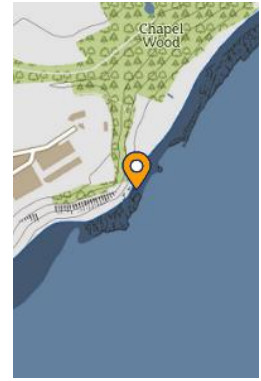




The Man i' the Rock.

A Tale of Neglect.



When this item was first under consideration, the intention was to concentrate solely on the “Man i’ the Rock” himself. However the story of the pathway where he stood grabbed both interest and attention. It should be remembered that the “low shore” pathway between Dysart and West Wemyss was widely considered one of the finest on the Fife coast, offering unmatched views over the Forth. It was disturbing to learn of the circumstances and neglect, which in time, saw it turned into a wilderness. The modern path (part of the Fife Coastal Path) above what little remains of the “Red Rocks” is endowed with a similar enjoyable vista but sadly with no memorial or mention of the “Man i’ the Rock”.

The pathway was also known as the “lockout road”. This was in recognition that large portions were created by the voluntary efforts of miners, when “locked out” of their collieries, during disputes. It serves as a timely reminder, that as well as being a beautiful walk, it was also the trail which carried men and women to their workplaces, facing long hours of toil in the days when almost all manual work was hard. No apologies are made in extending the scope of the research and the story.

This narrative begins in Dysart Parish Churchyard, on the afternoon of Monday the 15th of August 1898. A seventy six year

old man is being quietly laid to rest in the town of his birth. He grew up to be a weaver but had a change of direction (possibly forced on him by necessity) and for many years, had been an official of the Fordell Colliery Company. He was living in the little hamlet of Moorend, close to Crossgates, when his sudden death occurred.

1898 PATERSON, JOHN (Statutory registers Deaths 422/ 10)
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—Page 4—

1898 DEATHS in the Parish of Dalgety in the County of Fife

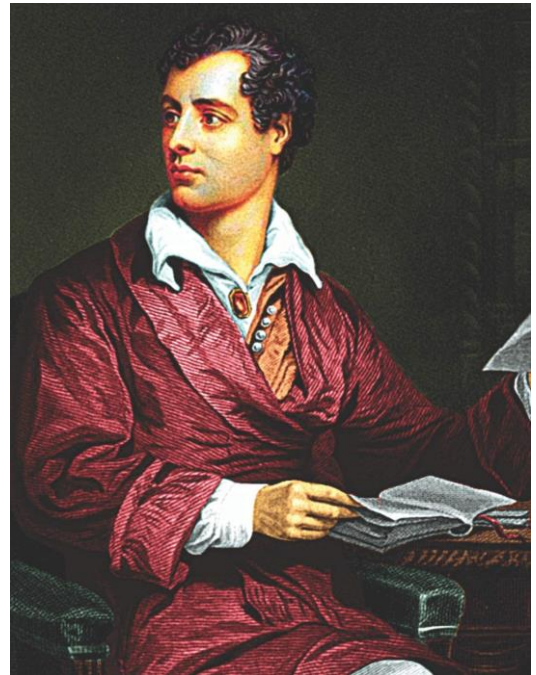
No.	Name, Sex, and Date of Birth	When and Where Born	Age	When and Where Died	When and Where Buried	Signature of Minister
9	John Paterson	1808	76	1898	1898	
10	Paterson	1808	76	1898	1898	
11	James Paterson	1808	76	1898	1898	
12	John Paterson	1808	76	1898	1898	

His name was John Paterson and although he had no artistic training, he appears to have had a natural skill for painting, especially watercolours. The talent which brought him fame, whilst artistic, was as far

removed from painting as it is possible to get. John Paterson was the creator of the carving known far and wide as “The Man i’ the Rock”. Although known locally by this name, the carving is Paterson’s representation of “The Prisoner of Chillon”, who was Bonivard, Prior of St.Victor’s in Geneva. He was chained for four years, to a pillar at the entrance to Chillon Castle near Montreux, Switzerland until freed by Berness in 1536. Bonivard is



immortalised in the poem by Lord Byron (he of mad, bad and dangerous to know fame).



This is a story from the picturesque Fife coast between Dysart and West Wemyss, admired by locals and visitors alike, which was reduced to rubble and wasteland by the lack of thought and action by every; county, town , parish and district council who had jurisdiction over the area. This article could just as easily be entitled – “Nothing to do with us”. Some things never change and possibly, a landmark at the western end of the bay, Seafeld Tower, will soon suffer the same fate. Wringing hands after the event is no use to anyone and certainly does not disguise ineptitude.

[The Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian of Saturday the 20th August 1898](#) gives us the brief facts of the deceased and goes on to tell, “the site which he chose for his figure is a very favourable one, namely a recess of the “Red Rocks” midway between Dysart and Wemyss, when on the beautiful walk which runs above the

beach. At the time the work was executed – 1851 - this was a favourite meeting place for the young men of the two villages.”

The article continues, “Mr. Paterson who was at this time like many of the adults in the district, engaged as a hand loom weaver. He had shown taste for carving, while many of his comrades were loitering on the Braes, he was trying his “prentice hand” at carving two heads on the face of the rocks.”

“His efforts meeting with considerable approval, he decided to venture on a larger scheme. Having read Byron’s “Prisoner of Chillon”, he set his heart on carving a representation of the prisoner. A suitable rock having been chosen, his friends assisted him to clear the face of it, so that he might proceed with his operations, and throughout the summer evenings, whilst his work was in progress, his labours were witnessed by his critical companions.”

“The whole of the carving was done by himself, with the exception of the chain with which the prisoner is bound to the rock. In this particular he had the assistance of the late Mr Williamson, Wemyss, who afterwards earned a high reputation by his beautiful carvings in parrot coal, which attracted great public attention, and some of which of which are still preserved in Wemyss Castle. The figure which is the attitude of supplication is well proportioned and is really a wonderful production for one who had no training and was even unaccustomed to the use of the sculptor’s tools.”

“For some years after the sculpture was completed, no particular care was taken of it, and it was considerably defaced by stones being thrown by boys. The preservation of it was taken in hand by the people in the district, and, as a result of a public subscription, a parapet wall and railings were erected. In addition the figure has occasionally been refreshed by a coat of paint, sometimes being tastefully painted in flesh colour with the clothing etc. touched up in appropriate hues. At other times the whole work has been covered in a glaring blue”.

“Of the sculptor who has departed, it may with truth be said that he has engraven his memory on his native rocks”.

We read in the [Dundee Courier of the 21st August 1878](#) that “some twenty two years ago, John Paterson. A weaver in Dysart, quite unknown for any ability as a sculptor, astonished the neighbourhood, by cutting out in the “Red Rocks”, about a mile east of the burgh, a most striking figure of the “Prisoner of Chillon”, which has been very well admired by the people of the district and by all our tourists. The Earl of Rosslyn and Captain Wemyss surrounded the work of Paterson’s genius with a substantial stone wall and iron railings, but the storms of upwards of twenty years have told severely upon the wall and the rock immediately surrounding the figure.



We are delighted to know that some gentleman of Dysart and Wemyss are about forming a committee to raise funds to have the wall repointed and the figure painted and otherwise better protected. We understand that the weaver-sculptor is still in the land of the living, although he has resided out of Dysart for some years. May we suggest that this committee present Paterson with a little token of acknowledgement, in giving us a work of art that is the delight of the entire neighbourhood”.

As the Earl of Rosslyn and Captain Wemyss had at their own cost, put the wall and bars in place to offer some level of protection, that this committee’s purpose was to restore and repair what was there rather than any additional work.

[The Fifeshire Advertiser from the 23rd August 1889](#) gives us a little anecdote, which is not about the beauty of the spot or the skill of the sculptor. Under the heading “Rather Queer” we find that “at an early hour on Sunday morning, one of the worthy sons of the Parish of Wemyss, who had been it is said, at Kirkcaldy Flower Show, had found himself at the “Man i’ the Rock”. On thoroughly awaking, found that not only his coat but his boots had taken their departure. The “Gentlemen in Blue” have the matter in hand and hope to be able to solve the mystery”. (The evils of strong drink?)

The Fife Free Press of the 13th November 1897, quotes from an article in “The

Cycle” written by “Rambler”. It again highlights the pride of the area in the carving and their efforts at maintenance.

It also carries a dark connotation.

“Rambler” supplies in this week’s edition,” a very nice picture of the “Man i’ the Rock”. The subject of the illustration is to be seen at the “Red



Rocks”, a place where reputed witches were burnt, sits on the Fife Coast, about a mile from Dysart and overlooking the sea. In the course of time the inhabitants give him a flesh coloured coat of paint every year and we are very proud of it”.

(The annual painting could be as a result of the aforementioned committee’s efforts).

In **The Fife Free Press of the 20th July 1901** is the first appearance of the “Man” in the new Century. The article indicates that he has had his annual coat of paint. Mr Bell, a tailor, supplied the paint with Mr Paul executing the work. The “Man” now sports a flesh colour with the railings in a green hue.

The Dundee Courier of 19th March 1901 has an interesting story, which is not about the beauty of the area but wanton destruction. It appears on the 1st March, one William Baxter of Eglington Place, set about throwing stones at a telegraph pole beside the “Man”. One of the insulators was broken and at Cupar Sherriff Court –

Baxter had the option of a fine of thirty shillings or ten days imprisonment.



1905

A sad story is told, both in [the Fife Free Press](#) and [the Fifehire Advertiser in June 1905](#). John Masterton (18), a ploughman at Blair Farm, had gone with a friend for a swim, just below the “Man”, after tea on the 15th. Masterton was a strong swimmer, his friend was not. Ten minutes after going into the water, “without shout or struggle, he suddenly disappeared”. The friend could do nothing but fetch help. A boat was launched from West Wemyss but by the time they were on the scene an hour had passed. They located the body, which was carried back to the farm, where Robert, his Father was Grieve and Foreman. John was the only son.

Another accident is reported by [the Fifehire Advertiser on the 12th May 1906](#). On this occasion, a horse belonging to the proprietor of a merry-go-round was grazing in the area above the “Man i’ the Rock”. It appears to have fallen over the cliff and was found dead from a broken neck.

The Fife Free Press letters column carries an angry letter from “Ratepayer” in **December 1906**. The letter makes the point that when rates, including those for the upkeep of roads are high, it is not too much to expect that our goings “to and fro” should be made pleasant or as pleasant as possible. “Ratepayer” points out that the road by the “Man i’ the Rock” is “paradisial in the summer time” but at present is “in many places a perfect quagmire”. “Whenever there is heavy spate of rain, the water comes pouring down from the high ground in cataractial fashion, falling on the road in perfectly formed miniature waterfalls, which, however entrancing in their beauty by day, are at nightfall, in the patchy darkness, sources of the greatest danger and discomfort.” He continues that two years previously there had been a huge landslip and he believes that unless action is taken – there will be another. “Foot passengers are subjected to the greatest jeopardy and danger and this is in addition to wading ankle deep in mud. “Hundreds of people use this path daily and surely it is the business of someone -Parish, Town or County Council – to see the road put into a passable condition.” The final barb is “In the wilds of Connemara, or in far off Timbuktu, such a condition of things might be expected, but at the doorstep of a well governed town like Dysart, one looks for better things”.

Under a headline “Oh What Roads” we are told that the “Man i’ the Rock” has been hidden from view for the past two weeks.” This is simply because the road approaching thereto, has been utterly impassable” the article then states that “if anybody wishes to win eternal fame, and to earn everlasting gratitude, a speedy means of earning both lies to hand in doing something, either public or private, to put the road in this much frequented part in a decent state of repair” (**Fife Free Press 21st March 1908**)

In the edition of the same paper on the **11th July 1908**, we learn at length of the new premises in the High Street for Dysart Co-operative Society. We are told about work done in the fleshing department, which is novel and “the first of its kind to be done on this side of the Forth” Messrs James Duncan & Co from Glasgow, tile and marble contractors, have given an artistic treatment to some of the internal walls. “The tiles depict many local scenes including St. Serf’s Tower, Ravenscraig Castle, the Noop Rock, the Dubbie Braes and the Man in the Rock amongst others”.

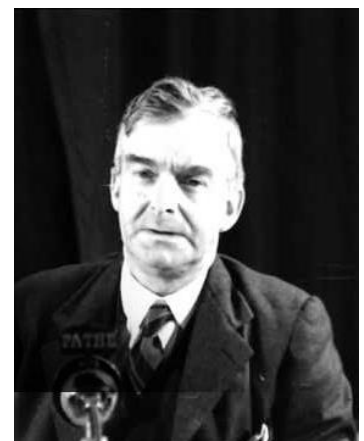
In a report on the **29th May 1913 in the Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette**, issues raise their head again, regarding the condition of the right of way between Wemyss and Dysart by way of the “Man i’ the Rock”. Wemyss Parish Council had received a letter from the Kirkcaldy and Dysart Council. In it they intimated that they had agreed that the road should be repaired and they had also asked the Trustees of the Earl of Rosslyn to underpin the dangerous overhang above the “Man”. They would like the Wemyss Council to join in on the repair. Although much of the area requiring repair, was in Dysart, it was felt that as it was mainly used by Wemyss and Dysart workers, there was a mutual interest. The Parish Chairman indicated that he felt they could not go out of their own boundaries to assist another Parish Council. They agreed that they should perhaps make good their own part of the right of way and leave Dysart to make good their portion. “They might appoint a committee to meet with the Dysart body but they would not be committed to spending a halfpenny, because they would have to come back to the Council before anything was decided”.

“On this non-committal understanding, it was agreed to meet the Dysart Committee at the spot”

In the Fife Free Press of the 11th April 1914, "St Serf" has a letter published, where he acknowledges and thanks Councillor Barclay for raising the issue of the dangerous road between Dysart and Wemyss. He then chides him for neglecting to highlight the condition of the "Man i' the Rock". He writes "Poor chap, if it were not for his chains, he would surely climb over the railings, and make tracks for the nearest tailor to get decently clothed. The man on the chain, at the present time, with his blistered hide is a sorry sight. Putty and paint would effect a wonderful reformation. The weather is gradually releasing him from his chains and should no attention be paid, the poor fellow ere long, will do the disappearing trick and the place that has known him so long, will know him no more. Dysart Town Council ought to see that the man in chains is not neglected. Come away Barclay let us see you move on the matter".

This letter clearly stung Councillor Barclay (Fifeshire Advertiser 6th June 1914) but he had a shock in store, when he raised it at the Town Council meeting in June. "Councillor Barclay said people had repeatedly asked him why nothing was being done to preserve the "Man in the Rock?" The Provost smilingly replied that he had forestalled him. He thought if Mr Barclay saw the "Man i' the Rock" now, he would give him (Provost Anderson) a special vote of thanks. He had had it freshly done up, and on Sunday, it was surrounded with people delighted to see the Man in his fresh paint".

"Councillor Westwood * suggested that a small brass plate, with an inscription recording how the sculpture came to be there, should be inserted in the rock. Treasurer Laing said the "Man in the Rock" was outside the burgh, and



it would require to be done by public subscription". (The letter of the law, not the spirit of the law?)

* Councillor Westwood was in his second year as a Councillor and rose in the political ranks to become a Member of Parliament and eventually being appointed Secretary of State for Scotland in the post-war Atlee government. He died in a car crash and is buried in Dysart Cemetery.

The **Fife Free Press of the 5^t June 1914** shows that the "special committee" had indeed held a meeting with their Dysart counterparts. However a letter had been sent telling the Dysart Committee, that they were not prepared to assist in any way. At the same time, they thanked Dysart "for the manner in which they had met them". "Provost Anderson said the reply from Wemyss was rather regrettable". Councillor Barclay was less that pleased and said "the road in question was mainly serviceable to Wemyss people, and the Wemyss Parish Council, if they cared, had power to spend money of the repair of that road, whether it was in the Parish or not. When it was considered that about 100 girls from Wemyss and 50 / 60 men used the road daily, it was to be regretted that the Wemyss people could not see their way to do something in the matter".

"The Provost said it was a most serviceable road, especially to Wemyss people. Did the Council think they should do anything further in the matter?"

"Baillie Irvine said the Town Council of course could do nothing. Councillor Barclay agreed they had no power at all, but he would try what he could do with the Parish Council".

The **Fifeshire Advertiser of the 10th April 1915** shows us "Nero fiddling while Rome burns. Kirkcaldy and District Parish Council,

write to ask if Dysart Town Council will assist financially in the cost of building a wall close to the “Man i’ the Rock” to prevent further encroachment by the sea? The response is that “the Town Council could not undertake any financial help – but a special committee was appointed to confer with the Kirkcaldy and District Parish Council”.

It is not difficult to see that the civic fathers took no action but help was at hand. **The Fife Free Press of the 4th September 1915** carries an article, “The miners of Wemyss have made a wonderful improvement at a dangerous point, near the “Man in the Rock”. For a week o’ nights the labours of a score of men has been herculean in its nature. Stones of more than a ton in weight being built into a bang, in a rude but serviceable sea wall, all by hand labour alone”. Great praise is due to the miners for putting the road in a condition of comparative safety”. There is then an appeal that “it is to be hoped that the Landward Committee of the Parish Council, will see their way to extending the handrail a few yards, otherwise the labours of the miners on behalf of public safety will be so far in vain”.

The Fife Free Press on 19th February 1916 relates a story about a different “Man”. On this occasion at Cupar Sheriff Court, before Sheriff Armour-Hanney, appeared Bethia Martin or Souter, publican of “The Man in the Rock”, who was charged with selling beer at 9.06pm to Beaton Dingwall, 41 Edington Place, Dysart. Both had the option of 10 shillings or 5 days. It transpires that at the Dysart Licensing Court in April, the Chief Constable had no option other than to object to the renewal of her license. However he could report that since the court appearance, he felt a strong warning would suffice, as the business had been properly operated since. This was agreed and the license renewed.

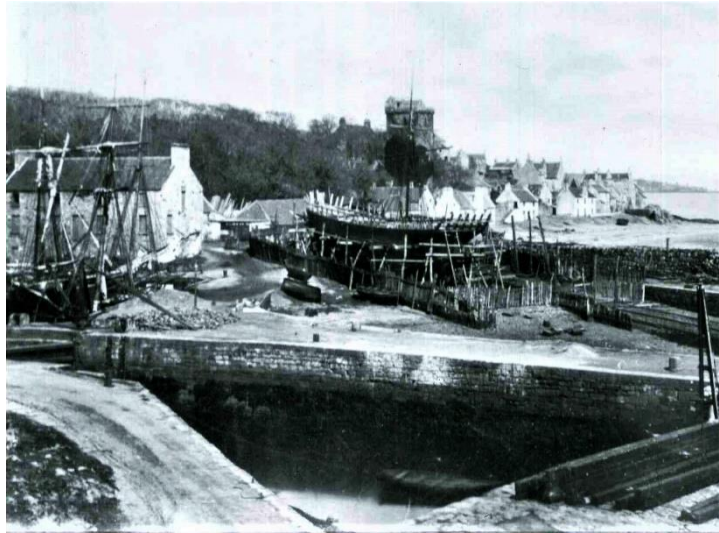
Mrs Souter had been left a widow in 1912. Her Husband, Andrew Souter was the licensee at the time. He had visited a relative in East Wemyss and they had enjoyed a motor outing. On returning to East Wemyss, they were talking when at 6,00pm; Andrew collapsed and without regaining consciousness, died at 10.00pm.

Sadly, Mrs Souter finds herself in trouble yet again at the Licensing Court on the 14th April 1917, when they met to discuss the renewals for; 1 hotel, 7 public houses and 6 licensed grocers. The Chief Constable again objected on the basis that on 17th October last – Mrs Souter had been convicted of supplying a pint of stout outside permitted hours. Baillie Irvine warned that he hoped this would be the last conviction, he then renewed all licences.

The Fife Free Press of the 20th June 1917 strikes a more sombre note. Lady Nairn is telling the Press about the vast number of letters of thanks she has received from prisoners of war. They were so grateful for the food parcels and books they have received. One speaks of his remembering when he was home to “the Lang Toun” on furlough and walked in the Public Park or by the Mill Dam. I am wondering if the “Man in the Rock” is on the same place yet”?

The Fife Free Press of the 7th July 1917 - once again, the road is in need of repair and at a special meeting on the 15th June,” the Town Council agreed to contribute £20 towards the estimated cost of making safe the portion of the road near “The Man in the Rock”. In the letter from the Clerk of the Kirkcaldy and Dysart Landward Committee seeking financial aid, it was mentioned that, a) The Earl of Rosslyn’s Trustees and the Earl of Rosslyn’s Collieries b) Messrs James Normand and Sons Ltd., and c) The Wemyss Coal Co.,Ltd., has each agreed to contribute £20 to the

cost". So we have £80 in total towards the cost, so what happened next?



The Fife Free Press of the 10th November 1917 tells us that at the November meeting of the Dysart Town Council, it is announced by Mr Foreman, that the final cost of the repair to the right of way passing the "Man in the Rock" was £96-1-3d. The Burgh share is £16-14-3d. It would seem that the ratepayers were saved £3-5-9d of expenditure, with Sir Michael only having to contribute just under £30 from his generous offer.

The Fife Free Press of the 29th March 1924 recognises the centenary of the death of Lord Byron and his "Prisoner of Chillon" is reproduced in full. The article gives details of the story behind the poem. "A 100 years ago, died that man of great poetic heart, Lord Byron, whose life and letters have formed the theme of

countless essayists. He was unconnected with Fife, but his sonnet "The Prisoner of Chillon" provided the inspiration for that cruder poem in stone, known locally as the "Man i' the Rock" and executed by John Paterson, a weaver, Dysart, well over 70 years ago". (Sonnet is the noun in the article and Byron died on the 19th April 1824 in Missolongi in Greece)

The Dundee Evening Telegraph of the 24th November 1926 broke the news that Dysart Police were trying to identify the body of a man which had been found on the foreshore below the "Man in the Rock". The body was currently in the mortuary at Dysart Cemetery and was believed to be around 40 years of age and five foot eight inches tall. A detailed description was given of the clothing and possessions, along with a description of some distinguishing marks. The body was thought to have been in the water for some 12 to 16 hours. A letter had been found" in respect of an application for a situation and it was hoped following that up would lead to discovering the identity".

We again stumble on failure to co-operate in the **Fife Free Press of 30th June 1928**. In local notes, under the West Wemyss banner, we read of "the deplorable condition of the road between West Wemyss and Dysart, which passes the "Man in the Rock" has been brought to the attention of the Kirkcaldy and District Landward Committee. The road just broaches the boundary of Wemyss Parish and at a recent meeting of the Wemyss Parish Landward Committee a letter was read out seeking co-operation in carrying out repairs. Mr D Dorward expressed the opinion that the Wemyss Committee could not interfere with roads outside their area as they could not levy rates for any expenses incurred there". The Clerk, Mr A Watson concurred and it was moved and agreed that no action be taken.

Matters had moved on by the time of the publication of the **Fife Free Press of 8th September 1928**. At the monthly meeting of Dysart Town Council, held on Tuesday evening with Provost MacLeod in the chair, a minute was read from a meeting of The Wemyss Shore Road Committee. It would seem that finally representatives of the local statutory bodies had got themselves together. The meeting was held at the Francis Pit on the 17th August, with attendees from the Landward Committees of both Kirkcaldy and Dysart and Wemyss Parish Councils. Dysart Town Council also had representation. “The meeting had been convened to consider the matter of the repair to the shore Road. The road had been used for hundreds of years, being in fact, long the main road between Dysart and Wemyss, and as well as being a beautiful walk it was still greatly used as a means of communication between Dysart and Wemyss. It had now become almost impassable owing to the operations of the Fife Coal Company causing a landslip in 1925. The Company had promised to repair the road at that point, but had not yet done so. A further obstruction of the road was caused by encroachment of the sea at the part of the road, known as the “Man i’ the Rock”, and where defensive work was done by volunteer effort in 1923”. Only some 2 / 3 feet of road were left at this point and it was therefore very dangerous. It was suggested that what was left of the road “would be torn away by the first gale, and thus all passage would be lost”.

Both spots were in Kirkcaldy and District Parish and members of the Committee “having visited both obstructing places, had carefully examined and considered them, unanimously agreed that the matter should be taken up by Kirkcaldy and Dysart Landward Committee with a view to having the necessary repairs carried out”.

At the same meeting, the Clerk to the Council read out a letter from the Board of Trade. They had made enquiries and found that the Fife Coal Company had been depositing redd and slag at an opening they had made at the foreshore at the Francis Pit. They were also discharging water from a pipe on the foreshore. They had informed the Fife Coal Company, that the Board of Trade should have been informed and plans forwarded. They indicated, as the actions were not dangerous to navigation, under present legislation, they could not assist the Town Council. The Town Council do not own the foreshore, but the ground above the high water mark was owned by the Earl of Rosslyn's Trustees and that they should communicate with that body and consider using the Police Act.



The Clerk explained that the Police Act only applied in the Burgh and this was outside the Burgh boundary. Councillor Patterson thought that they should have powers under the Police Act and Councillor Bellfield said

“no matter where it is, it was a nuisance and should be stopped”. The Provost made the helpful remark (?) that “as it was outside the Burgh. It would be difficult to prove that coal dust was being blown along in the direction of the Burgh”.

The matter was continued for consideration and presumably the dumping and the coal dust continued unabated without challenge.

The Dundee Courier of the 11th April 1931 featured Dysart in an article headed “Dysart’s Pressing Needs”. The article centred on

the town being badly in need of renovations and what were “the new custodians going to do about it”? This of course follows on from the amalgamation with Kirkcaldy. Housing was certainly the main topic but “summer haunts” were covered. The question can nothing be done for the Dubbie Braes is asked?



“Here was a beautiful summer haunt, a picturesque combination of woodland and pastoral scenery, enhanced by the beauty of, sand, sea and rock. But a great black cloak of

sea coal and redd is being allowed to completely mar the attractiveness of the spot”. Turning to the “Man in the Rock” the article mentions that “for nearly 70 years he has withstood the rigours of the weather, but he is showing signs of succumbing. The features are not as sharp as they were only a year or two ago. He is in danger of a quick demise from exposure. It used to be painted periodically, and this without doubt, was what preserved it for so long. It is close on 20 years since it last received a coat of paint”.

The item did accept that the spots were outside the burgh boundary and that Kirkcaldy District Council was the responsible authority and Dysart people would like to know if they intended doing anything on the matter”.

The Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette of 9th February 1937, speaks of an unusual occurrence. After a storm, a seam of clean coal was laid bare close to the “Man in the Rock”. “The seam is four feet thick and runs for 100 yards. Men have been busy with

picks and shovels –filling their cellars. It is first class household quality containing no stone “ribs”. It is unusual for coal of this thickness and quality to be found so near the surface”. The seam was found to contain passageways through it. It appears coal had been mined, probably centuries ago. “Five headings, each about six feet wide, had been driven from the beach, through the seam, pillars of coal about three yards wide dividing the passageways. The sides of the passageways bear the marks of some implements, perhaps wooden picks with iron points, similar to picks found in old workings nearly 30 years ago and now in Kirkcaldy Museum. Large crowds visited the scene at the weekend”.



The Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette of the 22nd June 1937, alerts us to events at the Wemyss District Council meeting, earlier in the week. There appears to be consequences from the February storm with the meeting looking at ways to restore the ancient right of way. Three schemes have been submitted for consideration. The first idea was discounted as it involved a new path from just past the “Man” which would rise steeply to the top of the hill and then descend again. The cost was £200. The second idea was to cut into the bedrock and construct a new path 13 feet lower. This was discounted as the tide would wash over the path and there was the continual worry of a landslide from above. The attraction was the cost, which was only £53, so all credit to the

Councillors for not going on the basis of cost alone. The proposal which was accepted was to blast away the overhang and the face of the cliff to allow a new path to be set further back. The cost of this option was £193. The obvious issue and it was certainly commented on, was that possibly in a few years' time – the water would be at the “door” of this path. However it was agreed to take the third proposal forward, as it was a better option than asking elderly people to make a 50 foot climb. The Board of Agriculture were willing to “give” them sufficient land to move the path far enough back. “It was agreed to adopt the £193 scheme, subject to the approval of Kirkcaldy Town Council, who were to be approached with a view to their making a contribution”.

The Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette of 21 December 1937 show that nothing has moved forward. In fact we now appear to be on a different course. The Clerk indicated that there had been a meeting with Mr Terras, the contractor of choice and Mr. Wigston, the Sanitary Inspector. While the estimate from June still held good, Mr Terras was of the opinion that the Council should look to “the construction of a new path from the top of the cutting west of the “Man in the Rock”, which would go over the high ground and come onto the field to the west of the point somewhat further inland than the path which the Council previously proposed to construct” Mr Beveridge went on to say, “If the Council agreed to this, he thought a plan showing exactly what was proposed should be prepared and submitted to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health for their approval”, and that, on the approval of both Departments being obtained, Mr Terras’ offer for carrying out the work at an estimated cost of £260 should be accepted”.

On the motion of Mr Hope, seconded by Mrs Stewart, the report submitted was adopted”

The **Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette of the 8th February 1938** carried reminiscences stretching back nearly seventy years to childhood. The talk is of the lovely walk by the “Man in the Rock”, past the Blair Burn and the old “tinkers” camp and in the spring, collecting daffodils in the woods.”Between the pit and the Red Rocks one could sit under a beautiful setting with the overhanging trees behind you, the sweet scented smell of the lush flowers in your nostrils, and the lovely rugged shore and waters of the Forth before your eyes. A lovely summers paradise. This little article also tells us of interest by Royalty! “Many years ago when Princess Louise, Queen Victoria’s daughter and wife of the Marquis of Argyle, was a guest at Wemyss Castle, she was a frequent visitor to the “Man of the Rock” and was very much interested in its creation and the rocks overlooking it”. (Princess Louise, married in 1871. Her husband died in 1914 after a long illness).



The Dundee Courier of the 21st May 1938 brings joyous tidings in that, “The Wemyss Parish Council have agreed to reconstruct the footpath between Dysart and West Wemyss – The Man in the Rock road – at a cost of £260. The contract has been won by R.Terras, contactor, East Wemyss”. (See 21st December 1937)

On the **20th September 1938**, we learn that encroachment by the sea on the ground between Dysart and Wemyss, had swept away the footpath on the sea shore. Despairing of the fight, Wemyss District Council had agreed with the owners of the allotments, the right to form a footpath up the slopes to link with the road from Chapel Gardens to Dysart. The strip of land was to cost £50, clearing any trees in the way and erecting fences as required. (it would seem the plan from 21st December 1937 and 21st May 1938 had failed to materialise).

The Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette of the 25th July 1939, tells that “another serious landslide had taken place at the “Man in the Rock” and left the road in a very dangerous condition”.

A very unusual crime was highlighted in the **Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette on the 8th August 1939**. Baillie Collyer remarked, at Kirkcaldy Police Court, that “This is a very serious offence. We are determined to stamp out promiscuous drinking. Thomas Wright of Stewart Street, Dysart had been found drinking alcohol outside permitted hours at the “Man in the Rock” public house. The accused was fined 25/- or twenty days.

The Leven Mail of the 21st February 1940 carried the banner headlines “Man in the Rock” – New Footpath Scheme”. It appears that the plan from December 1937 has not moved forward an inch.

The lengthy article covers a lengthy meeting of the Wemyss District Council, which was clearly bad tempered and acrimonious. A report was submitted by some members of the Council who had visited the road and the statue. Their recommendation was to delay the scheme for a new path as there had been more damage caused by erosion since the original

scheme and estimates had been made. County Councillor W. Main suggested that in view of what had happened, a delay should be made on the basis that the likely cost be in excess of the estimate.

County Councillor Jas. Hope (he had proposed the original motion to proceed in 1937), objected to the delay “ he had extracted minutes from the Council records dealing with this matter, and that they showed the matter had been discussed at length several times in the past three years and still nothing had been done”. He went on to quote from the minutes. However during his remarks, Councillor Main intervened with “I don’t think it is serving a useful purpose to go over all that”. Councillor Hope retorted “it is serving my purpose. I am here to represent the public of West Wemyss and they want this matter attended to and it is my purpose to try and get their wishes carried out”. He then indicated that by going over past minutes would remind members of some things they might have forgotten with the passage of time. Councillor Main, it would seem did not wish this to happen “it is not going to get us any further. We all know that we have been discussing this for three years. There is no use reading past minutes to show that”. Councillor Hope indicated that it was not his intention to read the minutes verbatim. “All I want to do is to refer to the important parts of the various minutes dealing with this, to show a new footpath is needed”. Councillor Main – “we all know it is needed”. Councillor Hope made an attempted check-mate with “Well if we know that it is needed, why are there objections to it”? Councillor Main said “there is no objection to the scheme. The point is that the price is not going to be the same as it was originally, and that will have to be gone into before we decide to go ahead”



The Man in the Arch, Dysart

Councillor Hope was not deterred and continued to quote from the minutes, especially from the late 1930s – letters confirmed that the ground required could be purchased for £5. He quoted another minute where the plan had been discussed in detail and an estimate of £300 given. Another letter from the Department of Health agreed with the scheme and also gave permission for the Council to borrow up to £300 to finance same. There was also approval from the Department of Agriculture for acquiring the land. The Clerk to the Council had been instructed in June 1939 to write to the Department of Agriculture that the ground had been acquired and to submit an offer from a contractor to carry through the work. “There had been a lot of complaints about not getting the roadway sorted. Men were travelling backwards and forwards every day to their work via the pathway, and it is dangerous. It meant a long deviation to go by the highway and to

take the bus was adding to their expenses. When members of the Council had met at that footpath, it was clear to all of them that the place was in a dangerous state, but people were still using it because it meant such a shortening of the way to their work”.

The Clerk, Mr Beveridge claimed that it would mean going through all the procedures for approval again. Councillor Hope argued that should surely only be the case with the contractor. Councillor Main then seems to have irritated Councillor Hope with “he did not dispute the people had a right to have the roadway made so they could use it, but it was a fact that the majority of miners did not use it at all”. Councillor Hope – “they are using it”. Councillor Main – “Oh no they’re not”.

Councillor Hope moved that the scheme be proceeded with and he found a seconder in Mrs Stewart, Methilhill. However, Councillor William Jack countered with “until he had the opportunity of seeing the place he was not prepared to agree with going on with the scheme”. He admitted that he had been invited to the original site visit but a Tuesday had not suited him. He clearly thought he was an important public personality, as he came away with “they must have known that particular day would not suit him, as it was a Tuesday”. Councillor Main was back in with “the miners don’t travel that road, they are going with the other pathway and the factory girls travel by bus”. Councillor Jack asked if it was because of the state of the path that the factory girls used the bus. Councillor Main said “That may be, but I don’t think so”. Councillor Jack found a seconder to his motion in Councillor McFarlane.

This was all too much for Councillor Hope who exploded, calling the whole thing an old County Council trick – “whenever anybody did not want a thing done, they got it delayed and delayed by this

sort of excuse, that they hadn't seen the spot and so on. There had been plenty of time for anyone to see the footpath and the (site) meeting that was held had been fixed at the last meeting of the Council. He did not know if Councillor Jack was at that meeting or not, but it was certainly arranged then".

By 4 votes to 3 the Council decided to delay coming to a decision until another meeting had been held at the spot.



The Fife Free Press of the 20th April 1940, reports on a meeting of the Wemyss District Council, the matter of a dangerous overhang close to the "Man in the Rock" was discussed. Mr James Hope had asked the Clerk to the Council if "there was any word regarding the blasting away of a dangerous rock on the Dysart to Wemyss road. He understood that there were provisions in the Burgh Police Act, for taking of action, to have such a danger removed". For some reason, it was the Sanitary Inspector who answered, using the oft used response "while that was the case, the ground was outside a special district or burgh". Mr Hope to his credit did not give up and suggested that "they write to the Board of Agriculture, pointing out the dangerous nature of the

roadway. The sooner the rock was blasted away, the safer it would be for the public who use the road daily". The Sanitary Inspector was tasked with making a survey of all the rights of way and reporting on their condition.

The Leven Mail of the 24th April 1940 had some further detail of the meeting. It appears that Councillors Hope pointed out that some years ago; the same Act had been used to remove trees which were growing on a cliff, at the bottom of which was the West Wemyss to East Wemyss path. It can only be assumed that this intelligence fell on deaf ears. Councillor Main had agreed that it was desirable that action be taken. We learn that the Clerk, Mr Beveridge was instructed to "take whatever steps that were legally available to deal with such a matter".

The Leven Mail of the 24th July 1940 bring us more bad tidings, when we learn that the Wemyss District Council is engaged in a dispute with the Department of Agriculture regarding the "alleged sale by the Department to the Council, of a piece of land which includes the "Man in the Rock" road. The Council want some overhanging rock over part of the roadway blasted away, in order to remove a dangerous ledge. They asked the Department to do it, but the Department replied that the ground had been sold to the Council. The Council replied that there had never been a concluded sale".

At the meeting a letter was read from the Department in which they restate that "they are of the opinion that a completed bargain for the sale of the ground to the Council had been made, and that therefore the liability to carry out the work which they proposed as necessary to make the footpath safe was the Councils".

The Clerk to the Council, Mr Beveridge, indicated that it had been suggested that the Council do the work but if they did “work of that kind might make themselves responsible and become liable to pay for the purchase of the ground”. Councillor Main asked “if it was a completed bargain if it was not paid for. What is to be the position “? Mr Beveridge again restated – “if you do something on the ground that may make you liable to pay for it”. Mr Main kept going with “how are we to prove there was no completed sale”? Mr Beveridge replied “that is not for us, it is for them to prove there has been a sale”.

Was the death knell of the road and statue sealed with the next statement?

“it was decided to let the matter drop”.

For the consequences of these eight words, see below.

The Leven Mail of the 4th December 1940 brings the inevitable news – “Rock Collapsed – There was a large fall of rock at the Blair Road, near the “Man in the Rock”, during the week, when hundreds of tons of debris, crashed onto the shore”.

In the Fife Free Press of 31st May 1947 we learn that there is to be a new trophy presented to the Dysart Boating Club, to be competed for by yawls. The Proprietor of the “Man in the Rock”, Thomas Henderson has gifted the trophy and it will be known as the “Man in the Rock” trophy.



In the Leven Mail of 6th August 1947, we learn of some good news – “For some time now the footpath between West Wemyss and Dysart on the foreshore has been anything but safe. This is

particularly so in the area close to the “Man in the Rock”, where the footpath more resembled a mountain track than a roadway for pedestrian use .Over- hanging boulders presented a constant menace and few if any dared to use this footway. But new blasting operations have taken place, and the path is once again safe for pedestrian use”.

The Dundee Evening Telegraph of the 3rd December 1947 tells us that Wemyss District Council is worrying about the effects of water and weather erosion on a castle and a statue. The castle is of course MacDuff and the statue the “Man in the Rock”. “They are going to ask the Ancient Monuments Board to have them preserved”.

The Fifehire Advertiser noted on the 21st August 1948 in their “50 Years Ago” section, that 50 years had passed since John Paterson was laid to rest. A little fresh information is provided, in that after weaving, he had been coal grieve at one of the Earl of Rosslyn’s pits and then on the Wemyss Estate. He had moved to Fordell around 1870.

The first mention in the 50s comes in the **Fife Free Press on 9th September 1950**. An advert offers “The Man in the Rock” public house for sale and offers are to be made to Gibson & Spears, Dow&Son, then at 170 High Street.

The Fife Free Press of 3rd March 1951 gives a report on a talk delivered by Mr James MacNaughton, delivered in the Sinclairtown Library to a packed audience of over 300, including Provost Young. We are told many were turned away. It was probably not his intention to light a spark but that was the outcome. “Mr James MacNaughton has performed a signal service for the townspeople of Kirkcaldy, by preserving

photographic slides of many of the town's historical and most interesting features, which with all the changes wrought by the passing of the years, are among the only pictorial records left to us on scenes that were once familiar". We learn that "Mr MacNaughton has devoted many years to the study of the history of his native town, and shows at all times, great willingness to share with others interested, the knowledge which he has acquired". The talk covered all the areas of the town and was so well received that Baillie Wright, chairman, indicated it would be repeated on the 14th. So much nostalgia was present it clearly sparked an interest in the "now badly disfigured Man in the Rock"

. The talk "was rich in legend, anecdotes and reminiscences, and was warmly appreciated by the large audience". "Provost Young, in proposing a vote of thanks, to Mr MacNaughton, praised his work in keeping alive the traditions of the past, upon which all future progress and developments must be built". The Provost also "expressed gratitude to the townspeople for their widespread interest in their town's history".

The talks brought about a raft of reminiscences in the press, all making the same points, the previous splendour and civic pride, and now the steady demise of the heritage.

One of the best came from a Dysart lady (Anne Lumsden), who had emigrated to New Zealand but had returned on holiday, after 26 years to visit to the town of her birth. Her letter was published in the **Fife Free Press on the 25th October 1952**. Her words speak volumes and after talking about the people and places she had seen, she wrote "there was also the terrible disappointment at seeing the once beautiful beach and Dubbie Braes so horribly disfigured. I couldn't get over it for a long time. I also went to the "Man i' the Rock", after an awful journey along past the Dubbie

Pit and on to Wemyss Woods to pick primroses, I thought what a pity to let things go like that.

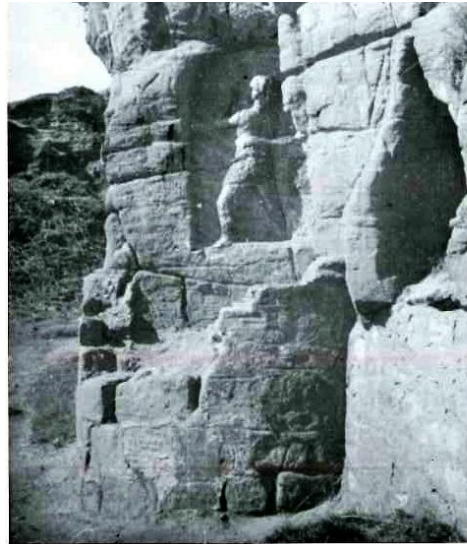


I am not ashamed to say I wept". "I hope someday to pay another visit to the dearest spot on earth for me – the "Saut Burgh".

On the **18th October 1952, the Fife Free Press** informs "The Council approved a recommendation of the Provost's Committee not to accept an offer dated September 11th, by D Leonard, sculptor, Southport, to model at a fee to be arranged, a replica of the "Man in the Rock", for installation on the original site on the West Wemyss shore road or some other site selected by the Council".

The Fife Free Press of the 1st August 1953 tells an interesting tale of a Dysart yawl – "The Firefly"- which was launched on Monday the 27th July. Skippered by Mr Tom Carrington of 32 Bellfield Crescent, on Wednesday 29th at the Dysart Regatta, it took home the "Man in the Rock" cup and was second in "The Westwater Cup". Mr J Anderson from Kirkcaldy, met with bad luck in the first race of the day. Sailing 5th in his yawl "Ravenscraig", as he

approached the first buoy, he began to overtake the leaders and built up a 100 yard lead, when the mast “tie” frayed and threatened to snap. The yawl had to be towed into the harbour. However, he obtained some degree of consolation in being placed third in the “Man in the Rock” cup.



1956

The Fifehire Advertiser of 15th August 1953, gives us some details of the sculptor, the poem and the inspiration for his work. The piece also carries grave warnings as to the condition of the figure and its surround. It has to be assumed that this piece was prompted by the condition of the figure. It was certainly two years too late for the centenary of its production.

We learn that “he was often seen with mallet and chisel in the vicinity of the “Red Rocks” carving out faces, one or two of which are still to be seen, although somewhat indistinctly”.

The reason for the choice of his masterpiece is that “in 1851 the Rev. M. Muir, then Minister of the Parish, being struck by the power of Mr Paterson’s genius, induced the amateur sculptor to try his hand at the “Prisoner of Chillon”.

We are offered a little history of Bonivard and Byron’s poem before grave and gloomy warnings follow. “Some years after 1851

a railing was erected round the figure but the railings have been pulled down, as has the coping wall around the statue. Can nothing be done to preserve this interesting work in the manner it deserves? Unless action is taken, the tale of the “Man in the Rock - the romantic or the real – will indeed become a tale with no tangible association”.

An unexpected source of local news is the **Kirkintilloch Herald of the 10th January 1955** – when we learn the “mine host” at the “Man in the Rock” is one, Jose Giannandrea, a former goalkeeper with the local junior football team Kirkintilloch Rob Roy and Stirling Albion. We learn that he is a member of the House’s darts team and they have gone through the league undefeated. We can only assume it was a slow week for news in Kirkintilloch!

The Fife Free Press in its 26th February 1955 edition devotes headlines and space to the perilous situation of the “Man in the Rock”. Under a substantial headline we learn that -“At Wemyss District Council meeting on the 24th, Councillors Alexander Eadie and Robert Grieve reported on a survey they had been delegated to make on the danger threatening the “Man in the Rock”, as a result of the sea tunnelling some eighty yards underneath the site of the old carving. “The right of way is completely destroyed” said Councillor Eadie. He added that they had examined the undermining caused by the sea and further remarked: “the Man i’ the Rock” is going to be lost. Time will see to that. The only solution is we try to make a new right of way over the hill on which the statue stands. There will be difficulties but I feel that Kirkcaldy Town Council might be anxious to preserve this right of way as well. It is only a matter of time before the whole structure is going to collapse. We should move the statue before it is too late. It would be a tragedy if the sea were allowed to take away

“The Man i’ the Rock”. He suggested that an expert be called in to make an examination and that the District Council approach Kirkcaldy Town Council for financial help. The suggestion was approved.

The piece goes on at some length in detailing the history of the statue and then comments “ while few will dispute the verdict by Andrew S.Cunningham in his book “Dysart, Past and Present”, that the “Man i’ the Rock” is a piece of painstaking work rather than a work of art, Dysartonians and the inhabitants of West Wemyss, at least the older members of these communities, looked upon the “Man i’ the Rock” as a friendly landmark on the very pleasant pathway linking the two places on the “low Road” The article covered the building of the plinth and the railings being put in place and tells us the figure was kept painted up until the time of the last war. The article concludes with “during the way years and the post-war years the pathway suffered greatly, mainly due to the effects of coast erosion, and the once familiar and well kept “Man” is now more or less forgotten and dilapidated. The railings were removed in the war, and the wall suffered damage which was never made good”.

The article concluded with another strongly worded attack on the “Decay of Dysart’s Beauty Spots”. The argument was based around the “once happy hunting ground for Dysart district trippers, bur now a black desolate spot, the victim of waste products from the bowels of the earth” It went on to talk about the “fun and gaiety, with picnic parties, band performances and it is even more difficult to recall one could walk along the top part of the Dubbie Braes through a wooded pathway, with the scent of wild roses and the view of the Firth through the trees to stir the imagination”.

The concluding shot was “in recent years the “low road” to West Wemyss has degenerated from a pathway offering a pleasant stroll, to something more worthy of the climbing abilities of a mountain goat. The only solution seems to be a pathway at a higher level, using the expression in a strictly professional sense, which of course, means that the “Man i’ the Rock” will either have to be removed to a place of safety or left to his fate”.

“So much has been lost in Dysart and district already – must the “Man i’ the Rock” follow suit” These were the stark and sombre final words of the article.

The Fifeshire Advertiser of the same date also carried the above story. On the same page they covered Kirkcaldy’s Town Clerk, Mr Charles D. Chapman’s conservation credentials. He was telling all and sundry, that if need be, he would arrange compulsory purchase of the Adam designed mansion – Viewforth Tower.



The intention was to demolish the property, to allow the building of flats.

This vandalism followed hot on the heels of the demolition in 1931 of Gladney House, birthplace of the Adams' brothers. Kirkcaldy clearly believes that naming a street after this famous family is more than adequate recognition. Scotland is indeed fortunate that Burns' birthplace is in Ayrshire and not Kirkcaldy.



The articles brought another flurry of letters including an evocative reminiscence from Alex Logan, published in [the Fife Free Press of 12th March 1955](#), who could also remember upwards of 70 years before. It is a wonderfully evocative piece written from the heart. The letter opens with “So that grand piece of work performed by a humble weaver of Dysart is in danger as a result of the encroachment of the wild seas. It was not only a landmark and a pride to Dysart citizens, old timers like myself, but down the years since 1851 it has been visited and marvelled at by thousands of visitors”. Mr Logan goes on to tell that he himself had spoken to Princess Louise and others in her group – “I was privileged to have the opportunity of speaking to the Princess about the man who carved the figure”. Further into the letter he writes “time and tide, as the years come and go, take in their

stride a heavy toll, and I'm sad and sorry to see the famous landmark and beautiful surroundings are in danger of being lost. As a sentimental old timer I sincerely trust that something will be done to preserve the famous "Man i' the Rock" from the same fate that has befallen the Dubbie Braes, for so many years a magnet for pleasure seekers, natives and visitors alike, who spend long hours of enjoyment on the Braes and adjoining beauty spots"

Mr Logan goes on to tell how he had written a book some years previously, "Recollections of Dysart" where he had dealt in full with the beauty spots of the area. He commented that "For many years now Dysart has lost many of its beauty spots and other famous places. The losing of our famous harbour and dock was a sad and lasting blow but the memories of its beauties and industrial activity remain a grand memory", Alex lists many of the sites, sights and folks which have gone but moves towards the climax of the letter with "The low Wemyss road in the days of yesteryear, at early morning, was always busy with the miners of Dysart going to their work in Wemyss collieries and the countless cheery lassies travelling the road to their work, and during the summertime, it was both to the natives and visitors a lovely walk with all its scenic beauties, now alas gone for all time. I for one will be sad and sorry to see the doom of the famous "Man i' the Rock" sealed but I trust that sad fate will never materialise. As a great lover of my native "Saut Burgh", it saddens my old heart to see its beauty and other spots disappearing".

A week later, **the Fife Free Press of the 19th March 1955**, carried a letter from Mr R Colville of Quarry Brae who was wishing to "add my plea to his (Alex Logie) that "The Man in the Rock" be spared. It certainly will be a difficult job at this late hour. The cause of the trouble, of course, is that for years the redd has been tipped 300

or 400 hundred yards westwards of the point. This redd aided by the heavy easterly seas has now heightened the beaches by about 10 feet. As a result the “Man in the Rock” point now receives the full weight of the heavy seas, which previously would have spent themselves in the bay. Still, where there’s a will, there’s a way”. Mr Colville then proceeded with his own recollections of Auld Dysart.

The Fife Free Press is certainly keeping the issue in front of its readers. On the **30th April 1955** they remind readers of Councillor Eadie’s dire warning given in February and the fact that it was hoped a meeting could be arranged with Kirkcaldy Town Council. “A meeting has now been arranged between Wemyss District Council and Kirkcaldy Town Council on this matter. There is no doubt that in spite of the ravages of time, which have resulted in a visitation to “The Man i’ the Rock” becoming a major feat of exploration, instead of a gentle meander, as in days of yore, this carving of “The Prisoner of Chillon” by a Dysart weaver in 1851, is still regarded with considerable sentiment locally. If it is possible, within reason to preserve the carving, then many local people will rejoice that at least one ancient landmark is not following in the way of so many others”.

The Fife Free Press on the 14th May 1955 is the harbinger of bad news. On Thursday the 12th Wemyss District Council met a deputation from Kirkcaldy Town Council, on site to discuss the possible methods of the stone figure which was carved in the rock face and also keeping open the right of way along the coast. “Rock falls had made the pathway difficult and left the carving in a perilous position. In the vicinity there is a colliery bing which sweeps down to the shore and across the path there is an overhead pit superstructure. Many of the amenities in the locality

including the once popular Dubbie Braes have disappeared". "Commenting on the position yesterday, Councillor A. McLean, convenor of Kirkcaldy Town Council Parks Committee, who visited the site on Thursday, said "we felt very sympathetic towards the preservation of the "Man in the Rock" but we all agreed that the sum necessary to preserve properly this area would be at least in the region of £20000 - £25000. The sea has washed in under the rock face at the very base of the path and under the rock face on which the figure is sculpted. Most of us were surprised at the extent of the erosion. Considering the matter fully, along with officials, we decided with regret that we could hardly face up to such expense or even suggest that the matter be pursued further". He did add the helpful offer that the Kirkcaldy deputation felt they could support the Wemyss District Council in any approach they might make to the N.C.B. regarding an alternative right of way.

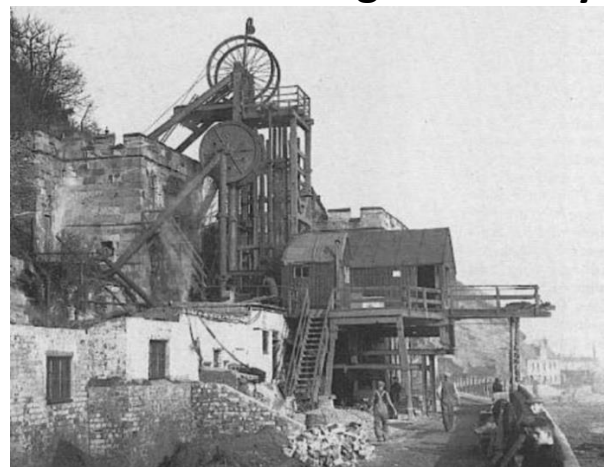


"While there will be feelings of regret locally that this landmark will not last much longer, it has to be agreed that, in view of the general devastation in the vicinity and particularly the dangerous approach from Dysart end and any expensive scheme of preservation is out of the question."

The Fife Free Press on the same date also covered the story. It carried a comment from a Wemyss Councillor W.Wilson “we will have to leave it in the lap of the gods how long he stands there”. Councillor McLean who lived in Crammond Gardens, Templehall added “I came here hoping something could be done but it is hopeless”. (“most of us were surprised at the extent of the erosion” suggests most of the decision makers did not have a clue about the situation before arriving on the site).

It would now seem that following the advice contained in a letter to **the Fife Free Press on the 14th May**, might be the only hope left, when R F Bamford “suggested that readers can help to carry forward a United Evangelical effort by prayer”. On reading further, its purpose was not to save the “Man in the Rock” but for the upcoming meeting of Kirkcaldy Churches Council.

The Fife Free Press of the 21st May 1955 sees action being taken in the shape of warning signs. Members of Wemyss District Council agreed with their Clerk’s action in having signs placed in the area. One was to be placed at the Dysart end – the other at the Wemyss end. “it was also agreed that negotiations should be opened with a view to getting an alternative right of way”.



John Barclay wrote from Sutherland Street to the **Fife Free Press on the 21st May 1955**, disputing the cost and the fact the case was

hopeless. He pointed out that the “Man in the Rock” was almost the last asset on Dysart’s balance sheet. He accepted that it would take a magic wand to restore the Dubbie and Piper Braes to their former glory but it did not have to be that way with the “Man in the Rock”. “This is not the first time the sea has menaced the “Man in the Rock” and adjoining footpath. On other occasions Dysart Town Council always gave a lead and along with the County Council and Woods and Forrest Commissions, were able to preserve them from the toll of the sea”. His argument was that stones and sand were available in plenty on the spot and surely the cement and labour required to fill in the gully made by the sea and face up the rock in front could be done at a reasonable cost. Mr Barclay believed that the scheme which the Council felt would be required was “grandiose and not absolutely necessary”.

His alternative suggestion was to move the 5 foot carving some 30 / 40 yards up the brae, where it would be safe for another century. He then made the very telling point “I, along with many others, am not convinced the position is hopeless, and the no-use attitude which is apparent from this report would not operate , if by perchance some 40 / 50 yards of Kirkcaldy Prom were taken away by some storm “.



“Time is still on our side to preserve this carving and footpath, which have been and still are a pleasure to many Dysart folks and

others, both young and old. The young live on hope – the old on memories. Is it too much to hope that “remit back for further consideration” will be the decision of our Council when this matter appears on the agenda”.

The 16th July 1955 sees the Fife Free Press announcing that a statue planned for the Town House precincts will symbolise the spirit of Kirkcaldy. On Monday the 11th the full Council meeting was asked to approve the spending of £1800 on a bronze statue, to be placed on a plinth on the western elevation of the Town House. Councillor Lonie asked about the cost and if it were necessary, whilst Baillie John Kay agreed the cost was “far too high”. He then referred to the “history attached to the matter” Although deploring the cost of the statue, “it had been decided on as an integral part of the building as far back as 1936”.

In the architect’s report which was presented to the meeting, it was stated “that in order to appreciate fully the statue’s significance as a part of the building, they would explain that the exterior design of the building had always depended on four main elements – a simple treatment generally; dominant emphasis on the main entrance; the careful placing of a statue facing up Wemyssfield to balance the long office wing; and a dominant tower feature to unify the composition. Each of these was interdependent and considered necessary for the successful treatment of the whole.”



The Architects considered “that to be successful, the statue should fulfil two functions, one architectural the other social. It should symbolise the spirit of Kirkcaldy. It should represent something vital with which each citizen could identify himself; something that he could be proud of; something with real significance so that if a picture of it was seen at the ends of the earth it would always form a strong link with his home town”.

Then comes the unbelievable pronouncement “**It would in time, symbolise Kirkcaldy and have even more significance than the “Man in the Rock”.**

Clearly with the above “nonsense” in mind, members were told that a sketch had been prepared for “consideration and adoption”. “it was of a vigorous young man, confident of success in the world before him – at his feet. He was sowing, confident of his skill; confident of his own merit and that his skill and labour would in the future allow him to reap a good harvest of prosperity not only for himself and his family but no less for Kirkcaldy and for the folk of the Lang Toun.

Baillie Kay supported the motion and in his remarks hit out at the “Fife Free Press” whom he claimed “had played no small part with their sneers about 2d on the rates, in their efforts to prevent the erection of the Town House”. His main argument for justifying this expenditure of £1800, seems to be “that it had been agreed in 1936” and “if one looked upon the wall – there was a plinth for it” It transpired that the cost of the new building was now, not the £90,000 original estimate but £250.000. The motion was passed and the final comment came from Provost David Wright – “this is a building which will stand for hundreds of years and it is really one of the best municipal buildings in Scotland”. (Some things never change – the suspicion that minds were possibly

focusing on legacy – not unlike the 1.6 million pounds being spent on the promenade today).

So neither the “Man in the Rock” nor the replica ever found their way to the Town House. It is however heartening to know that the population are all fully aware of the significance of the “Spirit of Kirkcaldy” and how it has overtaken the “Man in the Rock” in the public consciousness,

On the 13th August a letter appears in the Fife Free Press which emanated from New Zealand and by the hand of “ex-Dysartonian”, who wrote about a holiday they had had in Dysart in 1951. The writer had left Dysart as a 16 year old and in 1951, had returned, with their daughter to the town of their birth. The



daughter had been filled with stories about Dysart’s delights and beauties on the trip and both were looking forward to sampling the attractions the Burgh had to offer.

The letter included the following – “I could not believe it. I went to see the lovely golden sands I had dreamt about. Black ugly stretches of mud met my eyes .Where were the Glasgow and Edinburgh visitors? Where were the children playing? All I saw was a lady gathering coal. I wasn’t to be put off; it couldn’t be as bad as they said; so off we went to the Dubbie! Well! Nothing but desolation met my eyes. Where was the cafe? Was that the Bing – that big monstrous black mountain spilling into the sea and all over the braes we used to spend hours sliding down? Where were the wild rose bushes? Where was everything?

We have earthquakes in New Zealand but no earthquake could have done a better job. Hadn’t we come 13000 to see all this? I was determined to go on. ”I’ll take you to pick primroses and see the “Man in the Rock” tomorrow (I told my Daughter). We went up by the Braes and along by the mine but that was as far as I got. I found it was blocked from there and the road narrowed to nothing, so we had to slip and slide till our boots were sunk in mud. For every step we took, we seemed to slide back two and seemed in danger of falling into the sea. My daughter was crying with terror and I with disappointment. However we managed to see the “Man in the Rock” but his railings had gone and he seemed so lonely. But the primroses and daffodils were there and we seemed to be in a different world on the Wemyss side”.

I hope I won’t be accused of sentimentality when “the “Press” tells me the “Man in the Rock” is also due to disappear and it seems there will be nothing left soon. To many Dysart people abroad it is still home to them and it makes us very sad to read about it. I congratulate John Barclay and others who are advocating something should be done and I am sure if you found it possible to open an overseas fund, hundreds of Dysart people

would be happy to send a contribution. What a pity Dysart does not have a "Carnegie" and are her Councillors only thinking of Kirkcaldy now"!

John Barclay is back in action supporting the comments of" ex-Dysartonian" in the following week's edition."Although coming from the other side of the world, no one could challenge or deny the assertions made regarding the declines in the past number of years of that once proud little burgh, and for taking up the cudgels on its behalf, she is to be commended.

"Clever men tell us progress is not an accident, it is part of nature itself. Certainly Dysart must be the exception. With the Ashlar on the way out, the Harbour, Piper's and Dubbie Braes knocked out, almost half of some of her streets made up of ghost houses (perhaps the rats share them as well) the majority of her sons and daughters, unwilling in many instances, transferred to housing schemes many miles away. Some of us at least, advocates of amalgamation as a means to progress, must ponder and say "I wonder". Certainly the two wooden seats at the Cross and the handrail in East Port are the only visible signs of compensation as far as I can see".

"I would not care to individualise but there were in both places, Dysart and West Wemyss, men who gave of their time and labour without reward for the keeping of this road and monument about to be discarded".

"Personally, I would be prepared in conjunction with others to play a full part by agitation or deputation, convinced that time is still on our side in this matter".

"Certainly our Town Councillors cannot evade their responsibilities by dodging behind the backs or opinions of

officials whose birth and sentiments are far removed from the district”.

In the Fife Free Press of the George Barclay – the self proclaimed champion of “letters to the Editor” joins the fray. He opens with “May I be allowed to reply to John Barclay’s sentimental emotionalism. Had John like our New Zealand friend “come from the other side of the world” to have a quick look at “Auld Dysart”, there would have been some excuse for his statements but he is a local person who has lived in the locality all his life and while he was a member of the Town Council, he never raised his voice for “Auld Dysart”. George took exception to the comment regarding two seats and a handrail – pointing out that in addition the “Grass has been removed from the top of the clock tower and indeed the structure itself had received a fresh coat of paint”. He did concede that people who emigrated did “get a kick” out of remembering their home and the people they knew. However those who stayed had to be “realistic and try to make things better for themselves and those who follow”. He certainly made a forceful point in indicating that in the absence of a Town Planning Act, houses in Dysart had been built by private individuals and the coal companies. But now following amalgamation, every possible space in and around Dysart was being built on by Kirkcaldy Town Council and there was now, Cook Street, Stewart Street along with Bellfield Crescent.

He went on to say that while many of the older generation enjoyed the limited facilities at the Dubbie and Piper Braes, the coming of Ravenscraig Park



where the facilities included, football pitches, training facilities, bowling greens, tennis courts, putting greens, bandstands, cafe and public conveniences. The contention was that “the gift of Ravenscraig we have been more than compensated for the loss of the Dubbie Braes, Piper Braes and the “Man in the Rock”. Councillor Barclay also suggested that with the “money being spent from Dysart Harbour to Kirkcaldy Harbour will make “Kirkcaldy and Dysart one of the most attractive resorts on the Fife coast”.

The Fife Free Press of the 3rd September 1955 carried a response from John Barclay but it was clear that the arguments had moved away from the “Man in the Rock” to more general policy matters. John concluded his letter with “I have no difficulties with the present Town Council, other than they might reconsider their present position to abandon the “Man in the Rock” and roadway. I think I speak for many when I say this right-of-way, a privilege for many of us appreciated in many ways including travelling to work night and morning, but while there is room for warning notices that the road is used by travellers at their peril, there is still room to do a little for the roadway.

Pens are poised again on the **10th September 1955 in the Readers' Letters Column of the Fife Free Press.** Regular Reader" comments on the earlier letter from John Barclay with -. "I have given some consideration to some of John Barclay's suggestions, especially the Man in the Rock". As he states, Dysart has lost the Dubbie Braes, the Piper Braes and the harbour etc. since amalgamation – so why should Kirkcaldy not carry on the good work and take over "The Man in the Rock"? According to John Barclay, the Council intends to spend some £2000 on the erection of a statue at the Town House. The ratepayers would be saved all that money if the Council would move the "Man in the Rock" along to the Town House. A few brushers could be hired from Frances Colliery to do the work of cutting out the poor auld dejected man from his rock prison. I know it is considered in some quarters, that the miner has fabulous wages, but I don't think the brusher's bill would hit that mark.

In the same edition (**10th September**), Robert Colville joins the fray with another strongly worded pronouncement. "I have noted with interest, the various letters in your column in connection with "Auld Dysart". I trust that I will be allowed to contribute and in particular on Councillor George Barclay's and what would therefore seem to be the official attitude towards the amenities which once represented the individuality of Dysart. "I have a respect for "Geordie" and feel that no member of the Council is more sincere and hardworking, both as a citizen and a Councillor, but as he is no doubt aware, when you are "amang the craws".....well?

"It would appear your correspondent would dismiss as sentimentality, the fact that people interested in preserving the simple things are annoyed and dismayed at the state of "The Man

in the Rock”, the beaches and the harbour. Everyone is well aware that the trouble has come from the dumping of redd over the Dubbie Braes and I quite accept the statement made, stating that Dysart Town Council capitulated when the old Fife Coal Company issued a warning – “no dumping – no work”. But what I can not understand is why it has been allowed to go on unchecked all these years. After all, if I dump muck in my neighbour’s garden, I will be dealt with mighty quick. Surely Kirkcaldy Town Council must see the writing on the wall if they look east at; Buckhaven, West Wemyss and Dysart. Surely they must know Kirkcaldy harbour can not escape. I would respectfully suggest Mr Editor that what riles the Dysart people is that it would never have been allowed to go on at Pathhead Sands or on the Esplanade”.



It just seems a pity that “the Man in the Rock” had not been situated just below Ravenscraig Castle.

Mr Colville then changes tack and his aggression is aimed at the state of the harbour with - “Geordie” dismisses the harbour question with a brief “they are not forgotten”. He questions when “Geordie” was last at the harbour, which he describes as “one of the most depressing and disgusting sights in Scotland. The old harbour, the pride of the old “saut burgh” is done for, strangled”.

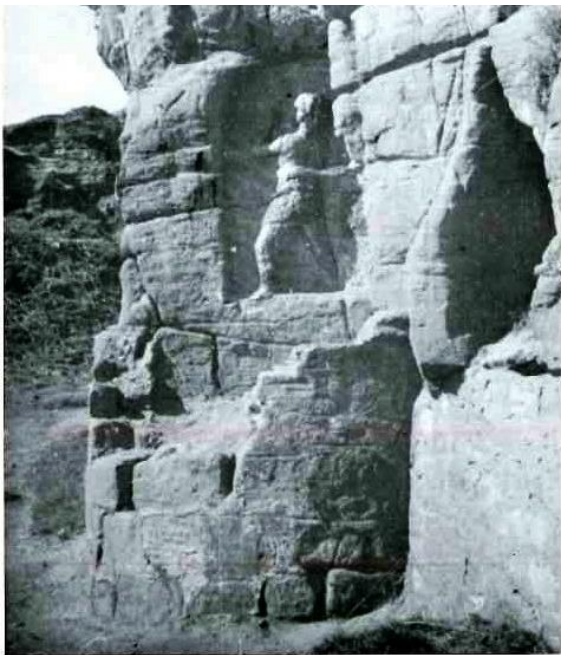
He goes on to say that one half of the fleet of proud sailing yawls are “already sold and in St Andrews”, while every other boat is

left high and dry for 9 hours out of 12. I can not agree that a dredger should be at Kirkcaldy 12 months a year and never used to help. The conclusion he comes to is that if a strong swift channel of water was kept running out of Dysart harbour, it would deflect the redd outwards and stop the westward drift which now covers the noop rocks.

Letters were now becoming more general and overtly political on all sides. There could be no doubt that the fight, the footpath and the statue were or were going to be lost. George Barclay wrote another letter to the [Fife Free Press on October the 22nd](#), which covered many issues, including the situation relating to the Tory Government's promise to build 300,000 houses nationally along with their decision to raise the bank rate, which in Councillor Barclay's eyes prohibited the building of municipal houses. He went on to consider whether the Ratepayers Association would field a candidate in Dysart at the next election. Clearly his interest in the "Man in the Rock" had ebbed and the thrust of his letter was the defence of Dysart's Labour Councillors. His penultimate paragraph seems rather strange with the statement that "I have never had any doubt in my mind as to who was responsible for the right-of-way and the "Man in the Rock". It has merely been a delusion that the "Man in the Rock" was a Dysart possession. The boundary of the Royal Burgh of Dysart was the well to the west of the Dubbie Braes. I think there may have been an agreement to include the Dubbie Braes but never at any time did the right-of-way or the "Man in the Rock" come under the jurisdiction of Dysart Town Council"

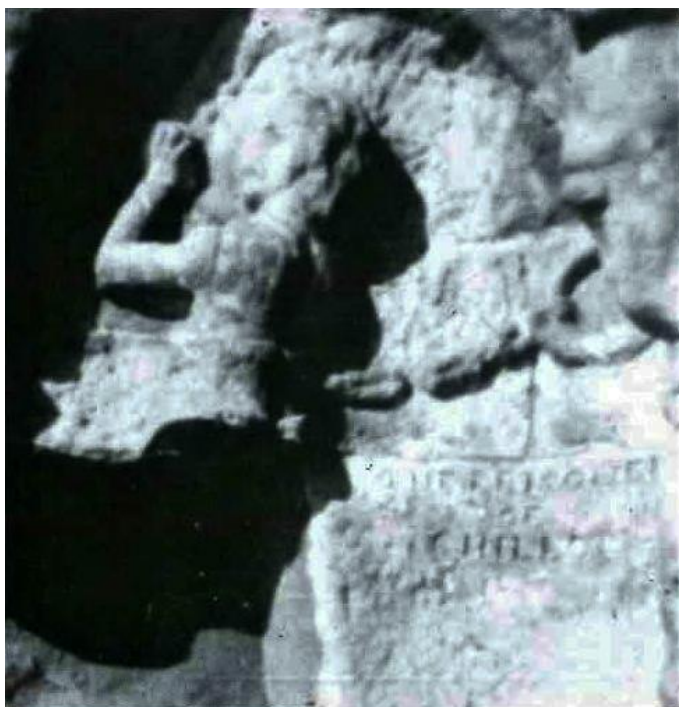
His evidence for this statement is a minute from 15th May 1955, where after a site meeting it was minuted by Wemyss District

Council that the cost to repair was too prohibitive and that a new pathway should be sought. It would almost seem that his suggestion was that Wemyss District Council was responsible for the right-of-way. This ignores the whole history of the route being littered with agreements of “you repair your portion, we will look after ours”.

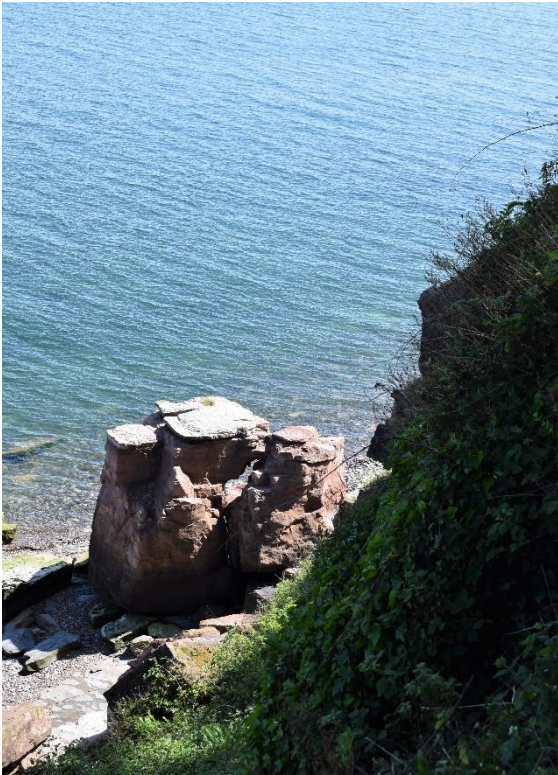


1956

It seems once again that this is aimed at ensuring no mud is flung in the direction of either himself or his fellow Dysart Councillors, when the statue falls and the route is forever lost. At no point had anyone suggested that the Dubbie Braes and the statue were inside the town boundary. However opportunities to save this landmark, carved by a Dysart man, along with a path which for decades had served both Dysart and West Wemyss so well, deserved more co-operation rather than the classic – nothing to do with us.



1968



In any event it is of no consequence, the statue and the path were left to rot and eventually fell into the sea, following a violent storm in October 1970. With the benefit of hindsight plus improved knowledge of coastal erosion, the carving was probably always in a perilous place. However, it is hard to believe that something more could not have been done. Surely some effort could have been made to try and move the statue or

indeed produce a barrier to thwart the sea? Would it have happened had it been in Kirkcaldy was the question? The answer is probably not but, then again, Seafield Tower will in all likelihood suffer the same fate. Would it not have been an idea, when a substantial number of homes were planned for Seafield, to include the builders stabilising the Tower as part of the planning consent? They say you can only reach the future through the past and if that is the case – Seafield Tower will meet the same grim fate.

Who was to blame? Responsibility must sit on the shoulders of every council; county, district or parish who had any jurisdiction (legal or moral) over the statue and certainly the coal companies, both private and nationalised, do not escape their share of the responsibility.

Councils and councillors still seem to cling to the same logic and belief which concluded George Barclay's final letter (22/10/55) – "a subject that is only in the minds of the older generation which will only be a memory for some and forgotten by the many in a few years time".

On reflection perhaps he has a point. Times change and the young look to the future and the elderly often to their memories. It cannot be denied that almost all the correspondence and criticism came from the pens of the older generation, who remembered the glorious memories "Auld Dysart" had seared into their minds. In general, the young want change and advancement and, saving the pathway and the statue was probably furthest from the minds of that generation. Of course the young grow old eventually and it becomes their lot to start to look backwards. Perhaps it always was so and perhaps it will always be so. Was the "Man in the Rock" just another victim of the circle of life?

If this story achieves nothing else, perhaps it will galvanise our current civic fathers to cast their eyes on Seafeld. Tower. Can we allow another of Kirkcaldy's few remaining historic structures to crumble into the sea?



The Prisoner of Chillon

by Lord Byron (George Gordon)

My hair is grey, but not with years,
Nor grew it white
In a single night,
As men's have grown from sudden fears:
My limbs are bow'd, though not with toil,
But rusted with a vile repose,
For they have been a dungeon's spoil,
And mine has been the fate of those
To whom the goodly earth and air
Are bann'd, and barr'd—forbidden fare;
But this was for my father's faith
I suffer'd chains and courted death;
That father perish'd at the stake
For tenets he would not forsake;
And for the same his lineal race
In darkness found a dwelling place;
We were seven—who now are one,
Six in youth, and one in age,
Finish'd as they had begun,
Proud of Persecution's rage;
One in fire, and two in field,
Their belief with blood have seal'd,
Dying as their father died,
For the God their foes denied;—
Three were in a dungeon cast,
Of whom this wreck is left the last.

There are seven pillars of Gothic mould,
In Chillon's dungeons deep and old,
There are seven columns, massy and grey,
Dim with a dull imprison'd ray,
A sunbeam which hath lost its way,
And through the crevice and the cleft
Of the thick wall is fallen and left;
Creeping o'er the floor so damp,
Like a marsh's meteor lamp:

And in each pillar there is a ring,
And in each ring there is a chain;
That iron is a cankering thing,
For in these limbs its teeth remain,
With marks that will not wear away,
Till I have done with this new day,
Which now is painful to these eyes,
Which have not seen the sun so rise
For years—I cannot count them o'er,
I lost their long and heavy score
When my last brother droop'd and died,
And I lay living by his side.

They chain'd us each to a column stone,
And we were three—yet, each alone;
We could not move a single pace,
We could not see each other's face,
But with that pale and livid light
That made us strangers in our sight:
And thus together—yet apart,
Fetter'd in hand, but join'd in heart,
'Twas still some solace in the dearth
Of the pure elements of earth,
To hearken to each other's speech,
And each turn comforter to each
With some new hope, or legend old,
Or song heroically bold;
But even these at length grew cold.
Our voices took a dreary tone,
An echo of the dungeon stone,
A grating sound, not full and free,
As they of yore were wont to be:
It might be fancy—but to me
They never sounded like our own.

I was the eldest of the three
And to uphold and cheer the rest
I ought to do—and did my best—
And each did well in his degree.
The youngest, whom my father loved,
Because our mother's brow was given
To him, with eyes as blue as heaven—

For him my soul was sorely moved:
And truly might it be distress'd
To see such bird in such a nest;
For he was beautiful as day—
(When day was beautiful to me
As to young eagles, being free)—
A polar day, which will not see
A sunset till its summer's gone,
Its sleepless summer of long light,
The snow-clad offspring of the sun:
And thus he was as pure and bright,
And in his natural spirit gay,
With tears for nought but others' ills,
And then they flow'd like mountain rills,
Unless he could assuage the woe
Which he abhorr'd to view below.

The other was as pure of mind,
But form'd to combat with his kind;
Strong in his frame, and of a mood
Which 'gainst the world in war had stood,
And perish'd in the foremost rank
With joy:—but not in chains to pine:
His spirit wither'd with their clank,
I saw it silently decline—
And so perchance in sooth did mine:
But yet I forced it on to cheer
Those relics of a home so dear.
He was a hunter of the hills,
Had followed there the deer and wolf;
To him this dungeon was a gulf,
And fetter'd feet the worst of ills.

Lake Lemman lies by Chillon's walls:
A thousand feet in depth below
Its massy waters meet and flow;
Thus much the fathom-line was sent
From Chillon's snow-white battlement,
Which round about the wave inthralls:
A double dungeon wall and wave
Have made—and like a living grave
Below the surface of the lake

The dark vault lies wherein we lay:
We heard it ripple night and day;
Sounding o'er our heads it knock'd;
And I have felt the winter's spray
Wash through the bars when winds were high
And wanton in the happy sky;
And then the very rock hath rock'd,
And I have felt it shake, unshock'd,
Because I could have smiled to see
The death that would have set me free.

I said my nearer brother pined,
I said his mighty heart declined,
He loathed and put away his food;
It was not that 'twas coarse and rude,
For we were used to hunter's fare,
And for the like had little care:
The milk drawn from the mountain goat
Was changed for water from the moat,
Our bread was such as captives' tears
Have moisten'd many a thousand years,
Since man first pent his fellow men
Like brutes within an iron den;
But what were these to us or him?
These wasted not his heart or limb;
My brother's soul was of that mould
Which in a palace had grown cold,
Had his free breathing been denied
The range of the steep mountain's side;
But why delay the truth?—he died.
I saw, and could not hold his head,
Nor reach his dying hand—nor dead,—
Though hard I strove, but strove in vain,
To rend and gnash my bonds in twain.
He died—and they unlock'd his chain,
And scoop'd for him a shallow grave
Even from the cold earth of our cave.
I begg'd them, as a boon, to lay
His corse in dust whereon the day
Might shine—it was a foolish thought,
But then within my brain it wrought,
That even in death his freeborn breast

In such a dungeon could not rest.
I might have spared my idle prayer—
They coldly laugh'd—and laid him there:
The flat and turfless earth above
The being we so much did love;
His empty chain above it leant,
Such Murder's fitting monument!

But he, the favourite and the flower,
Most cherish'd since his natal hour,
His mother's image in fair face
The infant love of all his race
His martyr'd father's dearest thought,
My latest care, for whom I sought
To hoard my life, that his might be
Less wretched now, and one day free;
He, too, who yet had held untired
A spirit natural or inspired—
He, too, was struck, and day by day
Was wither'd on the stalk away.
Oh, God! it is a fearful thing
To see the human soul take wing
In any shape, in any mood:
I've seen it rushing forth in blood,
I've seen it on the breaking ocean
Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,
I've seen the sick and ghastly bed
Of Sin delirious with its dread:
But these were horrors—this was woe
Unmix'd with such—but sure and slow:
He faded, and so calm and meek,
So softly worn, so sweetly weak,
So tearless, yet so tender—kind,
And grieved for those he left behind;
With all the while a cheek whose bloom
Was as a mockery of the tomb
Whose tints as gently sunk away
As a departing rainbow's ray;
An eye of most transparent light,
That almost made the dungeon bright;
And not a word of murmur—not
A groan o'er his untimely lot,—

A little talk of better days,
A little hope my own to raise,
For I was sunk in silence—lost
In this last loss, of all the most;
And then the sighs he would suppress
Of fainting Nature's feebleness,
More slowly drawn, grew less and less:
I listen'd, but I could not hear;
I call'd, for I was wild with fear;
I knew 'twas hopeless, but my dread
Would not be thus admonishèd;
I call'd, and thought I heard a sound—
I burst my chain with one strong bound,
And rushed to him:—I found him not,
I only stirred in this black spot,
I only lived, *I* only drew
The accursed breath of dungeon-dew;
The last, the sole, the dearest link
Between me and the eternal brink,
Which bound me to my failing race
Was broken in this fatal place.
One on the earth, and one beneath—
My brothers—both had ceased to breathe:
I took that hand which lay so still,
Alas! my own was full as chill;
I had not strength to stir, or strive,
But felt that I was still alive—
A frantic feeling, when we know
That what we love shall ne'er be so.
I know not why
I could not die,
I had no earthly hope—but faith,
And that forbade a selfish death.

What next befell me then and there
I know not well—I never knew—
First came the loss of light, and air,
And then of darkness too:
I had no thought, no feeling—none—
Among the stones I stood a stone,
And was, scarce conscious what I wist,
As shrubless crags within the mist;

For all was blank, and bleak, and grey;
It was not night—it was not day;
It was not even the dungeon-light,
So hateful to my heavy sight,
But vacancy absorbing space,
And fixedness—without a place;
There were no stars, no earth, no time,
No check, no change, no good, no crime
But silence, and a stirless breath
Which neither was of life nor death;
A sea of stagnant idleness,
Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless!
A light broke in upon my brain,—
It was the carol of a bird;
It ceased, and then it came again,
The sweetest song ear ever heard,
And mine was thankful till my eyes
Ran over with the glad surprise,
And they that moment could not see
I was the mate of misery;
But then by dull degrees came back
My senses to their wonted track;
I saw the dungeon walls and floor
Close slowly round me as before,
I saw the glimmer of the sun
Creeping as it before had done,
But through the crevice where it came
That bird was perch'd, as fond and tame,
And tamer than upon the tree;
A lovely bird, with azure wings,
And song that said a thousand things,
And seemed to say them all for me!
I never saw its like before,
I ne'er shall see its likeness more:
It seem'd like me to want a mate,
But was not half so desolate,
And it was come to love me when
None lived to love me so again,
And cheering from my dungeon's brink,
Had brought me back to feel and think.
I know not if it late were free,
Or broke its cage to perch on mine,

But knowing well captivity,
Sweet bird! I could not wish for thine!
Or if it were, in wingèd guise,
A visitant from Paradise;
For—Heaven forgive that thought! the while
Which made me both to weep and smile—
I sometimes deem'd that it might be
My brother's soul come down to me;
But then at last away it flew,
And then 'twas mortal well I knew,
For he would never thus have flown—
And left me twice so doubly lone,—
Lone as the corse within its shroud,
Lone as a solitary cloud,
A single cloud on a sunny day,
While all the rest of heaven is clear,
A frown upon the atmosphere,
That hath no business to appear
When skies are blue, and earth is gay.

A kind of change came in my fate,
My keepers grew compassionate;
I know not what had made them so,
They were inured to sights of woe,
But so it was:—my broken chain
With links unfasten'd did remain,
And it was liberty to stride
Along my cell from side to side,
And up and down, and then athwart,
And tread it over every part;
And round the pillars one by one,
Returning where my walk begun,
Avoiding only, as I trod,
My brothers' graves without a sod;
For if I thought with heedless tread
My step profaned their lowly bed,
My breath came gaspingly and thick,
And my crush'd heart felt blind and sick.
I made a footing in the wall,
It was not therefrom to escape,
For I had buried one and all,
Who loved me in a human shape;

And the whole earth would henceforth be
A wider prison unto me:
No child, no sire, no kin had I,
No partner in my misery;
I thought of this, and I was glad,
For thought of them had made me mad;
But I was curious to ascend
To my barr'd windows, and to bend
Once more, upon the mountains high,
The quiet of a loving eye.

I saw them—and they were the same,
They were not changed like me in frame;
I saw their thousand years of snow
On high—their wide long lake below,
And the blue Rhone in fullest flow;
I heard the torrents leap and gush
O'er channell'd rock and broken bush;
I saw the white-wall'd distant town,
And whiter sails go skimming down;
And then there was a little isle,
Which in my very face did smile,
The only one in view;
A small green isle, it seem'd no more,
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,
But in it there were three tall trees,
And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,
And by it there were waters flowing,
And on it there were young flowers growing,
Of gentle breath and hue.
The fish swam by the castle wall,
And they seem'd joyous each and all;
The eagle rode the rising blast,
Methought he never flew so fast
As then to me he seem'd to fly;
And then new tears came in my eye,
And I felt troubled—and would fain
I had not left my recent chain;
And when I did descend again,
The darkness of my dim abode
Fell on me as a heavy load;
It was as is a new-dug grave,

Closing o'er one we sought to save,—
And yet my glance, too much opprest,
Had almost need of such a rest.

It might be months, or years, or days—
I kept no count, I took no note—
I had no hope my eyes to raise,
And clear them of their dreary mote;
At last men came to set me free;
I ask'd not why, and reck'd not where;
It was at length the same to me,
Fetter'd or fetterless to be,
I learn'd to love despair.
And thus when they appear'd at last,
And all my bonds aside were cast,
These heavy walls to me had grown
A hermitage—and all my own!
And half I felt as they were come
To tear me from a second home:
With spiders I had friendship made
And watch'd them in their sullen trade,
Had seen the mice by moonlight play,
And why should I feel less than they?
We were all inmates of one place,
And I, the monarch of each race,
Had power to kill—yet, strange to tell!
In quiet we had learn'd to dwell;
My very chains and I grew friends,
So much a long communion tends
To make us what we are:—even I
Regain'd my freedom with a sigh.