

Kirk O'Muir.

## Graveyard and Gravestone Recording Report 2017-2019.



Kirk O'Muir Cemetery showing decay. Source: author's own.

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## **1. Introduction**

This report presents the results of the graveyard and gravestone recording of Kirk O'Muir Cemetery. The local community, represented through the Valley Renewables Group (VRG), initiated the John de Graham's Castle and Kirk O' Muir Community Project which was Heritage Lottery funded as part of the Year of Heritage, History and Archaeology. This graveyard recording project was carried out as part of the community project.

The main aims of the graveyard and gravestone recording were to reconnect the local community with the history of the graveyard and its social value as well as to record the graveyard and gravestones in context for future generations. Additionally, comparing the current state of the cemetery to the recording undertaken in the 1960s by the Mitchells provided more insight into the process of decay of the gravestones.

Graveyard and gravestone recording were carried out by Ross Greenshields and Hanneke Booij supported by Dr Murray Cook, Archaeologist at Stirling Council. During the John de Graham's Castle and Kirk O' Muir Community Project, Skyscape Survey carried out SUA flights over Kirk O'Muir which provided aerial photographs forming the basis of the plan of the cemetery. Volunteers including representation of Denny and Dunipace Heritage Society participated in the archaeological excavations which were directed by Connolly Heritage Consultancy (CHC) on behalf of VRG. Background research presented in this report has been kindly initiated and supported by Mrs. Sheila Laidlaw of the Carron Valley Heritage and Historical Society. Children from St Ninians, Fintry, and Buchlyvie and Ballikinrain Primary Schools visited during the project and helped to uncover and decipher some of the gravestones previously buried under the turf.

### **1.1 Location**

Kirk O' Muir Cemetery is situated at a remote location (NGR NS 7007 8401) in Central Scotland along the Carron Reservoir just off the B818 (Map 1, Image 1 and 2). Kirk O'Muir is part of St Ninians parish, a Church of Scotland parish in Stirling.

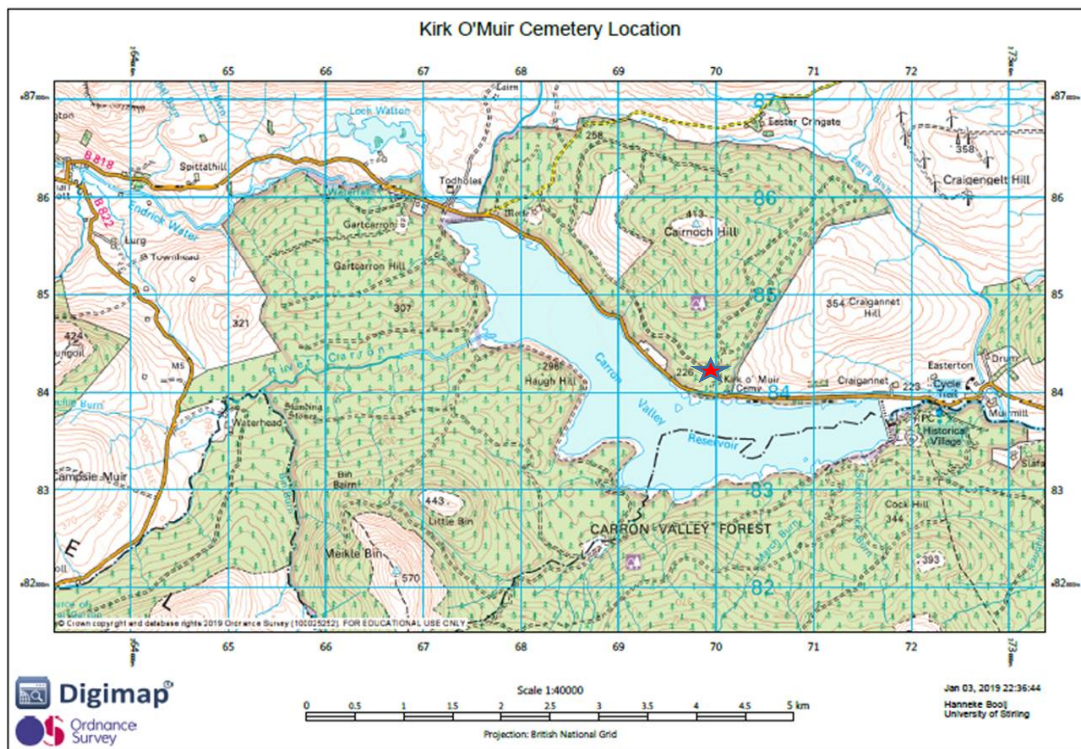




Image 1: Carron Valley Dam



Image 2: Carron Valley Reservoir seen from Kirk O'Muir



Map 1: Kirk O'Muir Location in the Carron Valley, Stirling marked with a red star. Source: Digimap.

## 1.2 Historical Background

Kirk O' Muir is a small cemetery surrounded by a stone wall. It is described on Canmore (ID 45979) as having had a chapel dedicated to St Mary, founded around the middle of the 15th century. The chapel is thought to have survived for approximately 200 years; however, there are currently no visible remains. Parish







Map 3. Both Kirk O Muir and Sr John de graham Castle marked as ruins on: A map of Stirlingshire from a Survey by William Edgar in 1745. Source: University of Edinburgh Library, Special Collections, Work ID 0043454.

### 1.2.1 Kirk O'Muir Conventicles

Each first Sunday in August, open air worship takes place at Kirk O'Muir to commemorate the outdoor services which took place in Scotland and presumably at Kirk O'Muir in the seventeenth century. Conventicles were unofficial religious meetings which happened in Scotland after the Religious Act of 1592 and the Conventicle Act of 1664 forbade people to hold religious gatherings outside the Church of England. The current Reverend of St Ninians, Rev Gary J. McIntyre, informed the Falkirk Herald (2014) that "People have gathered at Kirk O'Muir for more than 100 years on the first Sunday in August. The service remembers the Covenanters who formed an important movement in Scotland in the 17th Century." However, articles from the Stirling Observer seem to suggest that this may have been taking place for much longer. On Thursday 23 November 1865 (p. 2) it was reported that "After the demolition of the church, public worship was conducted for long series of years in the graveyard, under the canopy of heaven..." Money was then raised to build a chapel at Buckieburn, however "A sermon still preached once a year in the graveyard at Kirk o' Muir, when the weather will admit of it".

It is unclear whether Conventicles have been taking place ever since the seventeenth century or if there have been periods in which the ritual was ceased. Announcements in the Stirling Observer were found for the years 1914, 1915, 1917 with reports of beautiful weather (p. 3), and 1918. The Milngavie and Bearsden Herald of 6 August 1926 (p. 8) reported the Conventicles as being 180 years old and reference is made to the nearby ruins of Dundaff Castle where “resided Sir John de Graeme, the friend of Wallace”. The Stirling Observer (1930, np and 1933, np) covered the Conventicles in 1930 and 1933 with photographs of the cars lining the road (Appendix E). The Bulletin of 4 August 1930 (1930, np) reports the conventicles as being “centuries old” and “a place of worship in the days of Wallace and Bruce”.

The Stirling Observer describes the Conventicles again in 1939 and 1940 with the effects of the war becoming noticeable in 1941 with a mention of smaller numbers due to road transport issues (p. 3) and again in 1942 where a “smaller attendance due to petrol rationing” was reported. On 8 August 1944, the Stirling Observer (p. 3) reported that “For the first time in a quarter of a century a Christening took place at the annual Kirk O’ Muir Conventicle held on Sunday in the graveyard.” The christening indicates the importance of the Conventicle for those who attend these special services. A volunteer, representing Denny and Dunipace Heritage Society helped cleaning the gravestones and shared his stories of attending the Conventicles since he was a young boy. This illustrates how the Conventicles form an important part of Kirk O’Muir’s intangible heritage and its social value to its community. Social value (Jones, 2017) has been defined as encompassing “the significance of the historic environment to contemporary communities, including people’s sense of identity, belonging and place, as well as forms of memory and spiritual association”. The meaning of the commemorative act of the conventicles to the community may have changed over time, however, considering the older members of the Kirk O’Muir community have many memories going back to the late 1930’s and 1940’s, there is currently ample scope to record the social values and meanings of both older and younger generations.



### 1.2.2 Archaeological Research at Kirk O'Muir

As part of the community project, archaeological research was undertaken at Kirk O'Muir by Connolly Heritage Services. Excavations at Kirk O' Muir Cemetery took place over a period of four days. Connolly and Kdolska, aided by a group of volunteers, excavated five trenches within the graveyard boundary wall and one to the north of the cemetery. The full results can be found in their report: Connolly, D. & Kdolska, H. (2017) *Sir John de Graham's Castle & Kirk O' Muir Community Project. Data Structure Report*. The excavation revealed that the burial ground sits in an elevated position from the area outside the boundary wall caused by an increase in soil depth (Connolly and Kdolska, 2017, p. 25). Soil depth was increased in the second half of the nineteenth century most likely to enable more burials. As a consequence, earlier graves may be hidden under this newer layer of top soil and some graves may have been moved during this time, also to allow the creation of the centrally positioned Bow family graves.

One of the aims of the archaeological research was to determine the site of the church that once stood on Kirk O'Muir. Although the excavations did not uncover remains from the church, it was concluded based on map regression research that the church was located in the centre of the graveyard where the Bow family grave is currently situated (Connolly and Kdolska, 2017, p. 7). Due to the location, archaeological research could not take place at the centre of the cemetery as the graves could not be disturbed. Connolly and Kdolska concluded: "Given that William Edgar's 1745 map marks the chapel as a ruin as does Ainslie's map (1821; 'Muirkirk Ruins') and that both NSA and OS Name Books suggest it is gone by 1840s/1850s, this implies that the ruined structure was entirely removed between 1822 and 1841." This approximates the later Bow family burials which took place between 1818 and 1869. The Stirling Observer (1865, p. 2) discussed what had become of the stones of the Kirk and concluded that local oral history which describes the stones as being used to build farmhouses in the surrounding area were confirmed after inspecting the farmhouses of Muirmill, Craiganet and Kirk o' Muir. Although the dates on some of

these farmhouse stones were reported to be no longer legible, they were thought to “have adorned the walls of some more sacred building”.

Connolly and Kdolska’s map regression research (2017, p.7) also revealed the location of the local school which was situated to the left of the entrance gate of the graveyard which is consistent with local knowledge. As quoted by Connolly and Kdolska (2017, p. 7), the OS Name Books for Stirlingshire 1858-61 describe “a recently built small single story school house, with slated roof, located in the corner of the burying ground at Kirk O’ Muir, with average attendance of 30 pupils”. However, the school was in ruins by the 1860s.



*Image 7: Inscription on the stone inserted into the eastern gate pier; “This dyke and gate was repaired 1798”. (Source: Connolly & Kdolska, 2017, p. 32)*

Connolly and Kdolska (2017, p. 32) indicated that the boundary wall and the entrance were restored after the demolition of the school. Initial viewing of a large stone in the boundary wall on the right hand side of the entrance seemed to show a number of skull and bones, however, photogrammetry revealed the full inscription

(Image 7) commemorating a wall repair of 1798. This is confirmed by news in the Stirling Observer of 23 November 1865 (p. 2) “The present dyke was repaired few years ago by public subscription, but prior to that it was a very dilapidated condition. It had been repaired about seventy years ago, and on a stone, built into the dyke at the entrance, the event is commemorated. The back wall of the schoolhouse forms part of the wall of the graveyard, and when excavating for its foundation about twenty years ago, large quantities of human bones were disinterred, the most of which were in the outside of the present enclosure”. This news article indicates that burials took place beyond the current boundary wall of the cemetery. It is likely that the cemetery’s boundaries were different than its current size or could indicate that people were buried outside the boundary wall of the church which sometimes happened with those who were considered dissenters.

### **1.3 Previous Graveyard Recording**

Kirk O’ Muir has previously been inspected by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS 1963: 160) and in June 1969, Kirk O’ Muir Cemetery was recorded by the husband and wife team J.F. and S. Mitchell for the Scottish Genealogical Society (Mitchell & Mitchell, 1973, p. 190-191). The Mitchell recording has proven to be a valuable resource enabling comparison of the inscriptions recorded in 1969 with what remains of the inscriptions in 2017. However, it must be noted that the Mitchells recorded mainly the names, dates and ages of the deceased and not the full inscription on the stones or any other stone related information which therefore limits the scope of comparing the 1969 recording with this recording of 2017.

## **3. Method**

Kirk O’ Muir Cemetery was recorded on 4 June and 3 October 2017 using the Council for Scottish Archaeology’s Recording methodology and form. On 4 June 2017, vegetation and turf were cleared around the stones and the boundary walls with the kind help of volunteers (Image 3 and 4). The grass was cut by Stirling

Council. Gravestone recording was undertaken at the Kirk O’Muir Cemetery by authors between 6 September and 5 December 2017 again applying the Council for Scottish Archaeology’s Graveyard and Gravestone Recording method (Willsher, n.d.) which was previously used to record Kirklogie Cemetery in Stirling (Young, n.d.). To ensure a consistent approach to graveyard recording in Stirling, this method was applied to Kirk O’ Muir Cemetery as a whole and each gravestone individually. No GPS was used by volunteers as this equipment was not available to them. However, in September 2017, an SUA (drone) took aerial photographs which provided a basis to authors to create a detailed plan of the cemetery (*Appendix A*). Newly exposed gravestones uncovered after the drone recording were added to the plan manually and remain uncovered for the public to enjoy. Authors have numbered gravestones starting at 101 to avoid duplication of the Mitchell stone recording numbers which start with 1.

Photographic recording of each stone took place on 3 October and 5 December 2017 as recorded in *Appendix B*.



Image 3: Volunteers clearing turf at Kirk O’Muir.



Image 4: Kirk O’Muir prior to grass cutting.

Care has been taken during the 2017 recording to record the full inscription on the stones including a description of any trade marks, embellishments or other marks. The condition of the stones as well as any plant growth on the stones have been recorded in line with recommendations by the Council for Scottish Archaeology



Gravestone Recording (Willsher, n.d.). This provides some insight into the rapid process of weathering and erosion that is threatening the Scottish gravestone heritage. Until the later sixteenth century, graveyards were mostly devoid of monuments as those held in high esteem were buried inside the church (Willsher, 2005). However, post-reformation gravestones and monuments provide a record of the past including information on ordinary people such as their names, relevant dates, references to occupations and names of relatives. Recording of these historic graveyards is an essential tool to ensure these historic records will not be lost in the future.

As recommended by the Council for Scottish Archaeology, the graveyard recording includes recording of plant and wildlife as described in paragraph 4.3.

The full gravestone recording including the comparison with the 1969 recording undertaken by the Mitchells can be found in *Appendix C*. It must be noted that this overview is and is likely to remain a work in progress document as new information will continue to be added.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Graveyard Recording**

Kirk O' Muir Cemetery was recorded on 4 June and 3 October 2017 using the Council for Scottish Archaeology's Recording Form. The full result can be found in *Appendix D*.

Prominently visible in the centre of the graveyard is a large and unusually high mort safe of which the entrance gate has come off its hinges as can be seen in *Image 5*. Placement of mort safes against body snatching for medical research was prevalent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The ruined structure of the kirk was removed between 1822 and 1841 which approximates the later Bow family burials (gravestone 147 and 148) which took place between 1818 and 1869. However, this does not necessarily explain the presence of the 1760 burial of William Bow of Bougseid (nr 148) within the mort safe. This raises the possibility that this

gravestone was either moved into the mort safe at a later date or that burials had taken place on top of the ruins of the church previously. The unusually high mort safe is likely to have been built for protection against grave robbers who were buried between 1760 and 1869 (latter date by Mitchell, 1973, p. 191). Some of the surrounding graves were misaligned when replaced. Christian gravestones usually face east, stemming from the pagan tradition to face the rising sun which was continued in biblical tradition. However, number 107 seen in *Image 6* below faces west. Also, number 117 is broken and the bottom half has been misaligned. Numbers 143-146 placed alongside the mort safe all face south as can be seen in *Image 5* below. Again, this may be a consequence of gravestones being replaced in the nineteenth century.



Image 5: the unusually high mort safe at the centre of Kirk O'Muir



Image 6: gravestone 107 facing west instead of east.

In order to date the graveyard more accurately, an approach was chosen to uncover certain gravestones (all flat stones) based on the Mitchell recording. As it was clear from their 1969 recording, the oldest part of the graveyard is found on the west side of the mort safe with the exception of graves 156 and 162 as potentially seventeenth century on the east side. However, as discussed, these are likely to have been moved from their original location. Turf was therefore cleared from nine gravestones which have been left uncovered for descendants and the public to enjoy (stones 112, 115, 121, 127, 136, 150, 156, 162, 165). Some of these stones are dated as seventeenth century (156 and 162). The Mitchells did not record either of these

stones however, knew about stone 156 from previous RCAHMS records. Some uncovered stones are no longer legible, however, have the same slim flat stone with rounded edges style as other seventeenth and early eighteenth century stones and are suspected to be from around that time. Evidence of older gravestones was provided by a mention in the Stirling Observer, 1865 (p. 2) of the earliest stone then being dated 1605: “the earliest which we can distinctly decipher carries us back only to the year 1605 a.d., although some of the stones seem to be very much older than this one; but on these the storms of centuries have told their tales, completely obliterating both the dates and the names of the occupants below which they intended to commemorate”. Based on the graveyard recording and documentary evidence, it can be concluded that Kirk O’Muir Cemetery was in active use during the seventeenth century, the time of the Covenanters.

In addition to the uncovered stones, several gravestones remained turf covered or partly turf covered such as 138 which has been left under the turf but is dated by the Mitchells as 16(7)8. Exposing the stone can lead to destabilisation caused by exposure of the foundation. This approach was the chosen middle ground having considered an archaeology based approach which would suggest uncovering gravestones, recording the information and replacing the turf back on the stone to ensure best preservation of the gravestones as opposed to leaving the stones open to the elements, increasing the rate of decay. However, the current approach in graveyard recording practice is to leave stones uncovered for descendants and the public to enjoy in line with the function of gravestones. This has been applied to several other historic cemeteries in Stirlingshire and is an approach that could be appraised in a Stirling Council historic graveyard conservation policy including an approach for sustainable ground maintenance.

## **4.2 Gravestone Recording**

As indicated above, the full photographic record of Kirk O’Muir can be found in Appendix B and the full overview of the stones and their inscriptions, compared to those recorded by Mitchell and Mitchell in 1969 in Appendix C. The main findings of the gravestone recording at Kirk O’ Muir are presented below.

Authors recorded 73 gravestones in total in 2017 where the Mitchells recorded 66 gravestones. With regard to comparing the Mitchell recording of 1969 and current recording of 2017, there are some graves that prove difficult to correlate to each other. Gravestones recorded in 2017 as 153-155 and 157-159 and 166 are difficult to correlate to the Mitchell graves 52, 54, 55. The issue is the lack of decipherable gravestones as well as current recorders having located 7 stones in this particular area where the Mitchells recorded only 4. Mitchell gravestones 26, 36, 52, 54, 55 and 56 were not located by authors either. The 1969 recording seemed to be aimed at recording graves dated prior to 1855, which may explain the omission of recording the very large and easy to read table tomb number 170, of the Turner family recorded as the most recent burial in 2017. However, it seems this rule has not been applied consistently as other graves from past 1855 were recorded by Mitchell and Mitchell. It must also be noted that authors' interpretations of inscriptions do not always match the Mitchell's interpretation. All information including any inconsistencies, have been noted in the overview in Appendix C.

The common risk of memorial instability is considered minimal at Kirk O'Muir Cemetery. Memorial instability is a common safety issue at many historic graveyards often caused by exposed foundations as discussed above. However, as most gravestones are flat slabs or table tombs, this issue would potentially only apply to the twenty-five headstones recorded at Kirk O'Muir. Most of those however, are leaning backwards and are supported by either the boundary wall or the mort safe. Some are thus far under the turf that they are supported by the turf.

The earliest gravestone still currently decipherable is David Liddle's dated 24 May 1682 as seen in *Image 8*. This gravestone (162) was uncovered during graveyard recording. Connolly and Kdolska (2017, p. 5) reported the earliest decipherable stone to be dated 1651, however, further recording revealed that this particular stone, number 156, in *Image 9*, to be of 1695 with embellishments around the inscription which could be interpreted as a 1. The oldest decipherable stone in the recording by Mitchell and Mitchell (1973) lists their stone 19 as showing a date of 167... and their stone 29 as dated 1678. Authors were no longer able to fully decipher these stones in 2017.





Image 8: Stone 162, the earliest decipherable date of 1682. Image 9: Stone 156 dated 1695

The most recent gravestone decipherable by authors is number 170 which was erected by John Turner in memory of Dugald Turner who died in 1872, Helen Turner died 1873, his father Archibald Turner died 1878, aged 84 years, his Annie died 187... September aged 23 years Mary Blackwood Turner died 30th January aged 4 months. However, Mitchell & Mitchell recorded their gravestone 61 (Booij & Greenshields stone 164) erected by George Adam for his daughter Jane to be the most recent burial with a date of 19.12.1876. This part of the stone could no longer be read by authors in 2017 due to heavy delamination. Authors could see this stone deteriorate over the course of the recording project. The Mitchells omitted the Turner grave in their recording. This could be due to their recording being focused on pre-1855 graves; however, this is inconsistent with their recording of several other post 1855 graves such as the George Adam grave.

Kirk O' Muir is organised by family plots (Map 4). Many nineteenth century and later cemeteries are organised in neat rows with paths and landscaping. However, as far as we can see evidence of, Kirk O'Muir originated in the seventeenth century or even sixteenth century by early modern standards. This explains why graves of a range of dates can be situated alongside each other within the family plot. There are some exceptions to this rule. It is highly likely that David Liddle's gravestone which is dated

24 May 1682, was moved from its original place to make way for the Bow family grave as it is wedged between a number of Adam graves to the east of the mort safe whereas the other Liddell graves are placed north west of the mort safe (Map 4).

Map 4: Plan of Kirk O'Muir by family name (produced by H. Booij & R. Greenshields).



The most common family names at Kirk O'Muir are: Adam, Liddell, Dobbie and Bow. Relatively little information has been found in the public domain regarding these families, however, information regarding the Adam family was found on a family genealogy website (Burgess, n.d.) regarding Alexander Adam, gravestone 120. The stone shows the date of his passing: 25 August 1863, 58 years old. Consistent with

this date and age, the Burgess and Taylor website reports an Alexander Adam born in 1805 living at Buckieburn Farm near Carron Bridge. An excerpt from the page has been added in Appendix E and shows the Adam family and the houses they owned in the Carron Valley. John Adam was a relative of Alexander Adam of gravestone 120. Mr Richard Burgess has kindly provided authors with John Adam's will which can be seen in Appendix F as well as Alexander Adam's inventory of his estate and possessions, attached in Appendix G. These resources provide a good insight into who occupied which farm and into life around Kirk O'Muir in the nineteenth century. A family tree for the Bow family was kindly provided by Mrs Sheila Laidlaw from the Carron Valley Heritage and Historical Society and can be found in Appendix H.

As discussed, gravestones in Christian cemeteries face east towards the rising sun. However, this does not apply to six graves at Kirk O'Muir. Gravestones 107, 117 face west and 143 – 146 (40-43 in Mitchell recording) face south and lean against the south face of the large iron mort safe that is situated in the centre of the cemetery. As explained, it appears that these six stones have been replaced to accommodate the mort safe for the Bow family grave.

Most stones at Kirk O'Muir are made of local grey sandstone, however, number 103, 135 and 157 stood out as being red sandstone.

### **4.3 Wildlife and Natural Surroundings**

During recording visits to Kirk O'Muir, wildlife and the graveyard's natural surroundings were also recorded. Forestry Commission staff reported sighting of an otter in the burn next to the Cairnoch site entrance along the B818. Within the boundary walls of the graveyard recorders spotted several small frogs, a common lizard, and a heron. Masterwort, a protected plant species, was seen on the left side from the entrance within the boundary wall. The graveyard is surrounded by several large pine trees especially on the north side and many birch trees along the path leading up to the graveyard. Ground maintenance takes place on an irregular basis; however, care is taken to prevent damage when using mechanical mowers.

## 5. Conclusion

The John de Graham's Castle and Kirk O' Muir Community Project which included this graveyard recording has revealed how the cemetery has changed over time with the ruins of the fifteenth century chapel being used in local farm buildings and with changed cemetery boundaries which was illustrated by the record of human remains found outside the current boundary wall in the Stirling Observer (1865 p. 2).

Archaeological research revealed that the cemetery soil level was raised in the nineteenth century which was confirmed by gravestones having been replaced outside their family plot and some having been misalignment in the process.

Comparison of this 2017 recording with the 1969 recording by the Mitchells has illustrated the speed of decay and deterioration of the inscriptions on stones within a period of 48 years. Despite the fact that the Mitchells did not record the full inscription, it is clear from the limited information that a fast process of decay and loss is taking place. This underlines the importance of recording historic graveyards before they are lost to future generations.

A significant finding has been evidence for an earlier date of the cemetery. Two previously unrecorded gravestones from the seventeenth century were identified and information provided by map regression in the Connolly and Kdolska (2017) archaeology report, as well as a record of a 1605 and possibly older gravestones in the Stirling Observer (1865, p. 2) all provide evidence of a cemetery in active use during the seventeenth century, the period of the Covenanters. The conventicles that have been held at Kirk O'Muir Cemetery for many years may have a historical foundation at the site. Although no direct documentary evidence has been found to support this, historic records and graveyard recording strengthen the possibility that Covenanters were active at Kirk O'Muir Cemetery.

The ongoing commemoration of the Covenanters through the annual performance of conventicles testifies to the relevance of these conventicles to Kirk O'Muir's local community in the present day.



## 6. Recommendations

Authors would recommend the following actions pertaining to Kirk O’Muir Cemetery directly:

- Devise a sustainable conservation and maintenance plan.
- Improve paths and accessibility, physical as well as digital.
- Provide an interpretation board outside the cemetery.
- Incorporate the cemetery in tourist trails and consider developing a leaflet.

Within the Stirling Council boundary, a wide variety of graveyard recording projects are being undertaken by many volunteers who are to be commended for their enthusiasm and stamina. These groups of volunteers have been supported and united by the Council Archaeologist Dr Murray Cook into the Stirlingshire Historic Graveyards Group to enable them to exchange ideas and experiences. The group aims to make historic graveyards safe and accessible as well as to develop a structural and consistent approach to graveyard recording and promotion with a view to obtaining funding. It is highly recommended that Stirling Council continues and embeds their good practice in a Graveyard Conservation Plan in line with current guidance provided by Historic Environment Scotland (2003) in their *Guide for Practitioners. Conservation of Historic Graveyards*. As well as the Scottish Council for Archaeology graveyard recording guidance.

From a local as well a national perspective, it is strongly advised to carry out academic research into the history of conventicles at Kirk O’ Muir as well as at other places in Scotland. As attending conventicles is still in living memory within the older part of the community, as well as among a younger audience, it is advised to undertake qualitative interviews to record, archive and analyse these memories to gain insight into the social values and meanings.

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