



# THE ATHELSTANEFORD SALTIRE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SCOTTISH FLAG TRUST

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Main picture:  
Dry rot starting to  
spread over old cast iron boiler  
(now dismantled) in the void below the toilet  
Inset: Close up of white spores.

## Merulius Lacrymans Crisis Averted!

The Scottish Flag Trust received a nasty and unexpected shock at the end of 2002. Electricians, who were installing new heating in Athelstaneford Kirk, entered the former boiler house (now converted to the toilet), and found beneath the floor an extensive outbreak of white fungus covering almost every surface. Tests subsequently confirmed the fungus to be the virulent *Merulius Lacrymans*, better known as dry rot. This is a pernicious and insidious disease which can spread quickly through the fabric of buildings and consume everything which, like timber and fibre-board, contains cellulose. Dry rot can even penetrate through bricks, stone and concrete to reach timber on the far side.

The Trust has leased the toilet from the Church of Scotland since its installation in 1999. It was and indeed still is unclear as to what caused the outbreak. While dry rot is known to develop in damp conditions where there is inadequate ventilation, it would still need something to trigger it.

Perhaps understandably, the initial dialogue between the various parties - the Trust, the Church of Scotland, and the Kirk Session - focused on whose responsibility it was! However, attention soon turned to the urgent need both to

eradicate the dry rot in the toilet and to establish beyond doubt that the dry rot had not spread through the walls into the foundations of the Church itself.

The Trust took the lead in obtaining quotations for the work. The decision was taken to close off the toilet for use by visitors to the Centre or by Church members. As an interim measure, the Trust Chairman and the Custodian spent an uncomfortable weekend deluging the solum and joists below the toilet with a chemical spray called Murasol in order to destroy or at least halt much of the visible dry rot.

When the specialist quotations came in, it also became clear that the toilet would need to be stripped out of all its fittings and flooring in order to provide full access to the Church wall for chemicals to then be injected into the stonework under pressure. Similarly, some of the pews and wall lining within the Church next to the common wall needed to be stripped back to allow similar treatment.

The quotations in total came to £6,000, and it became a desperate rush to find sufficient funding to allow the work to be commissioned. Fortunately, local landfill operator, David Hamilton, whose firm had funded the initial works on the toilet, generously agreed to allocate extra funding through his firm's landfill tax credits. As

this money may not come through until 2004, the Trust has had to make bridging arrangements. Moreover, unforeseen extras relating to electricians are likely to push the total costs closer to £7,000. The funding package to date is as follows:-

- Scottish Flag Trust - £1,000
- St Andrew Society - £500
- Church of Scotland - £1,500
- J.Haig Hamilton & Sons - £3,000

Tenders were accepted, and work started on site at the end of July. Everyone was most relieved to find that the dry rot had not spread beyond the toilet. The chemical treatment, which carries a 30 year guarantee, should preclude any future outbreak, while improved ventilation below the toilet will be a further safeguard.

The toilet still requires additional work to bring it back into use, and the Trust will be addressing this in the coming weeks in the context of the money available. It looks as if some extra fundraising will be needed to complete the task. The clear target is to have the toilet fully operational once more for the start of the 2004 season and for the anticipated inspection by the VisitScotland assessors! ■

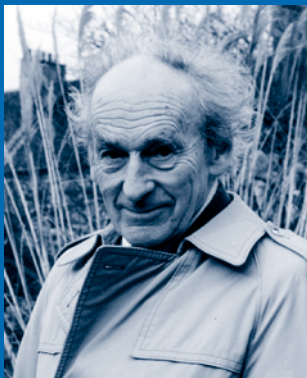
# Lord Wemyss Stands Down as Trustee

After an association with Athelstaneford of almost 40 years, Lord Wemyss has intimated with no little sadness his decision to "retire" from active involvement with the Flag Trust, as he feels he is not able to contribute as much as previously.

Chairman David Williamson paid tribute to Lord Wemyss for the enormous contribution he has made over this period. "He played a pivotal role in the early 1960s in the initial campaign to commemorate the birthplace of the Saltire in Athelstaneford. Funds were successfully raised through public subscription and this led to the concrete plinth and inset copper panels depicting the battlescene, together with the attached flagpole, being erected within the Churchyard. Lord Wemyss officiated at the unveiling on St Andrew's Day 1965.

In the 1980s, Lord Wemyss was a founder Trustee of the Flag Trust, and he then fronted the successful fund-raising campaigns in 1992 and 1996, first to restore the Saltire Memorial, and second to establish the Flag Heritage Centre".

The Trustees are pleased to know Lord Wemyss intends to maintain his interest in Athelstaneford. They are now addressing the difficult task of attracting a successor. ■



## 2003 VISTOR NUMBERS UP

Indications are that the number of visitors to the Athelstaneford Flag Heritage Centre in 2003 will be up compared to last year, reflecting the fine weather over the summer months and the impact of the new arrival sign at the site entrance. This is in line with trends elsewhere in the Lothians, compared to other parts of Scotland (Source: VisitScotland). Custodian Charlie Blair reports that while figures for April (which was a wet month) were down, the figures for each of the subsequent months has shown a healthy increase. Numbers are based on the entries in the Visitors Book. Encouragingly, the comments made are full of praise for the Heritage Centre. While visitors from the US are down, there are many entries from addresses in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, as well as Europe. Athelstaneford is also proving a popular attraction for visitors from many parts of England.

The Trust is investigating the costs of installing an electronic counter or counters at the site next year, which will allow better monitoring of the numbers of visitors to the Saltire Memorial and to the Heritage Centre. ■

Visitors passing through the village should have little difficulty now in finding the site!



The Trustees meeting in the Village Hall (March 2003). Left to right: Watson Thomson (Kirk Session), Charlie Blair, Krystyna Campbell, David Brittain, Malcolm Duncan, Robert McAlpine, Dr Farquhar Macintosh, Rina Moore.

## ABOUT THE TRUST

The Scottish Flag Trust was established in 1984 and is a registered charity (Scottish Charity No: SC002778). Its objectives are:-

- The maintenance and upkeep of the Heritage Centre and the Saltire Memorial with its floodlighting;
- The raising of public awareness about the origins of Scotland's national flag and the historic battle site by Athelstaneford.

For information about the Trust's activities, including School Information Packs and how to become a "Friend", write to PO Box 84, Edinburgh

**Trustees/office bearers are:-**

Krystyna Campbell  
 Dr Winifred Ewing MSP  
 James Gilchrist  
 Dr Farquhar Macintosh  
 Robert MacAlpine  
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## NEWS IN BRIEF

- **Lime Mortar:** While the fabric of the Doocot remains in excellent condition, there is some evidence that the lime mortar on the east façade of the building is starting to spall in parts. The Trust is seeking advice from the Scottish Lime Centre based at Charlestown in Fife as to treatment.
- **Sign Benefactor:** Three new direction signs for the Heritage Centre were erected at the start of the year, one at the T-junction in the village, one on the Garleton Road, and one on the Haddington/Aberlady Road. Funds for these signs were donated anonymously by a "Friend" to whom the Trust is indebted.
- **A1 Expressway:** The 10 mile stretch of new A1 Trunk Road between Dunbar and Haddington is on schedule for opening early in 2004. The Trust is pressing East Lothian Council and the Tourist Board for confirmation that tourist signposting associated with the new road will include full details of the Heritage Centre for east and west-bound traffic.
- **"Kenneth" Manuscript:** The late Nigel Tranter generously donated to the Trust in the 1990s the original complete typed manuscript of his historical novel "Kenneth". This work contains references to the Saltire appearing above the 9th century battle at Athelstaneford. The Trustees are considering options as to how best to display the manuscript.
- **T-Shirts:** The distinctive Athelstaneford T-shirts are still available and make excellent presents! A special thanks to "Friend" John Mackay of Aberdeen who has been successfully selling the T-shirts on behalf of the Trust on the Highland Games circuit. Adult T-shirts cost £10 (S,M,L,XL,XXL), long-sleeved ones cost £12.50 (M,L,XL), and kids ones cost £7.50 (state age). Cheques should include postage (50p for single orders, £1.00 for 2 or more).

**VISIT THE WEBSITE**

Information about Athelstaneford can be found via the St Andrew Society Website at

**www.st-andrew.org.uk**