

Beveridge, Nairn and MacBean Kirkcaldy and Its Libraries

For our December Object we are once again indebted to Kerry Briers who makes her second appearance as a guest writer. Kerry previously related the account of *Mr Tait's Whale*, a little known but nevertheless fascinating local story from over 150 years ago.

Kerry is English born, hailing from Nottinghamshire, attended a Welsh University and now lives in Kirkcaldy with her husband and two daughters. That is not strictly correct as, at this moment, both daughters are away from home at university. One is closer to home in Edinburgh, while the other is currently studying in Berlin.

Kerry is a qualified librarian working at present with the University of Dundee on their Kirkcaldy Campus. From the time she took her first steps in employment, Kerry has been immersed in books with her tastes covering a wide range of genres. Kerry, unusually, has no particular favourite book – everything is dependent on her mood or purpose when selecting a volume. As well as books being Kerry's work, leisure and pleasure, being a librarian also brings the reward of meeting and conversing with people who have varied interests in their reading material.

In all honestly, when the subject of Kirkcaldy and its library was first mooted – there really was only one person to approach as the author. We were delighted when Kerry accepted our offer and we could not be in better hands. The following narrative covers the parts the major players, Michael Beveridge and John Nairn, played in bringing libraries to the town but also, the not so well known, Miss Mary MacBean who provided over 40 years sterling service in the library's employment.

Running alongside her love of literature Kerry is deeply immersed in all manner of local history. Since 2018 Kerry has been a volunteer with both the Local Studies Team in the Kirkcaldy Galleries and also with the Council's Archive Team based at Bankhead in Glenrothes.

This voluntary work has certainly paid dividends for the *50 Objects Team*. It was the opening of a red deed box which had lain untouched for many years which saw Kerry stumble on the genesis of the Whale Story. This time there was no need for a deed box to launch this Object – that sprang from a burning desire to learn more about the formation and history of libraries in Kirkcaldy. We thank Kerry for the ensuing narrative:-

Kirkcaldy Public Library

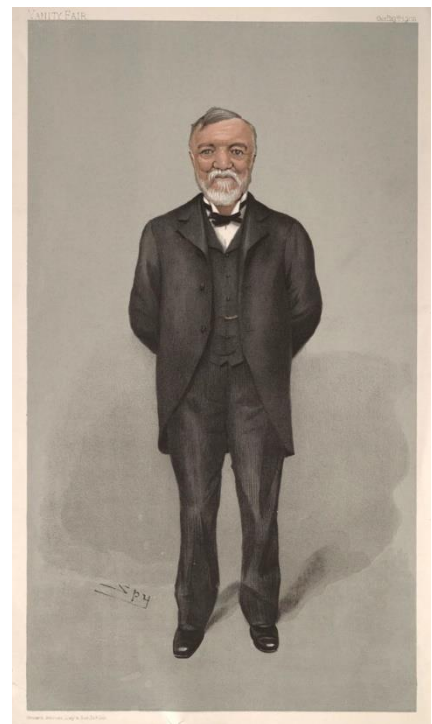


Kirkcaldy Galleries, War Memorial Gardens (photograph taken August 2023)

For this month's 50 objects I am going to explore a place and a person; Kirkcaldy's public library and the services developed there by Miss Mary Macbean, Kirkcaldy's first female public librarian. She was appointed in 1901, aged 20 and continued to work as a librarian in Kirkcaldy Central Library until her death in 1943.

Andrew Carnegie opens Kirkcaldy library, October 1899

The first public library in Kirkcaldy was located across the road from the current library building in a small hall within The Adam Smith and Beveridge Memorial Halls. It was officially opened on the 11th October 1899 by Andrew Carnegie who stated in his speech that he had 'experience in building libraries' but had not spent a penny on this particular one. He was not sure "whether he was to be congratulated or commiserated upon that fact." (*The Fifeshire Advertiser*, 14th October 1899). The library and halls had been mostly funded by the late Provost Beveridge who left £50,000 in his will for a public park, free library, and hall for Kirkcaldy. Mr Alexander Gow, who had been an innkeeper/hotelier and bottler and soda water manufacturer, had initially left a separate bequest in 1882 for a library, and others had also contributed by subscription to a public hall and library fund.



Captioned "Free Libraries", Carnegie caricatured by "Spy" for

Vanity Fair, 1903. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Carnegie

A pair of golden keys

At the opening ceremony two golden keys, symbolising the opening of both the hall and library, were presented by Provost Hutchison to Mrs Elizabeth Beveridge, the widow of the late Provost Michael Beveridge. Beveridge wanted Kirkcaldy to build a memorial to Adam Smith and “it was in this way that the idea of erecting a hall and library originated”. (*The Scotsman* 11th October 1899). Mrs Beveridge was asked to retain one of the keys in remembrance of the day and the other she was asked to present to Mr Carnegie. These keys have recently been reunited (September 2023) and are currently exhibited at Kirkcaldy Galleries to celebrate the refurbishment of the Adam Smith Theatre. You can find out more about who did spend a penny on Kirkcaldy’s library and the hall it was first located in by reading about Object 11: Adam Smith Halls.



The pair of gold keys presented at the opening of the Adam Smith and Beveridge Memorial Halls. Source: kirkcaldy_galleries, Instagram, posted 20 September 2023

Libraries and halls ‘fit and needed companions.’

Speaking at the opening ceremony Mr Carnegie mentioned that in his experience of building libraries he had realised “that halls were their fit and needed companions.” and “a great unifying influence making each citizen more of a kindly neighbour of his fellows” (*Glasgow Herald*, 12th October 1899). In order to promote their use for a range of events, Andrew and Louise Carnegie donated a £3000 organ for the halls in Kirkcaldy as a memento of their visit.

A Library in the third ward – Pathhead library



Pathhead Halls, Commercial St (photograph taken 13th October 2023)

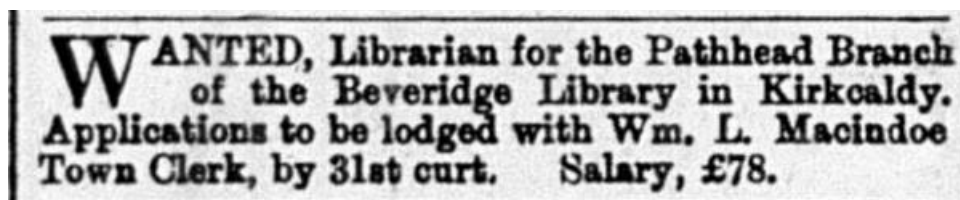
Mrs Beveridge had prior experience of opening libraries. On Thursday of 12th March 1896, she performed the opening ceremony of the Beveridge Branch Library (later known as the Pathhead branch library), situated in the third ward and borrowed the first book. The branch was squeezed into an existing building with the library collection housed in the gallery of the Pathhead Halls. After the ceremony, a cake and wine banquet was held in the public hall. The *Dundee Courier* (13th March 1896) reported that “On account of the great length of the town, the Council thought it advisable to provide a Branch Library for the Pathhead and Gallatown district”. The library was also paid for from the Beveridge bequest.

The Public Library – A public danger?

An article in *The Fifeshire Advertiser* (8th June 1895) discussed the strong possibility of the dangerous influence a public library may have on the female readers of Pathhead and Gallatown. The paper was keen to emphasise that it had advocated strongly for the adoption of the Free Libraries Act but thought that it should warn of the evil of fiction when used “not wisely but too well”. In the Beveridge Branch Library there was to be 6000 volumes of which novels made up 2640 books, “leaving less than half the books of a useful kind.” The article did not condemn all novel reading just “reading nothing else, and doing nothing else, unless compelled by stern necessity.” The report was concerned that in other towns with libraries large sections of the population “notably working girls and women, married women, servant girls and old women...have contracted a taste for novel reading.” This habit of reading “like opium smoking or dram-drinking – a dissipation, a vice”, had led to them neglecting their work, and their mental powers. Young men had fortunately taken with considerable zest to various forms of athletics – saving them from “being abused by continuous novel reading.”

A librarian for the Pathhead branch

On Saturday May 25th, 1895, *The Fife Free Press* carried an advertisement for a Librarian for Pathhead branch of the Beveridge Library



Advertisement, *Fife Free Press* 25th May 1895 (sourced at Kirkcaldy Galleries)

The appointment of the librarian for the Pathhead Branch was also a cause for concern in 1895. *The Fifeshire Advertiser* reported that the position continued to engage the attention of a committee of the Town Council. The council considered that “while a stranger to the town, would no doubt, do his best in the discharge of the duties, a qualified local gentleman, if appointed would (just on account of his own connection with the community, and the fact that his reputation is at stake) be still more eager that the library should be a great success.” Whilst it was possible for an applicant to “qualify himself through study of the management of other public libraries”. A stranger would need to become acquainted “with the town, the people, and their needs”. The advertisement attracted a lot of interest; a shortlist of 4 candidates was drawn up from the 172 applicants, of which only one was a local gentleman. In June 1895, Mr Robert H. Yorston of Edinburgh was appointed on a salary of 30 shillings per week.

The appointment of a librarian for the Beveridge Library

At the opening ceremony of the Adam Smith Memorial Halls and Beveridge library Andrew Carnegie spoke of the importance of a free library where you ‘can find access to the most precious treasure that the world possesses, those stored up in books’. He was also very vocal about the role of a librarian, mentioning reading in the *Dundee Advertiser* about a presentation made to Mr MacLauchlan, the librarian of Dundee for 40 years. MacLauchlan observed that in that time “the standard of books read from the library constantly became higher and higher”. Loans of the fiction, few of them ‘sensational novels’ accounted for only 34 per cent of the total issue in the year prior to the presentation. (*The Fifeshire Advertiser*, 14th October 1899). Carnegie was keen “to intimate that the selection of a librarian is important. It is he who can direct the young and the uninformed in the proper books they need. You want a Mr MacLaughlan, a Morrison, or a Robertson in Kirkcaldy – perhaps you have him – and I trust that his salary will be fixed high enough to secure him.”

In contrast to the Pathhead Branch Library the librarian was to be appointed after the Beveridge Library had been opened and this meant that there was a significant delay between the library opening and people being able to use it. Mr Hew Morrison, the Edinburgh City Librarian, was asked to advise on the purchase of library stock. Mr Yorston, formerly the librarian at the Pathhead branch, was appointed in September 1900 with Mr Sandilands succeeding him at Pathhead.

In 1900 there was another significant appointment, that of Mary Macbean, assistant to Mr Yorston. Mr Yorston did not hold the position of librarian for long; owing to his illness, Mary Macbean became librarian at a salary of £60 per annum in 1901, compiling the catalogue in that year and writing subsequent annual reports for both libraries. Mary Macbean was born in Kingsbarns but moved with her family to Kirkcaldy soon after her birth in 1881.

Interestingly, her father Mr Lachlan Macbean (see object 25: Caer Caledon) had been the librarian of Kirkcaldy subscription library almost a decade earlier (1887-1889).

Public and subscription libraries

The subscription library, located on the High Street, continued to operate alongside the free public library. A special meeting of the subscription library was called on 7th October 1899 to consider whether in view of the establishment of the public library by the corporation – should the subscription library continue or discontinue and should the books be presented free or at a price to the town council. It was considered that as the subscription library could not be closed without the consent of every member, which would be very difficult, it should continue and co-existed with the public library until December 1934. The remaining stock and shelving were auctioned off in November 1935.

Macbean and her new team

The *Fife Free Press* (12th October 1901) reported that Miss Macbean was to have two assistants: Miss Mary Tod, first assistant and Miss Turner, second assistant. In 1902 the library annual report mentions that Miss Macbean was keen for the library assistants to get a pay rise, focusing attention on this above her own pay. By 1903 Miss Tod's wages had increased from 10s to 12s, and Miss Turner's from 7s to 9s a week.

The Annual Reports

The Annual Reports of the Public Libraries (formally known as The Burgh of Kirkcaldy, Annual Report by the Librarian on the Condition and Work of the Public Libraries), and the minutes of the meetings in which they were presented contain much information about the stock. The report presented in 1902 indicates that the library was open on 289 days in 1901-1902. November had been the busiest month and the winter months saw a bigger daily average of issues (331) compared to the summer months (232). An annotation to the report written in pencil suggests that the library was opened for borrowing in the month of October 1901. It officially opened for use on the 14th of October 1901. The opening hours for the New Beveridge Library were from 10-1pm and from 3 until 8pm every day except Sunday.

The stock held in the Beveridge Library in 1902 was 10,126 volumes, made up of 9,670 books available for lending and 465 for reference. The books were not available on open shelves. An indicator system was used and that was why the work on the catalogue was important as without it was not possible to request what you wanted to read or borrow from the library. The loanable stock was divided into categories: Theology, Philosophy, Sociology, Science and Art, Poetry and Drama, Fiction, History, Biography, Travel, General Literature and Juvenile books.

Table of Beveridge Library days open and loans for 1901-2.

Month	Open days	Theology	Philosophy	Sociology	Science and Art	Poetry and Drama	Fiction	History, Biography, Travel	General literature	Juvenile books	Total issue	Daily average
Oct-01	16	21	12	41	198	35	1828	237	139	1855	4366	273
Nov-01	26	101	16	128	395	121	4085	500	309	3938	9593	369
Dec-01	25	101	17	88	331	113	3995	437	293	3274	8649	346
Jan-02	23	80	16	52	306	84	4072	420	244	2324	7598	330
Feb-02	24	90	15	50	295	82	3787	451	250	2961	7981	332
Mar-02	26	90	13	64	249	80	4143	416	312	2871	8238	317
Apr-02	25	80	8	68	275	57	3482	328	223	2286	6807	272
May-02	27	57	15	47	253	56	3523	242	197	2009	6399	237
Jun-02	25	45	15	46	176	64	2786	208	148	1514	5002	200
Jul-02	21	37	25	35	133	64	2531	166	130	1223	4344	207
Aug-02	25	45	16	43	200	68	3114	230	142	1561	5419	217
Sep-02	26	51	21	46	263	75	3617	296	188	2014	6571	253
Total issue	289	798	189	708	3074	899	40963	3931	2575	27830	80967	280

These statistics may have helped with the concern from the rate payers that the stock in both libraries - the Beveridge library and the Pathhead branch were being borrowed not purely for amusement.

The annual reports do give us a brief insight into what the librarian considered the priorities to be. During the war years (1914-1918) the lack of books available for purchase caused some concern. When writing about her life P. Livingstone in a tribute suggested that Mary regularly travelled to London during the war years *“making friends with many of the book sellers became familiar with the best sources of supply.”* She was keen to develop and build up the collection to ensure that it continued to be useful.

Running out of space – in need of a new library?

As early as 1916 there is some suggestion that owing to the large attendance of readers, including many soldiers based in the town, occasionally the ‘accommodation has been taxed to the utmost’. She reported in 1918 that the present library indicators were completely filled up more than two years ago. No extension to the indicators, which would cost around £40, could be carried out until the end of the war. Mary Macbean did stress *“this is the first extension found necessary since the library opened nearly 20 years ago.”* The extension would require some structural changes; shelving was becoming overcrowded and *“the need for further accommodation may have to be considered at the same time”*.

The space available for the library became critical and in the annual report for the year 1924 Mary Macbean expressed further concern. The library is *“in a small, dark and awkward corner of the Adam Smith Hall, it cannot adequately meet the needs of the public.”* The librarian continues to stress that the lack of space was preventing borrowers from effectively borrowing the stock as they had difficulty getting access to the library counters, and nor was it a good space to read or study in.

John Nairn's donation – solving the space issue

The initial Museum and Art Gallery building was gifted by John Nairn and opened in June 1925. Nairn however was also concerned about the situation of the library, writing to the Provost, Magistrates and Councillors on 9th April 1926:

“Gentlemen, - I understand that the accommodation of the present public library is insufficient and that suggestion has been made to extend it.

I beg to submit the plans of a new library, to be built in the grounds of the War Memorial immediately to the east of the present museum and picture gallery, and if these plans are approved of by you, I undertake at my own expense to erect the buildings as shown on the plans, subject to minor alterations which may be subsequently made and approved of by me on the plans.

Your obedient servant

(Sgd.) John Nairn”

[Taken from P. K. Livingstone, *Kirkcaldy and its Libraries*, page 15]

The council thanked Mr Nairn for this gift and the *Fife Free Press* (1st September 1928) suggested that the townspeople on its completion had “library accommodation which must compare more than favourably with that of other burghs of a similar size, or, for that matter, even larger than Kirkcaldy”.

Mr Nairn died just before the work, estimated to cost in the region of £80,000, was completed, but he had instructed the architects Messrs Heiton and McKay to extend the previous building in the same style for an additional 150 yards to the east. The stone for the building was supplied from Cullaloe Quarry. The Scotsman reported that “the main building shows a lending department to house 24,000 volumes...a reference department to accommodate 3600 volumes, a reading room with stands for 24 newspapers, and an annexe reference department”. The extension also incorporated three new art galleries.



Image of the original museum and picture gallery building at the War Memorial Garden



Presently from the front of the building It is difficult to see where the new building was added as it looks almost symmetrical to the initial building, but if you look from the back of the building it is a bit more obvious, and you can see the shape of the original building before the extension.

The original art gallery and museum from the rear carpark (photograph taken July 2023)

The front exterior of the Art Gallery, Museum and Library building constructed in 1928 (photograph taken 1950s). Image source: 'Fife Cultural Trust (Kirkcaldy Galleries) on behalf of Fife Council'

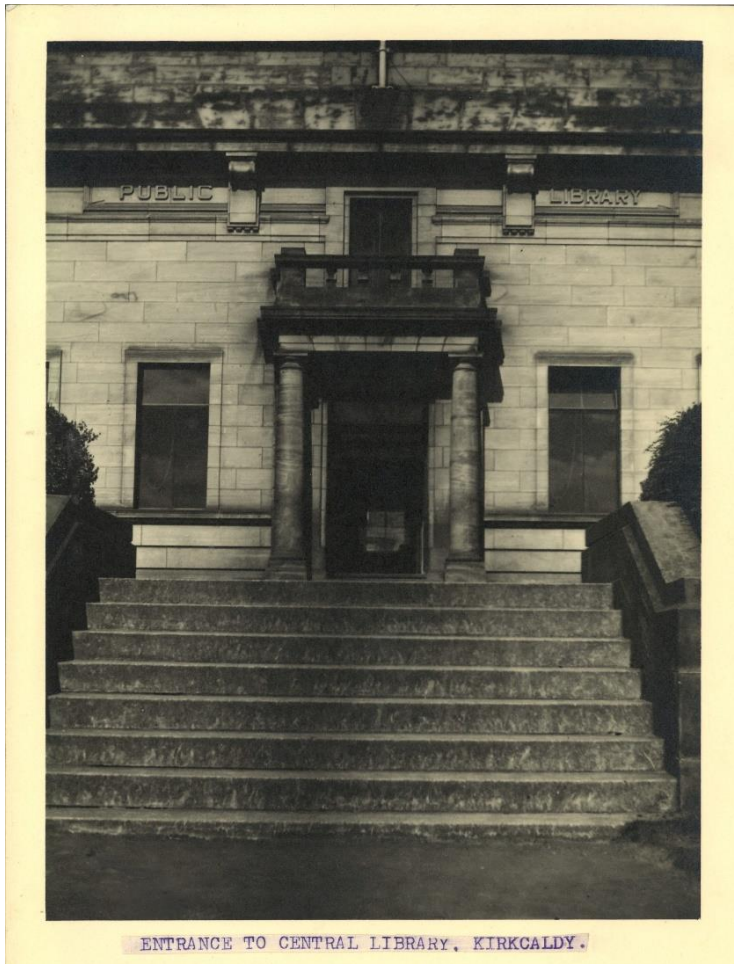


Opening of the new building

The extension to the Art Gallery and Museum was opened to the public in July 1928, a short time before the library. There was much celebration and *The Scotsman* reported on the opening exhibition (18th June 1928) the scheme of which was a 'somewhat novel' one with complete rooms being devoted to individual painters. Room VIII was devoted to French and foreign art, where you could see works by Vincent van Gogh, André Derain and Matisse.

Kirkcaldy has always had a library service which was part of a wider cultural offering. Initially both the Pathhead branch and the Beveridge library were in the same buildings as concert halls, and in 1928 the new library extension became part of the Museum and Art Gallery.

The doors to the public library were opened to the public on Monday 27th August, but there was not the same opening ceremony as for the original one. The trustees of the late Mr Nairn did not want a formal opening and proposed it should be gone about quietly. The entrance was separate to that for the museum and art gallery; 'Public Library' is written in the stonework above the door.



Entrance to Central Library Kirkcaldy. Image source: 'Fife Cultural Trust (Kirkcaldy Galleries) on behalf of Fife Council' (Photograph taken 1950s)

The doors of the Beveridge library were closed a week before to allow for the stock to be physically moved across the road. The *Fife Free Press* (1st September 1928) published a photograph of the new building, and described the interior of the new library, which incorporated teak and walnut woodwork and marble and parquet flooring. The newspaper was impressed by the “beauty, utility and commanding appearance” of the new library extension. “Kirkcaldy is indeed fortunate in possessing such an outstanding architectural feature, and we feel sure that the

townspeople will not be slow to take fullest advantage of the facilities it affords.”

The space allowed for a music section, a reading room, a children’s department separate from the adult collection and the books in both of these areas were now open access; the library staff were not required to fetch a book requested by a reader. The staff did have to implement a completely new card catalogue system to replace the indicators though, to allow the system to work effectively. Their additional work did not go unnoticed and had a special mention in the 1929 the Annual Report:

“Hearty thanks are due to all members of the staff for the efficient way in which they have continued to discharge their ever-widening duties”.

New building, new rules 1929

On the 5th of July 1929 the Provost, Magistrates and Councillors of Kirkcaldy approved the new bye-laws for the Library, Art Gallery and Museum. There were 35 bye-laws, and contravening one would result in a financial penalty. Some of the rules still seem reasonable to expect in a library today, as they emphasised the need to respect both the staff and the stock.

Bye-law 13. A person shall not carelessly or negligently soil, tear, cut, deface, damage, injure, or destroy any book, newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, map, chat, plan, engraving, etching, print, manuscript, picture or any exhibit in the library.

Other bye-laws are a little more surprising in their necessity to enshrine certain acceptable behaviour.

Bye-law 11: A person shall not light any match or smoke tobacco or any like substance in any part of the library set apart for the use of the public; nor shall they spit on any wall, floor, staircase or other part of the library, or upon any fitting or article forming part of the contents thereof.

The bye-laws prevented readers from entering or remaining in the library in a 'state of intoxication', loitering in the outer doorways, disturbing others, bringing in any dog, or partaking in refreshments. Some of the bye laws were applicable only to libraries and not to the use of the Art Gallery and Museum. For example Bye-law 15: if there had been an infectious disease in the house a person was prevented from using the library until the house had been declared 'free from infection by the medical officer of health.'

Public library service continues to adapt and evolve

There was some suggestion in the *Fifeshire Adviser* (13th February 1943) that Miss Mary Macbean "found full scope for her energies" on the transfer to the new war memorial library building. There the library service continued to evolve.

In 1929 Mr Sandilands of the Pathhead branch died and the branch came under the management of the main Beveridge Library (Kirkcaldy Central Library). In the same year the branch abandoned the indicators and became open access. The weeding of the stock and opportunity to browse saw borrowing numbers and readers increase.

The Beveridge Hall and Libraries Committee was superseded by the Public Libraries Committee. More money was available to support the libraries as the rates raised from 1d. to 2d. to support the work of the libraries. Perhaps reflecting increased usage of both libraries, and the inclusion of Dysart in the municipal burgh of Kirkcaldy consideration was made in 1931 for a new library in Sinclairtown, combined with a medical clinic. On 11th May 1935 Alexander Kilgour, a former Provost, opened Sinclairtown Library and Child Welfare Clinic. He was presented with a silver cigarette box to mark the occasion and Miss Machan, the librarian, presented him with a copy of *The King's Grace* by John Buchan.

In addition to developing the services and collection in Kirkcaldy, Mary Macbean was involved in conversations with other libraries about developing a way to share resources,

across local services and geographical boundaries. She attended and encouraged other staff to attend professional courses and lectures and welcomed the Scottish Library Association to Kirkcaldy in May 1931. As part of their annual conference, they had an afternoon outing to Loch Leven.

In addition to her library work, Mary Macbean also provided a space for the Citizen's Advice Bureau during the second world war within the library and worked as secretary for the service.

Miss Mary Macbean's death in 1943

The Times (16/02/1943) carried a death notice for Mary Macbean, stating that on Feb. 7th 1943, at a nursing home in Edinburgh, MARY MACBEAN, Librarian, Kirkcaldy, daughter of the late Mr Lachlan Macbean, Editor of "The Fifeshire Advertiser" had died. Similar notices appeared in the local newspapers. *The Fifeshire Advertiser* (13th February 1943) in an article entitled DEATH OF KIRKCALDY LIBRARIAN mentioned that Mary had taken ill while attending to her duties a short time ago, after which she was taken to the nursing home. As a librarian the *Fife Free Press* (13th February 1943) suggested Miss Macbean was a capable administrator, and "largely responsible for building up the excellent library service in Kirkcaldy with her genius for this type of work and a sound knowledge of literature."

Both the *Fifeshire Advertiser* and the *Fife Free Press* published a tribute to Miss Mary Macbean written by convenor of the library sub-committee P.K. Livingstone. He concluded the tribute by suggesting that:

"If we recognise the true assessment in life in loyalty and faithfulness in service, in little acts of kindness, in graciousness, and a spirit of lofty idealism then the town is poorer by the passing of this valued servant and friend."

Mary Macbean's gravestone can be found in Kirkcaldy Bennochry Cemetery (photographed Oct 2023).



Advertisement for a new librarian

The *Fife Free Press* carried an advertisement for the position of librarian, not long after it announced Miss Mary Macbean's death. There were no reports in the local newspapers discussing what kind of librarian was needed to fulfil the post, nor did the advertisement

specify the gender of the librarian. Applications were invited by men and women, but it was important that the successful candidate was to pass a medical, and the post came with a war bonus.



Advertisement for librarian *Fife Free Press* 20th February 1943 (sourced at Kirkcaldy Galleries)

Reporting on the legacy Provost Beveridge left for the “purpose of procuring a public park and library”, the *Dundee Courier* (10th March 1890) suggested “Kirkcaldy is in good luck.” Kirkcaldy continued to have good luck with the appointment of their first female public librarian. Mary Macbean worked hard for those who used the library, was engaged in the profession and supported those who worked in the library; a library we can still use for free, alongside an art gallery and museum.

Sources:

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The Fifeshire Advertiser

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Hearty thanks to the local studies team for their patience and support in helping me to discover the story of Mary Macbean.

The sources mentioned above provide the conclusion to the excellent research and skilled authorship which Kerry Briers has brought to her subject. Without question, Kerry's love of books, her calling as a librarian and her interest in heritage and history shine through. The team are happy to repeat that Kerry was the first name we considered when this Object first surfaced. Our confidence has very clearly not been misplaced. We believe that this is probably the first written review of the Kirkcaldy library service since 1950 – when P.K. Livingstone published *Kirkcaldy and its Libraries*. This follow-up is possibly long overdue and certainly stands comparison with Livingstone's seminal work.

We can only conclude by offering our sincere thanks to Kerry for another substantial addition to our project.