Club



Club highlights from 2026 so far! By Natasha Yule

Our club opening hours are 6.45 to 8.30pm on Friday nights during the school term time.

We welcome young people between the ages of 10 and 25.

New members would be most welcome.

Overview of Winter Sessions: Auchenblae Youth Club has enjoyed great success over the Winter/Spring period, attracting between 20 and 35 young people each week. All winter sessions have taken place in Auchenblae Village Hall, which has provided a comfortable and welcoming space. Young people from the village and surrounding area have gathered there during the cold, dark winter months to enjoy singing, dancing, drawing, playing games, making pancakes, sharing laughter, spending time with friends and simply having fun in a safe environment. We have loved the vibrant energy our young members have brought to AYC over winter, but as spring arrives, we're planning to move some sessions outdoors to the Pavillion in the Den, where we can make the most of the sunshine, open space and fresh air.



Art Sessions: We have launched monthly art sessions with Aimee Stevenson, a local artist and primary school teacher. Aimee provides engaging, creative sessions that give young art enthusiasts valuable experience with drawing and painting techniques, whether they're enjoying art now or planning to pursue it further at high school and beyond. We are excited to have Aimee on board and have greatly

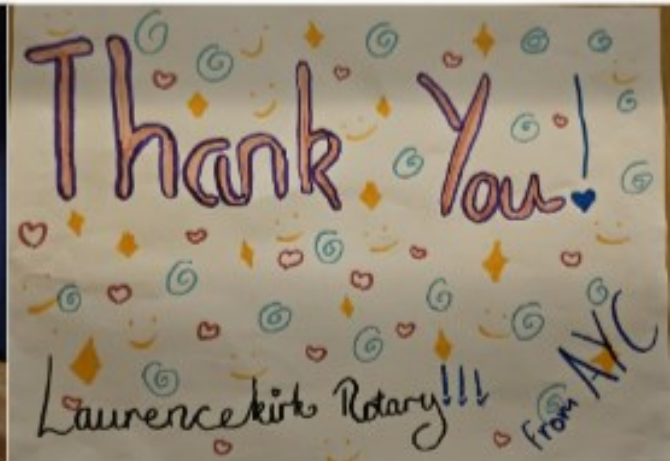


enjoyed seeing the young members of our club so engaged and focussed. Their artwork has been amazing!

Auchenblae Youth Club



Support for AYC: A special thank you to Laurencekirk District and Rotary Club for their donation of £150, and to a kind supporter from the USA who donated £300 to our club after buying Jenny Thompsons book 'Auchenblae Reflections'! With these donations, we have bought exciting new resources for the club, including a karaoke machine, arts and crafts materials and twister. These donations also help us to fund exciting trips for our members, which we will enjoy over the summer term. Thank you also to Auchenblae Community Fund, who has supported our Out and About programme. We are extremely grateful for all of the support and encouragement that we receive from our local community, and beyond. It really means a lot to us, and helps us to create opportunities for the youth of Auchenblae and surrounding area!



Launch of Oor Howe: AYC have launched a community food larder, which helps to save food waste as well as offer free food to those who may need it. Since opening in January, the larder has been steadily used by the community, and 'sells out' most weeks! The food larder is open to absolutely everyone – no payment required.

We would like to extend a huge thank you to:

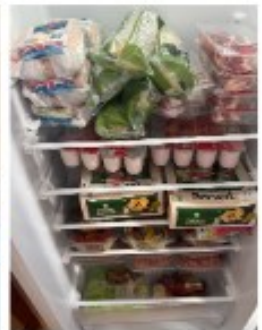
- Our wonderful community for supporting this venture so positively,
- The dedicated team of volunteers who show up each week and make it possible,

Auchenblae Youth Club



- The Stonehaven Co-ops (David St, Redcloak, Market Square) and the Laurencekirk Co-op for supporting Oor Howe and providing supplies each week.

The larder opens every Saturday at the Church Hall. Exact times currently vary slightly each week, depending on volunteer availability, but it generally runs early to mid-afternoon.



A short Story written entirely using Claude AI in 20 seconds The Unexpected Visitor to Auchenblae

The notice had gone up on the village hall door on a Tuesday, which was already suspicious. Nothing good in Auchenblae ever happened on a Tuesday. SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER — THIS FRIDAY — 7PM SHARP. Bring a plate.

Morag Guthrie, who ran the post office and therefore knew everything worth knowing in the village, squinted at the notice and pursed her lips. "Bring a plate," she muttered. "That'll be Margaret's doing. She brought those vol-au-vents last time and never heard the end of it."

By Friday, the hall was packed — an extraordinary turnout of thirty-seven souls, plus Davie Mearns' collie, Biscuit, who had wandered in during the confusion and settled himself under the trestle table next to the shortbread.

Nobody knew who the guest speaker was. The notice hadn't said. This had generated an entire week of speculation in the village that had, at various points, suggested it might be a man from the council about the pothole on the Fordoun road, a celebrity chef, or — according to old Hamish at the bar of the Drumtochty Arms — "some mannie fae Aberdeen."

At five past seven, a large black car with tinted windows pulled up outside, which was the most dramatic thing to happen in Auchenblae since the summer of 2019 when a pheasant got into the church.

A tall man in an enormous overcoat stepped out, looked around at the rolling Howe of the Mearns, and announced to no one in particular: "Beautiful. Really beautiful. People don't know about this place. They should know."

It was, unmistakably, Donald Trump.

A hush fell over the hall. Morag gripped her paper plate of tablet so hard it buckled.

"Folks," he said, striding to the front and adjusting the microphone, which let out a shriek of feedback that woke Biscuit, "I have to tell you — Auchenblae? Tremendous village. One of the great villages. Maybe the greatest. I've seen villages all over the world, believe me, and this one — the hills, the hall, the—" he glanced at the trestle table — "the shortbread — top notch."

Councillor Forbes, who had been preparing a strongly-worded question about the pothole, sat with his mouth slightly open. "Now I'm thinking," Trump continued, pulling a rolled-up document from his coat, "golf course. Right here. Between the B967 and that nice wee burn. Eighteen holes. Maybe twenty. We'll call it Trump Auchenblae. Has a ring to it." "That's Geordie Petrie's barley field," said Morag flatly.

"We'll make it better. Much better barley, probably the best barley in Scotland, the best in the world."

Geordie Petrie, who was indeed present and still had mud on his boots from that afternoon,

CONT:..... stood up slowly. "Ye'll nae touch ma barley."

There followed forty minutes of the most robust community engagement the village hall had ever witnessed, covering topics including: barley prices, the aforementioned pothole, whether the planning committee would permit a helipad, Biscuit the collie's dietary requirements, and the correct way to pronounce "Auchenblae" (Trump had been saying "Och-en-BLEE" with great confidence, which the entire room agreed was wrong, though they couldn't quite agree on the right way either).

At half past eight, Margaret produced the vol-au-vents. Trump ate four of them and declared them "incredible, truly incredible, the best vol-au-vents anywhere in Scotland, maybe Europe."

Margaret went pink with pleasure and was thereafter lost to his cause entirely.

He left at nine o'clock, pausing at the door to shake Geordie's hand and say he'd "be in touch about the barley situation." Geordie said something brief in reply that this story will not repeat.

The black car disappeared into the Kincardineshire dark.

Back inside, Morag stacked the plates while Councillor Forbes finally asked his pothole question to the room at large. Nobody had an answer. Biscuit ate the remaining shortbread. The notice stayed on the village hall door for three weeks, because nobody could agree whose job it was to take it down.

The pothole is still there.



President Donald Trump outside Auchenblae Village Hall (Image created by GROK AI)

Mearns FM: The Heartbeat of the Mearns is Turning Up the Volume!

Broadcasting from the heart of Portlethen, Mearns FM is more than just a radio station—it's the sound of our community in motion.

As we head into a vibrant Spring, Mearns FM is proving that local radio is alive, well, and louder than ever. We are a registered charity, a team of 20+ dedicated volunteers, and a vital lifeline for Aberdeenshire South and Aberdeen City. Whether you are tuning in on **105-107 FM**, catching us on **DAB+**, or asking **Alexa** to play Mearns FM while you have your morning coffee, we are right there with you.

New Sounds for a New Season

This May, we are thrilled to launch two brand-new flagship programmes designed to give our listeners a voice:

- **Student Sounds Off:** Giving the next generation a platform to lead the conversation.
- **Community Showcase:** Shifting the spotlight onto the local groups and charities that make our region thrive.

From the roar of Hard Rock to the soul of Jazz, Blues, and Country, our specialist music programmes continue to offer a diverse alternative to mainstream radio.

We Need Your Feet! (The Kiltwalk 2026)

To keep the music playing and the studio lights on, we need your help. On **7th June 2026**, the Mearns FM team is taking to the pavement for the **Aberdeen Kiltwalk**. As a 100% volunteer-run charity, this is our most critical fundraiser of the year.

- **Join us:** Walk with our team and represent your local station!
- **Support us:** Every penny donated via our goes directly toward sustaining our community response services - <https://www.justgiving.com/charity/mearnsfm>

Your Voice, Your Station: Join the Team

Have you ever wondered what happens on the other side of the microphone? We are currently looking for fresh talent to join our broadcast family! We have prime opportunities for **Drive Time** presenters, as well as slots on **Saturday (1pm–3pm)** and **Weekday Afternoons (1pm–4pm)**.

Whether you're a seasoned DJ, a technical whiz, or just someone with a passion for the Mearns, we want to hear from you. We even host **Open Days** where you can step into the studio, meet the directors, and see the magic happen firsthand.

Support Local Business

Local businesses are the backbone of our economy, which is why our **Business Spotlight** programme is so popular. For just £50, businesses can secure a one-hour dedicated showcase of their services—and if you're already an advertiser with us, this spotlight is absolutely free!

Mearns FM is your music, your station, and your community. Tune in today, join our Kiltwalk team, or get in touch to become our next star presenter.

Contact us: studio@mearnsfm.org.uk | events@mearnsfm.org.uk

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Check out the social community network online, advertise events, book the hall, promote your group and lots more: [www.http://theblae.org/](http://theblae.org/)



FORECAST COURTESY OF THE MET OFFICE

Friday 1 May - Friday 15 May

Changeable weather is likely through the period. In broad terms higher pressure is more likely to the north, with lower pressure to the south. Across Scotland and northern half of England this would mean drier and more settled weather. Meanwhile, Northern Ireland, Wales and the southern half of England perhaps seeing a greater chance of rain or showers at times, but plenty of scope for fair weather in between. Temperatures will probably be close to or slightly above average overall, perhaps becoming more widely warm at times.



Messenger Production Team—Chris & Keith Ridgway, Kevin Newstead, Eddie Cairns
The publisher for this issue was **Kevin Newstead**