

THE DARVEL BULLETIN

Alan McLeish

Lace 150

Darvel Gala

The Covenanters



WWW.DISCOVERDARVEL.COM

We've been telt tae tell ye this Autumn...



Heritage Matters.....Heritage is an essential part of what makes Darvel what it is and shapes how we feel about the town. It strengthens identity, wellbeing, community cohesion and local pride. Heritage is not simply about old buildings or traditions; it is about the stories, places and memories that help people understand who they are and where they belong. Across 30 editions, the Darvel Bulletin has tried to bring these stories and memories to the attention of the community, so that our heritage is recognised, celebrated and remembered.

A key element of the history of “the lang toon” is its emergence as a world-leading lace manufacturer. The 150th anniversary of Alexander Morton introducing power looms to the Valley will be marked by a Valley-wide festival from 7–10 October. This edition includes the itinerary, with opportunities to visit the exhibition, take part in factory visits and join the Lace Walk. We also include a short article on the Weavers’ Trail, which predated the industrialisation of the textile industry.

Looking further back, we feature an article on the Covenanting period of the 17th Century, which had a significant impact on Darvel and the surrounding area, focusing particularly on the Battle of Drumclog and its aftermath.

We also publish the second part of Agnes Wilson’s historical investigation into one of Darvel’s forgotten heroes, Dr John Morton Boyd, a pioneer in nature conservation.

Our summer edition reported that Councillor Sally Cogley presented a motion at East Ayrshire Council recognising Sir Alexander Fleming’s huge contribution to medicine and noting that 2028 marks the centenary of his discovery of penicillin. The motion received strong support and gave a timely boost to plans for anniversary celebrations. This Bulletin includes an article reflecting on how Fleming’s early life in Darvel influenced his later medical research and discovery in London.

So why is heritage important? It helps individuals and communities express who they are, strengthens the bond between people and place, and brings residents together through shared stories, volunteering and civic engagement.

In towns with a strong local identity, such as Darvel, heritage preserves community stories, supports regeneration and strengthens pride in place.

When people feel connected to their town’s past, they are more invested in its future.

*for further information on anything within the Bulletin just email:
info@discoverdarvel.com*

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Cover photo - Darvel Gala...photographed by Ricky Rowe



Gala Queen



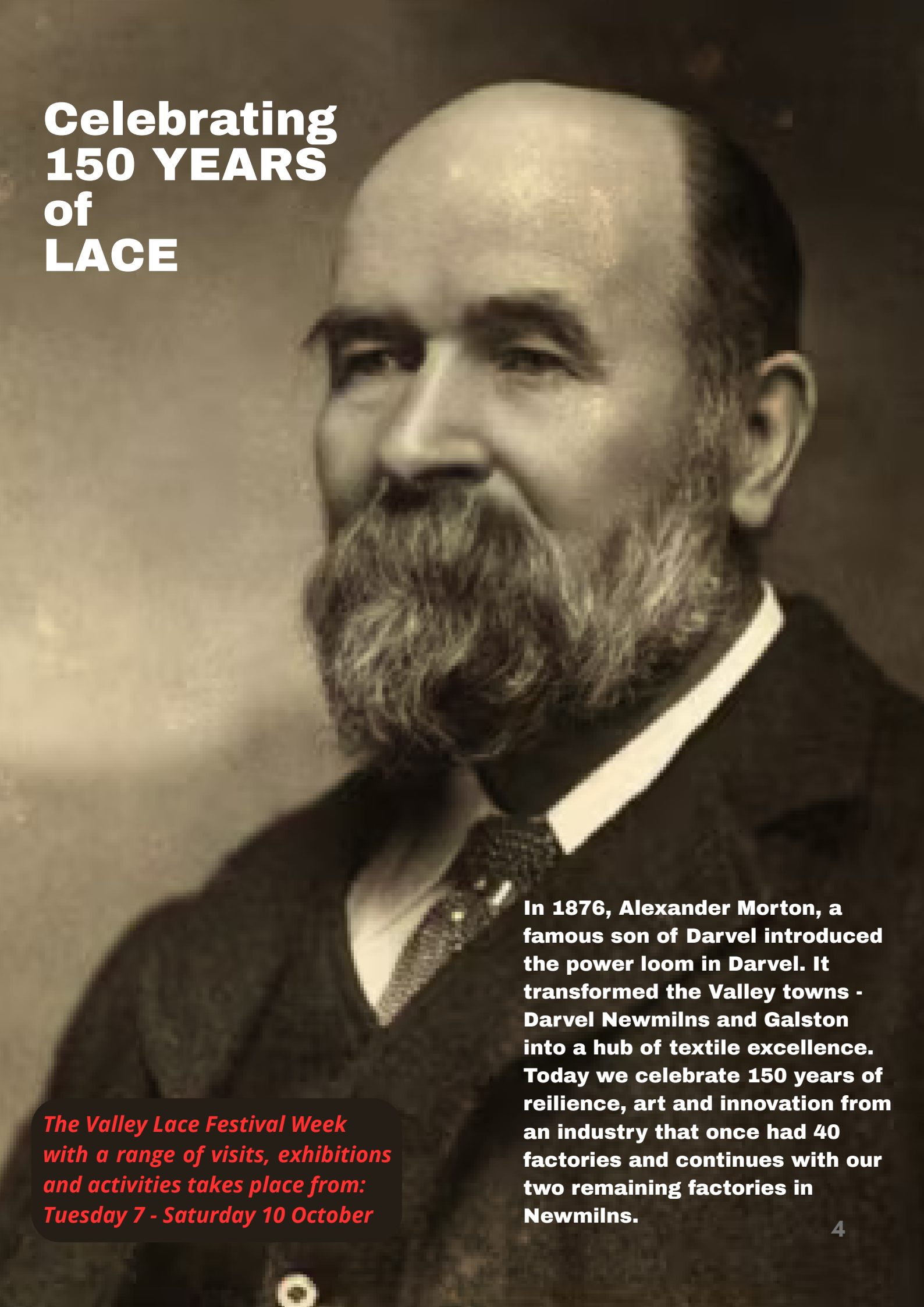
Jasmin Pollock



Covenanters



Alan McLeish - QTS

A sepia-toned portrait of Alexander Morton, a man with a full, dark beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt with a dark tie. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a gentle smile.

Celebrating 150 YEARS of LACE

***The Valley Lace Festival Week
with a range of visits, exhibitions
and activities takes place from:
Tuesday 7 - Saturday 10 October***

In 1876, Alexander Morton, a famous son of Darvel introduced the power loom in Darvel. It transformed the Valley towns - Darvel Newmilns and Galston into a hub of textile excellence. Today we celebrate 150 years of reilience, art and innovation from an industry that once had 40 factories and continues with our two remaining factories in Newmilns.

LACE Festival WEEK

AN HISTORIC COLLABORATION

In a historic collaboration, Darvel is proud to partner with Newmilns and Galston to launch a unique Irvine Valley Lace 150 Festival, uniting our three towns to celebrate a shared global legacy.

The groups which have contributed in organising this event are:

- Darvel Area Regeneration Team (Discover Darvel)
- Newmilns Regeneration Association
- Galston Community Development Trust

THREE TOWNS : THE LACE EXHIBITIONS - Wednesday 7th - Saturday 10th October

Where - Darvel Town Hall, Morton Hall in Newmilns, and Galston Town Hall

Explore historical artefacts, exquisite lace collections, and a breathtaking scrim painting commissioned by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. There are also exhibits produced by Darvel Primary School and Loudoun Academy plus weaving demonstrations and art classes at certain times.

Exhibition opening times - Wednesday to Friday 12 noon to 8pm; Saturday 10am to 4pm

BEHIND THE SCENES : MYB TEXTILES, Newmilns - Thursday 8th October

A rare opportunity to see the world-renowned surviving looms in action.

Pre-booking is essential as spaces are limited.

BEHIND THE SCENES : HADDOW, AIRD & CRERAR, Newmilns - Friday 9th October

Discover the craftsmanship inside one of our two remaining lace factories.

Pre-booking is essential as spaces are limited.

DARVEL TO GALSTON : THE LACE TRAIL WALK - Saturday 10th October 10.30 am

A guided journey through the Irvine Valley landscape, winding from Darvel through to Galston. Visit the exhibitions, obtain insights into the history of the Lace Industry and view the Newmilns murals. Walkers can join and leave the walk on a flexible basis but registration will still be necessary.

THE WARP AND THE WEFT: AN EVENING OF CONVERSATION

Saturday 10th October. Doors open 6.00pm, starts 7.00 pm: Darvel Town Hall

Join celebrated broadcaster Billy Kay and invited contributors for a poignant night of stories and reflections on the human legacy of the looms. From 7pm a short nostalgic film produced by Billy Kay for the BBC will be shown.

Sign up early for the visits to Newmilns factories, the lace walk and the Warp & Weft evening conversation, as places are limited.

Since there will be limited spaces for the factory visits and the Lace Walk, you can register on the Love Newmilns website which you can access here on the calendar:

<https://www.lovenewmilns.org/events-diary>

The Weavers' Trail



Darvel and the Irvine Valley were at one time world famous for the manufacture of lace. This year we mark the 150th anniversary of the introduction of power looms and the establishment of mills or factories. Before the factory system was introduced with the advent of the power loom in 1876, lace was produced on handlooms in hundreds of cottages in the Valley.

Weavers from the Valley walked across the moorland to Eaglesham, often with packhorses, delivering cloth to the markets of Paisley and Glasgow whilst collecting new yarn. This was part of the rural weaving economy before industrialisation.

Its significance lies in how it reveals the economic, social, and cultural life of the Irvine Valley's textile communities during the 18th and 19th centuries. The trail reflects the rhythm of rural working life: long walks across moorland, community networks, and the transition from domestic craft to factory production.

This is a challenging walk, especially through Whitelee Wind Farm in the upland area. This is made especially so because parts of the trail have been virtually lost through lack of use and investment, made difficult because of the issue of land ownership. For those who have walked or cycled the path they will recognise the effort of the weavers required to transport their cloth over the moor ...in all types of weather!

The Covenanters

The National Covenant

When Charles I was crowned in 1625 he wanted to bring the Scottish Presbyterian church into line with the English Episcopalian church by introducing the Book of Common Prayer. Unlike England, the Scottish church was totally independent from the State.

Presbyterians believed that no King should control their religious beliefs. Ministers objected to using the prayer book, the nobility and landowners were afraid the state may take back land and property previously in church control.

The national covenant was produced in 1638 and in Edinburgh alone more than 60,000 people signed it.



Coventicles

Over the next 20 years alliances were made and broken. Ministers were turned out of their churches but continued to hold meetings in private houses and in the open air, for example at the Gowk stane. These gatherings were known as conventicles and by 1670 it became a treasonable offence to attend one of these meetings and a capital offence to preach at one.



Many local men were covenanters and many died for their beliefs. The covenanters were very active in the Whitelee Forest area. There are quite a few monuments in the surrounding districts: Drumclog, Allerstocks, Lochgoin Fenwick, Loudoun Kirk, the churchyard in Newmilns and others. In addition, preaching posts where conventicles were held are on Low Overmoor (the Gowk Stane), on Carrot near Threeplant boundary and in the vicinity of the Munzie Well (the Priests Knowe) and Glaisters Law.

Lochgoin

The Howie family came to Lochgoin, (located high on the Eaglesham Moors a stone's throw from the East Renfrewshire boundary) around 1178 and their descendants are still there. James Howie and his wife Isobel and their son John suffered much in the covenanting days. Twelve times their home was searched by the dragoons. When they saw the troopers coming they fled into the bogs and peat hags and went into hiding in the area now known as Whitelee Forest. The troopers could not follow them for their horses would sink in the deep peat moss. Many famous covenanters found shelter in Lochgoin.

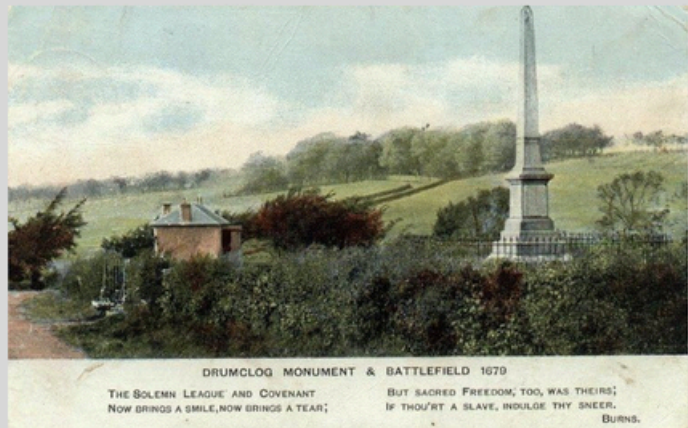


The farmhouse has now been converted into the Covenanters Museum which opened in 1961. The museum houses a diverse collection of Covenanter memorabilia, including manuscripts, weaponry, and clothing, offering a tangible connection to this turbulent period in Scottish history.

The Battle of Drumclog

On 1 June 1679 a conventicle was being held at Glaister Law. The covenanters had been informed of an approaching troop of soldiers and a lookout fired a shot to warn the congregation. The covenanters marched from Hairlawhill towards Drumclog. Robert Hamilton was appointed as leader although he had no military training since the senior officer, John Nisbet was not available.

Claverhouse's men crossed the moor from Strathaven. When they reached Drumclog they were surprised to find the covenanters not engaged in prayer but were lined up ready for battle. There were around 150 soldiers and 300 covenanters. Some of the covenanters had muskets or swords but many were armed with homemade weapons such as pikes, cleeks or pitchforks. Among Robert Hamilton's officers were John Brown of Priesthill and George and Hugh Woodburn of Loudoun Mains.



Claverhouse's force, consisting of dragoons, attempted to engage but was hindered by the marshy terrain. After initial skirmishes, the Covenanters, under William Cleland, launched a successful flanking attack, breaking the government line and routing Claverhouse's troops, leaving 36 dead. The effective use of terrain, including marshes and ditches, prevented cavalry attacks and contributed to the Covenanters' victory.

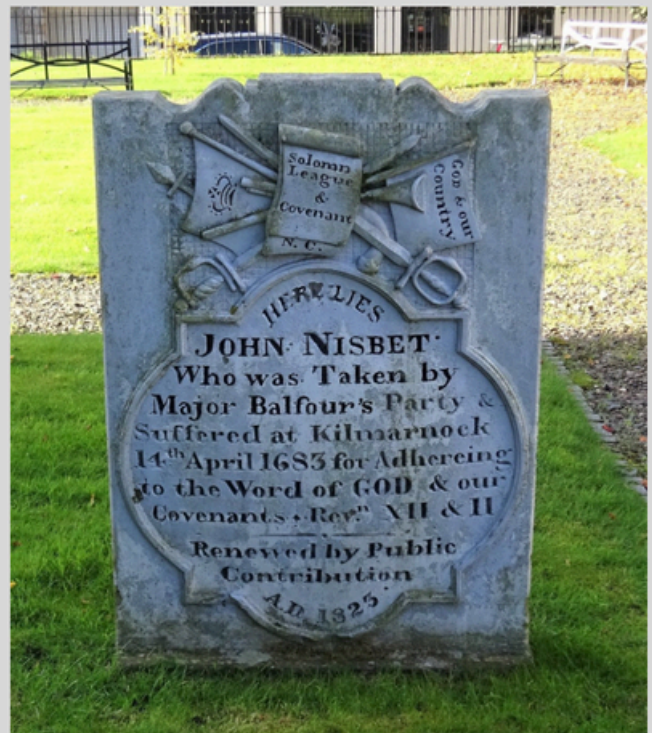
The Aftermath - the Search for John Nisbet

Although not involved in the Battle of Loudoun Hill John Nisbet fought on behalf of the Covenanters in a number of battles, he became a much sought after renegade by government forces. On one occasion soldiers arrived at Hardhill Farm, now gone but thought to be in the vicinity of Loudoun Castle. He was away in hiding but his sons, James and Alexander who were only 14 and 10 were at home. They were beaten and tortured by the soldiers hoping to find out where their father was hiding. When they would not reveal the information, the soldiers left them lying in their own blood. Five years later while staying at Highside Farm, Darvel, James was denounced a rebel and hanged. He had risked travelling to Glasgow to attend the funeral of his cousin John Richmond of Knowe Farm, Darvel.

One Saturday morning in 1685, a group of covenanters including John Nisbet met at Midlands Farm, Fenwick. They were in the midst of prayer when 40 dragoons came to the house. The leader was lieutenant Robert Nisbet, a cousin of John. Shots were fired from both sides. John Nisbet was wounded but three other covenanters were shot dead, Peter Gemmel, George Woodburn and George Fergushill.

The soldiers took the soldiers to Ayr where he stood trial. He admitted having attended a coventicle between East Kilbride and Eaglesham within the previous two months but would betray his friends.

He was sent to Edinburgh and executed at the Grassmarket on 4 December 1685. All his lands, goods and gear were forfeited to the king.



Footnote: The Killing Times

The period known as The Killing Times is generally dated from 1679 to 1688. In 1679, the Covenanters suffered a significant defeat at the Battle of Bothwell Bridge, leading to increased repression. The situation worsened under Charles II's brother, James VII (James II of England), who ascended the throne in 1685.

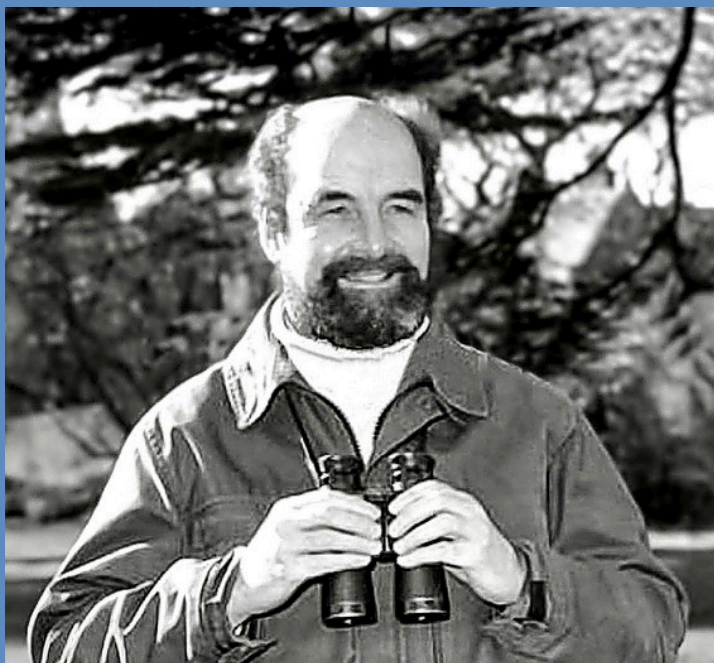
During The Killing Times, government troops, known as the "Highland Host" and later the "Killing Times dragoons," were deployed to eliminate Covenanter resistance. These soldiers executed suspected Covenanters without trial, destroyed homes, and instilled a reign of terror.

The Killing Times ended with the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which overthrew James VII and brought William of Orange and Mary to the thrones. William and Mary were Protestants, marking the end of the Stuart attempts to impose religious conformity in Scotland. The Revolution Settlement of 1690 restored Presbyterianism as the national church, granting freedom of worship and ending the persecution of the Covenanters.

The Charismatic

Dr John Morton Boyd, O.B.E.

Part 2... a pioneer of conservation



This article started with curiosity from a brief mention in 'Darvel Voices booklet' and a short paragraph from a newspaper. The tale of one of Darvel's famous sons is unknown to many, but his passion and international achievements in pioneering nature conservation were rooted in the love of the Darvel countryside.

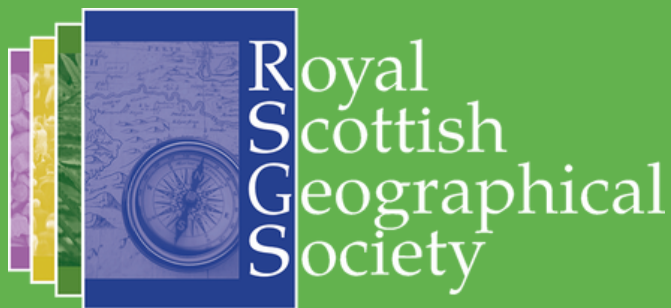
Born in Darvel in 1925, in Strathmore, East Donington Street, he was the only son of Thomas Boyd a master builder, and Jeannie Morton, a textile weaver. He attended Darvel Primary and later enrolled in Kilmarnock Academy where he was a known extrovert with a love of athletics and became head boy. His teachers despaired of him. His headmaster thought he'd make a good brickie, perhaps thinking along the lines of the family's business.



After leaving University, John was recruited to the Nature Conservancy Council (now known as NatureScot). He became the first regional officer for Scottish West Highland and Islands. Many of his projects during this time have had a lasting legacy in Scotland thanks to his passion and skills of persuasion:



- He united land owners from Beinn Eighe to Loch Maree, convincing them to extend the management of red deer beyond the confines of individual estates. This led to the establishment of deer management groups all over Scotland.
- He was responsible for establishing several important National Nature Reserves, including Creag Meagaidh.
- He worked with the RAF to photograph an entire gannetry on St Kilda. He then counted all 44,500 pairs.
- He developed rigorous scientific monitoring techniques for long term wildlife surveillance with his work on Soay Sheep and Grey Seals.
- His campaign for the re-introduction of the Sea Eagle to Scotland.



His reputation began to grow and in 1958 he became an Honorary Fellow of both the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and the Royal Zoological Society. His work in Scotland was also attracting international attention. By the time he accepted the Nuffield Travelling Fellowship in 1963 he had published 20 scientific papers and two books.



The Fellowship allowed him to study the Arabian Oryx in Jordan, amongst other work in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. He was then selected for the Royal Society Expedition to Aldabra Atoll in the Indian Ocean. After his studies of local wildlife including the pink-footed booby, the flightless rail bird and giant tortoises, he staged a relentless campaign which prevented the Aldabra being turned into a RAF staging point for the protection of the Suez Canal.

On his return to the UK he became the Director of the Scottish Nature Conservancy and then the Nature Conservancy Council (now known as NatureScot). He still spent sometime on international work studying the impact of mining on the environment in the Solomon Islands. He also worked closely with the Russians trying to solve issues of environmental protection of the northern seas. In 1983 he was awarded the Neill Prize by the Royal Society of Edinburgh for outstanding achievements.

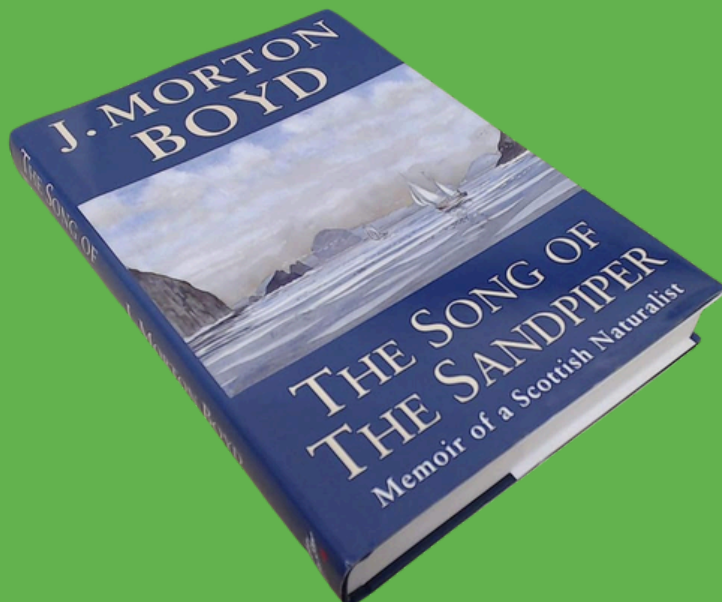
After retirement, he received an O.B.E. He continued to devote his time to conservation education as a lecturer on the National Trust for Scotland cruises around St Kilda, and international lecturing for Swan Hellenic and Serenissima Travel. He co-authored books with his son Sir Ian Lamont Boyd, who also became a Professor of zoology spending time studying Arctic life.

John Morton Boyd died 25 August 1998 and in his obituaries it was said

"Going for a walk in the countryside or on the moors with J. Morton Boyd was an incredible and enriching experience. His powers of observation of nature were stupendous. Quite simply, he helped to educate us all."
(The Independent)

"Morton was a deeply religious man who had great warmth of feeling for his colleagues and was not only respected for his enthusiasm and hard work, for his joie-de-vivre which often expressed itself in extreme loquacity, but he was loved for the attention which he devoted to the personal problems of his staff. He was a working director who had time for everyone. He made a point of visiting as many as possible of his field staff every year, and this was much appreciated"

"Morton's travels were illustrated on his walls by his paintings, a talent he used to produce a Christmas Card for his church."
(The Herald)



In his book **'The Song of the Sandpiper'**, the foreword was written by Magnus Magnusson K.B.E. who also wrote of him,

"Morton Boyd played an important and charismatic role in the early days of the Nature Conservancy in Scotland."

Christine Borland

1965 - 2026

*International artist
&
Turner Prize nominee.*

The contemporary artist **Christine Borland** was born in Darvel, on 3rd May 1965 to John and Chrissie Borland. They lived at East Main Street. Her parents both worked in the local lace mills, which were an inspiration for her work.

She recalled her other early inspirations growing up in Darvel in a National Galleries of Scotland video. *"I suppose just being a bit of a wild child in the 1970's, just kicking around the countryside as your playground, really, that and an interest in botany - of course. I wouldn't have called it that then, but a general interest in natural sciences, life and death, the way things interact with each other and interconnect, was very much part of my childhood wondering."*

Christine studied environmental art at the Glasgow School of Art between 1983 and 1987. She became one of the artists who made Glasgow an internationally fêted centre for contemporary arts in the 1990's. She went on to achieve much renown with international shows in Germany, Holland, Portugal, Paris, London, Ireland and New York. She would go on in 1997 to be nominated for the **Turner Prize** - the most prestigious visual arts award given to a British artist.

On 19 July this year, Christine aged 61, sadly died of cancer.

Some of her major works including the impressive Jacquard installation, DAUGHTERS OF DECAYED TRADESMEN were exhibited in the Dick Institute back in 2014.

*Check out her BBC interview with Kirsty Wark:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02335fq>*





Sir Alexander Fleming
The Sycamore and the Scientist



The ancient sycamore tree at Lochfield

Moorland made Alexander Fleming

On the high ground above the Loudoun Valley, a sycamore still stands in the garden at Lochfield Farm. It is reckoned to be more than six hundred years old - already ancient, already broad-boughed, when Hugh and Grace Fleming's third child was born in the farmhouse below it on 6 August 1881.

Alexander Fleming would have known that tree the way children know the one climbable thing in their world: by touch, by the give of its bark, by which branch held a boy's weight and which didn't.

Long before he was Sir Alexander, before Stockholm and the Nobel medal, before penicillin, he was a small figure disappearing up a sycamore on a hill farm in Darvel, and it is worth asking what that hill farm gave him.

A Landscape Built for Noticing

Lochfield sits on high moorland, and to the east the long dark shoulder of Loudoun Hill is never out of view - a fixed point on the horizon that every child at the farm would have grown up measuring the world against. It is the kind of landscape that does not announce itself in colour or drama but rewards patience: curlew and snipe working the wet ground, grouse breaking cover with that sudden clatter, the moor changing its temper by the hour. A child raised here does not need to be taught to watch. The moor teaches it for him, simply by being a place where nothing happens quickly and everything happens if you wait.

That patient, particular attentiveness would become, decades later, the single trait every colleague and biographer reached for first when describing Fleming the scientist. He was the man who noticed the one contaminated culture plate among hundreds that anyone else would have discarded, who saw the ring of dead bacteria around a stray mould spore and paused instead of moving on. It is tempting - and probably fair - to trace that instinct back to a boyhood spent scanning moorland for the flick of a snipe's wing or the alarm call of a curlew rising off the heather. Observation, on a farm like Lochfield, was not a hobby. It was how you understood where you lived.



The Walk to Loudoun Moor School



The Gully, the Burn, and a Boy's Education

Beside the farm the ground drops away into a deep gully cut by the Glen Water, and it was here, rather than in any schoolroom, that Fleming did some of his real early learning. He guddled for trout in the burn — that art of coaxing a fish out from under a bank with bare hands, which demands stillness, patience, and an intimate feel for water and shadow — and he caught rabbits on the moor beyond. These are not passive childhood pastimes. Guddling in particular rewards exactly the qualities Fleming would later be famous for: a light touch, total absorption in a small and specific problem, and the willingness to stay crouched at a burnside for as long as it takes.

His brother's account tellingly describes their early experiences having "a free-range childhood learning about fishing and birdwatching" across the farmland — an informal education in patience that no classroom could have offered.

The gully also gave him something else: a taste for working close to the ground, at the scale of small, overlooked things — a burn, a rabbit hole, a fish under a stone. It is not a large leap from a boy examining the water under a bank at Glen Water to a bacteriologist decades later peering at a petri dish, alert to the small anomaly that everyone else would walk past.

The Walk to School

Each day, Fleming crossed the moor to reach Loudoun Moor School, roughly a mile from home - a single-teacher schoolroom with around ten pupils, reached by a plank bridge over the burn, his mother sending him off with a hot potato in his pocket to keep his hands warm on the way.

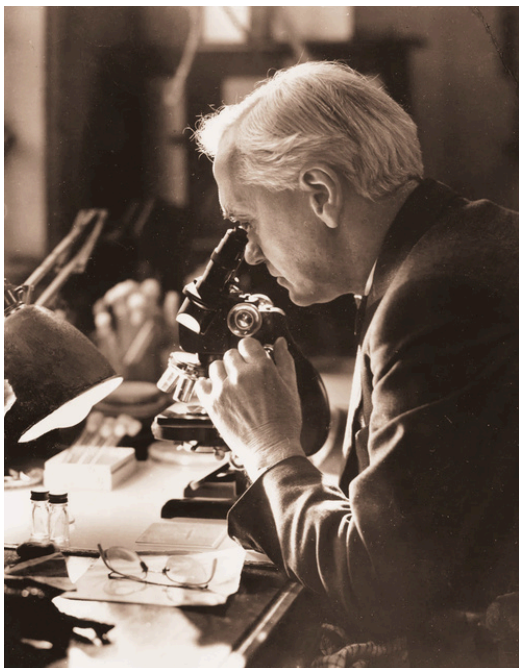
He attended and then moved on to Darvel School. Four years spent crossing open moorland twice a day, in all weather, before the age of most children's first real independence, is its own kind of schooling - in self-reliance, in reading weather and ground, in simply getting on with an unglamorous daily task without complaint. Diligence, like observation, was not an abstract virtue on that walk. It was the only way to get to school.

For all the discipline the moor demanded, Fleming carried an impish sense of humour through his entire life — the kind of dry, needling Ayrshire wit that turns up again and again in accounts of him as an adult, quietly amused, rarely one to explain a joke. It sits oddly alongside the image of the meticulous laboratory scientist until you remember where it started: a farm boy who spent his free hours stalking rabbits and outwitting trout, delighting in the private, unhurried cleverness of catching something that didn't want to be caught. That same puckish patience — waiting for the moment, then moving precisely — describes both a boy guddling in the Glen Water and, half a century later, a scientist watching mould do something unexpected to a dish of bacteria and deciding, rather than tidying it away, to find out why.

Fleming left Ayrshire for London as a teenager and never lived on a farm again. But the moor above Darvel — the ancient sycamore, the curlews calling over the heather, Loudoun Hill fixed on the eastern horizon, the cold, patient art of the burn — had already done its work.

It had built, in a farmer's child, a way of looking at the world that would one day change medicine for ever.

SG



Heart of the old Sycamore



Sir Alexander Fleming's Grandson visits Darvel ahead of the Penicillin Centenary

Andrew Fleming, the only grandson of Sir Alexander Fleming, paid a visit to Darvel, The Corner and Hasting's Square on Thursday 13 August, taking in several of the projects under way to mark his grandfather's connection to the town.

Whilst in Darvel, Andrew met with members of DART to view the mural celebrating Sir Alexander's discovery, and joined members of DIG to discuss the exciting plans for the new Fleming Memorial in Hastings Square. He rounded off the visit with an overnight stay at Lochfield Farm — his grandfather's birthplace, on the high moorland above the town where Sir Alexander spent his early childhood.

Andrew said he was very impressed by Darvel's plans to commemorate his grandfather and to mark the centenary of the discovery of penicillin in 2028. He has now joined the festival planning team, and we look forward to working with him as plans for the Centenary take shape.



Scotties in the City

Glasgow's streets have been given a 'pawesome' glow-up this summer by a colourful pack of artist designed giant Scottie dogs. Our very own Darvel artist, **Jasmin Pollock** had her design selected from over 300 entries to be one of the 40 designs featured on the large dogs which have been displayed all over the city this summer. Jasmin's design, 'In the Garden', was located in a prominent position in Queen's Park for the duration of the Scotties in the City trail and will be auctioned this September to raise vital funds for Glasgow's Maggie's Centre.

"I really liked the idea of transforming my Scottie into another creature" she says of her design, which has the dog painted to appear as a giant bluetit bird "after some brainstorming I settled on the overall concept and then came up with all the small additional details like ladybirds, spiderwebs and a small heart which are little extras to spot."

After submitting her design way back in November 2025, Jasmin was delighted to find out in February that it had made the final cut. *"I began painting in March and spent many hours in the painting space which we'd kindly been gifted for the duration of the event by the Buchanan Galleries. After 77 hours of painting, I'd finally completed the project - this four foot tall, three dimensional Scottie has by far been my biggest canvas to date. I've loved every second of being a featured artist on such a high-profile public art project and I'm incredibly proud of my sculpture"*.



AYRSHIRE 360

Earlier this year East Ayrshire Leisure transformed into **Ayrshire360**. The move provided a refreshed operating model which is designed to better meet the needs of the community. A new structure, which incorporate the East Ayrshire Council's Vibrant Communities and Catering Services, with plans next year to include Greener Communities. This offers opportunity to restructure the delivery mechanisms with the intention of creating a more integrated, responsive and future-based organisation. The head of Ayrshire360 Anneke Freel has attended meetings of the Community Council and DART to outline the ways in which there will be a more focussed delivery of the range of services.

There are four main organisational strands or pillars: - Community, Creative, Commercial and Corporate.

Community



Community Pathways: The focus here is on providing and supporting work with our youth creating accessible routeways into community life

Community Wellbeing: The focus is on helping individuals and families, working with partners to offer a wide range of programmes

Community Greenspaces: The focus is on celebrating Ayrshire's great outdoors, encouraging responsible use and offering a range of park based activities

Community Learning: Enriching community life by creating welcoming libraries and community hubs and supporting lifelong learning.

Creative



Arts Production: The Arts Team help enrich the cultural life in our community by managing services that create opportunities for music, dance and drama.

Event Management: In addition to producing and managing hallmark events, there is support for local groups producing successful local events.

Palace Theatre & Concert Hall: Opening in 2028 the aim is to establish the theatre and concert hall as an inclusive cultural hub.

Museum & Arts: Here there is commitment to preserve and promote our cultural heritage

Commercial



Estate Management: Caring for public open spaces by maintaining standards and creating safe, biodiverse and culturally rich environments valued by the community

Hospitality: Celebrating local food and produce by offering high quality inclusive experiences that support sector growth and attract visitors

Lifestyles: Promoting everyday physical activity through accessible programmes that increase membership and develop swimming, fitness and activity opportunities

Facilities Management: Creating welcoming, safe and high-quality venues where people feel valued and teams thrive in positive workplaces

Corporate



Marketing & Communications: Empowering the teams through data led marketing that strengthens the brand, drives growth and creates memorable experiences

Organisational Culture: Strengthening organisational effectiveness through people management, training and engagement with volunteers and apprentices

Special Projects: Leading development projects and supporting communities through asset management, consultancy and skills development.

Financial Management: Achieving financial sustainability through strong oversight and strategic financial planning and compliance.

So What Does This Mean For Darvel?

The community of Darvel will be very keen to build upon the good working relationships that have already been forged with East Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Leisure. Our voluntary organisations will want to continue to seek support from Ayrshire360 as they move forward. The areas most evident are:

Darvel Town Hall: We have already seen improvements to the decor of the Town Hall but a working group which involved representatives of community organisations has agreed upon extensive modernisation plans for the town hall. All that is needed is the finance!

Sir Alexander Fleming and The 100th Anniversary of the discovery of penicillin in 2028. There is scope for Ayrshire360 to work with the community in making this anniversary not only a local or national event, but extend into an international dimension.

Morton Park: There has been close cooperation between the Council and DART in identifying and developing a scheme of improvement for the park, and this must be continued as part of our Community Action Planning.

Supporting our young people: This is perhaps the most important and the most challenging in the collaborative work with Ayrshire360. It has featured in each of the Community Action Plans and organisations such as Sports Darvel, Darvel FC, Cycle Station and DART together with others, can collaborate with Ayrshire360 to extend activity for our young people



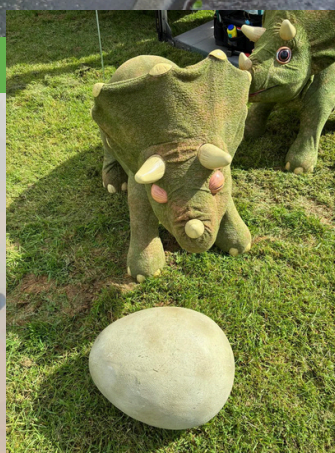


Friday 19th June it rained! The dinosaur stomp to start the gala weekend was due to begin at 6.30pm. Would the rain ease? Would anyone turn up?

As we started to gather at the Vet's carpark, the rain got lighter, more and more families appeared, and dinosaur masks were handed out. Then, the rain stopped, the sun peeked out from behind the clouds, and from the back of an unmarked white van appeared... YOSHI!

Then I knew the hard work was worth it and the weekend would be a success.

It all started in 2025, when a committee was formed to plan the 2026 Darvel Gala. A small group regularly met in the local Black Bull and plotted, planned and laughed our way towards organising our first Gala Day. When Scotland got through to the world cup, we wanted to extend the celebrations, so planned a Friday evening event to kick off the weekend with a bang. First up, was music at the Corner, with Sasquatch, the Railway Men and 77 Affair. As this started, a dinosaur stomp was planned to include families, travelling along Main Street from the Vets to the Corner. This was a roarsome success, thanks to the presence of Raptors World and special guest Yoshi who led the Stomp, made Sasquatch forget his words and generally tried to make friends or eat everyone there. The atmosphere was glorious and continued through the evening as the rain held off and the crowds stayed to enjoy themselves, singing and dancing with enthusiasm.





Saturday morning dawned fine, and our intrepid team of volunteers assembled at Morton Park to set up for the festivities. The Parade gathered by the school, and was led by local dignitary Max, the Gala Queen (Zara Frame) and her Attendant (Daniella Caleb), then followed by representatives of the community groups and businesses. Some glorious outfits were displayed, with special mention to the Brownies, the Rainbows, the Lacy Ladies and, of course, the Darvel Dragon (though I may be biased!)

When the parade arrived at the corner there was a visit by Yoshi's friend Remy, who entertained and delighted everyone as he strode around greeting and eating people in the sunshine. I did notice he preferred to eat the adults rather than the children – more of a meal I suppose!

The small but mighty Singing In The Valley choir performed for us, and then the Depute Provost John McGhee crowned the Gala Queen and the Gala proper began! Following a lovely speech by the Queen, the celebrations proceeded to Morton park where there was lots of entertainment to keep the town busy for the rest of the day.

There were inflatables, stalls for traders and local charity and community groups, lots of food, and the beer tent and ice cream van were a big hit in the sunshine. There was a fire engine, police cars, and Remy and Yoshi made further appearances throughout the afternoon to the delight of all, and the great surprise of some! For such large creatures, they have a knack of creeping up on people!

A great day was had, I had a fantastic time after all the planning, just sitting back and watching the happy faces on the people as everyone came together from far and wide to appreciate our town. An enormous thank you goes out to all the volunteers who helped it happen – we could not have done it without every single one of you.

A personal thanks to all my crafty angels who crocheted and knitted all the squares which ended up as the Dragon. These have now been repurposed as blankets, which will come in handy before too long.

Plans have already started for the next Gala, so watch this space!

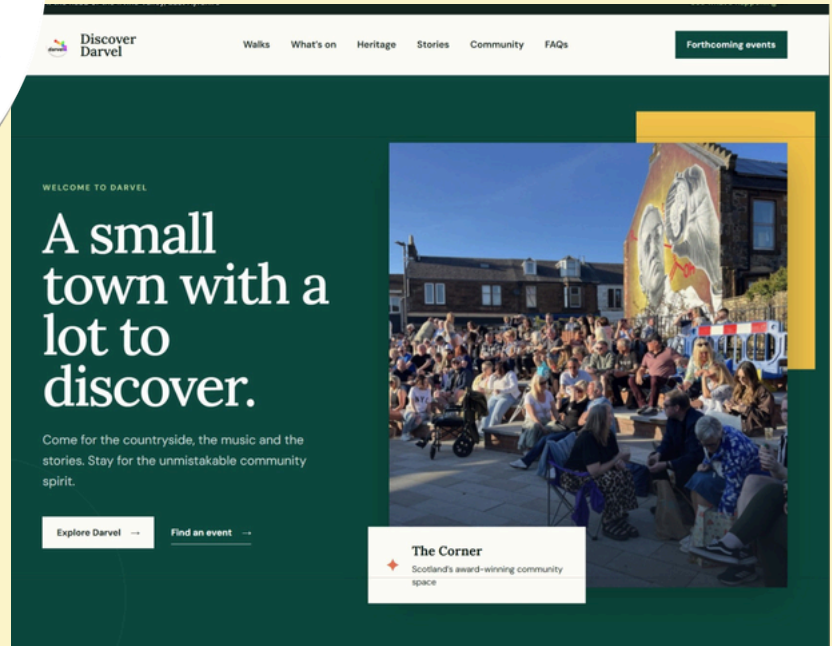
By Sue Clist, member of the Gala Committee, Black Bull Crafter, and HUGE dinosaur fan



Discover our new Website



DART



Discover Darvel has been relaunched as a wider community, heritage and engagement platform for the town.

The updated website goes beyond a visual redesign, giving residents, groups and visitors a clearer place to find events, explore local history and connect with DART's work.

The main changes include:

- A clearer, more welcoming home page centred on the town and its community
- An improved events calendar with a simpler submission form for community groups
- Dedicated heritage and stories sections featuring material from the Darvel Bulletin and local photographic collections
- A local walks section covering routes such as Loudoun Hill, the Dyke Walk, Lanfine Estate and the Five Mile
- A donations page that supports DART's wider projects as well as individual events
- An updated DART page setting out the organisation's work, projects and awards
- Stronger positioning of The Corner as an accessible community space
- A flexible structure that can grow with future stories, projects, events and community information

Profile

part 1



Alan McLeish... **QTS**

Alan's story is the stuff of fairytales. His name and that of QTS is synonymous. Most people in Darvel will be aware of the company if only because many of its huge fleet of distinctive orange and black vehicles are frequently seen passing through the town. Or maybe people saw the work carried out by QTS at Darvel Football Club's ground, creating a whole new standing area ahead of that unforgettable cup win over Aberdeen in 2021. It is obvious that Alan values his privacy and indeed was reluctant to agree to be interviewed for this article. So, for those who may not have heard his story, you are in for treat and for those who have, it is worth hearing it in detail direct from the man himself.

A further article in our next edition will illustrate in more detail some of the amazing achievements and range of activities covered by QTS as well as examples of the highs and lows Alan has experienced when developing a company that now boasts a turnover of over £200 million.

Alan and his family came to Darvel when he was 18 and he lived here for about 20 years, including a period in Priestland Mill before moving to Rench Farm at Drumclog, where QTS still has its UK headquarters.

He left Stewarton Academy aged 16 without a qualification to his name. He mainly wanted to be a professional footballer. School work held no interest whatsoever for him. When he badly injured his knee, this put paid to any chance of a professional football career. So, he continued to work as a seasonal gardener before moving on to tree surgery, fencing, forestry etc. "I enjoyed it. It was good physical work". His employers in forestry saw his potential and put him through college. Alan described the period that followed as a "great life lesson, trying as a young man to manage some "hard, hard men" in the forestry business. The years passed and Alan came to realise that as long as he was an employee on limited wages, he would never be able to financially support his now wife and 3 children as much as he would like. His thoughts turned to running his own business.

For a year Alan woke up at night thinking he had to risk it but by morning it seemed like too much. Finally, he decided he didn't want to end up regretting he had never given it a shot. "As my old man used to say - no decision is worse than a bad decision". Alan then spoke to his mother Anne about it but she was worried about what might happen to his family if it all went wrong.

Alan managed to talk her round and eventually persuaded her to give him a £300 loan to buy an old van and a chainsaw. Quality Tree Surgeons was born with Anne helping to choose the name.

As the momentum gathered, QTS started to become successful, and the initial tree surgery/fencing business progressed into clearing vegetation from the sides of railway lines for Network Rail. Alan was quick to realise that serious investment of profits in not only new but also the latest equipment was likely to be an important factor for success. Crucially, he describes himself as constantly willing to take risks, most of which came off.

Demonstrating incredible vision, one of Alan's major crucial early investments was in Road and Rail Vehicles (RRV's). These amazing machines are capable of functioning on roads but more importantly they can also operate on rail tracks. Different machines can carry out works when on the track such as cutting and uprooting vegetation, felling trees, shredding and so on. Crucially, RRVs operate under the overhead electric lines. Their efficiency is unbelievable and truly impressive. In due course, QTS began to not only service its own RRV's but design them. Alan has always aimed to stay ahead of his rivals and QTS has led the market in many areas, constantly working in-house to develop both machinery and ideas to new levels.



But Alan's natural business sense went beyond purely commercial decisions. He has always put a huge emphasis on trying to create a family atmosphere in the company and looking after his employees. This takes many forms. He values personal fitness and has always encouraged employees to stay fit. The work demands this. A youth athlete programme which was run for many years has been only this year superseded by a sponsorship fund which employees can apply to for causes close to their hearts. QTS offers employees prostate, bowel and ovarian screening. Mental health support is also offered, as well as a 24/7 employee assistance programme. Alan has always tried to make himself available where possible to his employees. As a friend and colleague stated: "You have always remained grounded, never treating other people as if they were less important than you....you have always been generous to a fault."

Both QTS and Alan have supported many charities over the years, (Alan has donated personally as well as participating) including WestFM Cash for Kids, Social Bite, Clic Sargent and many others. The company has also sponsored various sporting venues including Kilmarnock Football Club, Derby County and Ayr Racecourse; and also individual sports people including skiers and boxers. For the last 11 years, QTS has also sponsored the North-west Boxing Club in Onthank, Kilmarnock. With typical modesty, Alan describes the people who operate the club as achieving things there which are "head and shoulders above" anything Alan has achieved.

Alan soon expanded QTS from vegetation management to civil engineering works dealing with the likes of landslips, erosion, track collapses and so on. This sort of work requires specialist machinery, a highly skilled workforce and a lot of thinking outside of the box. Add in the likes of track cleaning (British Rail's notorious "leaves on the line" cancellations!), fencing, electrification of lines and even "tactile studs" (the studs in platforms to warn the visually impaired in particular that they are near the edge of the platform). A major breakthrough for QTS was to secure the position of becoming one of Network Rail's primary contractors. This all meant the number of employees rose steadily over the years as new skills were required. Today QTS has 14 offices in the UK and over 800 employees.

When he started out, Alan used to "dream in stages" - proper nighttime dreams. The first was to have his own van, fully kitted out. Then he dreamt of having a fleet of liveried vans with employees wearing matching uniforms. It all slowly came to pass well beyond Alan's wildest dreams! This culminated in the sale of QTS in 2018 to Renew Holdings plc for £80 million. Renew acquires diverse businesses but generally allows them to continue just as they are, leaving the existing management and workforce to carry on as before. As long as the company in question continues to produce satisfactory profits, they are left to get on with it.



The Renew acquisition of QTS would have been an opportunity for Alan to enjoy an early retirement but that is not Alan. Firstly, he felt that he owed it to his fellow directors and employees to continue to provide support and help guide the company to further successes. Secondly, he felt that QTS was in his bones and it would be a huge personal loss to him to walk away. With his son and two grandsons employed in the business, Alan stayed on as Managing Director and continued to grow the business until 2024 when he became Chairman and supports the Board in this capacity. Despite having some personal business interests in other areas, he has no plans to leave QTS.

Part 2 - will appear in the next Bulletin.

Why not visit the very professional QTS website which has a large selection of stunning videos showing the amazing RRV machines at work as well as illustrating the breadth of QTS's operations. You will find it at: qtsgroup.com

interview by Ken Mair



Darvel Improvement Group



Sir Alexander Fleming Memorial Update

We have the fantastic £200,000 from the UK Government, Pride in Place Impact Fund to start us off. The cheque was recently presented to DIG by Lillian Jones MP.

We have also been overwhelmed by the generous local support through personal donations and crowdfunding including:

- Darvel & District Community Council Lottery £2,000
- Loudoun Valley Trust £1,000
- Darvel Masonic £ 100
- Donaldson Construction of Alloa £ 300
- Private donation £5,000
- Crowdfunding £1,900



We'd love to hear from local companies who would like to support us with a donation towards this memorial for a Darvel man whose discovery of penicillin, the world's first true antibiotic, transformed medical science. The 100th anniversary of Fleming's discovery in 2028 will be marked worldwide, bringing attention to Darvel and its new memorial.

The memorial will enhance Hastings Square, complement the Fleming mural at the Corner, and provide a lasting educational focus, ensuring the story of Fleming's remarkable discovery of penicillin remains firmly rooted in his hometown.

DIG is also organising a Grand Raffle to raise funds – we have some great prizes including a £100 cash prize, £40 Buzzworks Voucher, 4 ball at Loudoun Gowf Club and Annanhill Golf Club, Bottle of Singleton Malt Whisky. Visit us at the Corner Market on Saturday 26 September.

Look out for a podcast with Dr Tom Smith and his memories of meeting Alexander Fleming's wife in Cyprus – locals Stan Zimmer and Elaine Ross will be talking to Dr Tom.

Personal donations can be made through DIG's Bank Account please contact Joyce on aljomorton@msn.com for details.

Darvel Improvement Group's autumn programme of events:

- Harvest Tea in the Church Hall from 10.00 to 12.00 on Saturday 19 September. £3.00 donation for tea/coffee and delicious home baking. Raffle and Tombola.
- Autumn Litter Pick on Saturday 17 October from 10.00 to 12.00 – come along and help to keep Darvel free of litter. Gloves, bags and pickers provided – tea/coffee and biscuits afterwards in the Church Hall.
- Scary Hallowe'en Quiz Night in Darvel Masonic on Friday 23 October from 7.30
- Christmas Fayre in the Town Hall on Saturday 14 November.

JM



UPCOMING EVENTS

AUTUMN 2026

HARVEST TEA Saturday, 10am -12pm, Irvine Valley Parish Church Hall, Darvel	19 SEPT
17 OCT LITTER PICK Saturday, 10am -12pm, Irvine Valley Parish Church Hall, Darvel	
HALLOWEEN QUIZ NIGHT Friday, 7.30pm -10.30pm, Darvel Masonic Hall	23 OCT
14 NOV CHRISTMAS FAYRE Saturday, 10.30am -1pm, Darvel Town Hall	

DARVEL IMPROVEMENT GROUP 



Skerryvore - The Final Curtain

Skerryvore took their final bow on Friday 21st August at a sell out concert in Darvel Town Hall. They have played here an amazing 15 times over the past few years and each time have had an amazing reception.

Thanks to the **Darvel Music Company** for organising these events along with so many other memorable concerts in Darvel over the past 25 years.

We shall miss you.



Universal

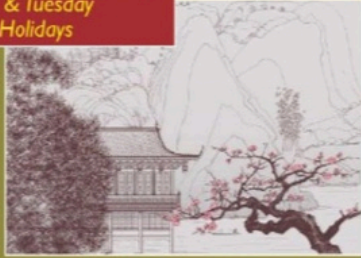
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ADVERTISE YOUR BUSINESS IN THE DARVEL BULLETIN



The Darvel bulletin is an A4 booklet, published quarterly with information on upcoming events, historical information, features on local people, and many more interesting articles about Darvel and surrounding areas.

It has circulation on 5 separate Facebook pages -

The Corner - Discover Darvel - DDCC - Dawn to Dusk - Darvel Chat

There are also 120 paper copies distributed via local shops for those who don't have internet access.

1 off advertising costs for
1 issue are as follows -

Annual advertising costs for
4 issues are as follows -

1/4 page - £25

1/4 page - £80

1/2 page - £40

1/2 page - £128

Full page - £75

Full page - £240

If this is of interest to you, please contact Alistair Crosbie

alic297@gmail.com

07485 111666

01560 322229

Articles for the Bulletin

If you have any articles or items that you would like published in the Darvel Bulletin then please contact georgegardner50@googlemail.com
Continuation of The Bulletin depends on community input.

Wag A Lot

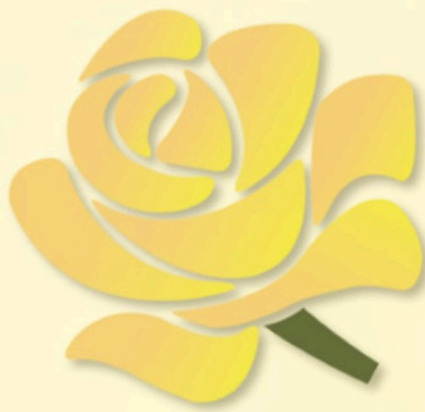
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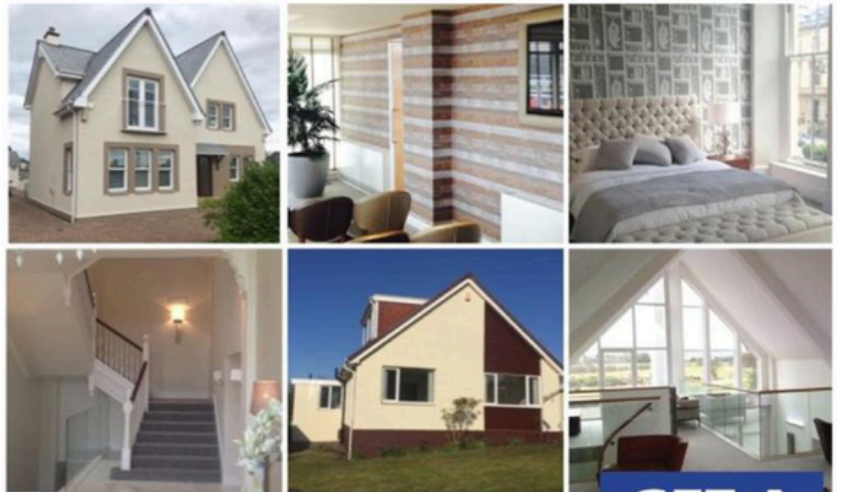


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Darvel Snippets...



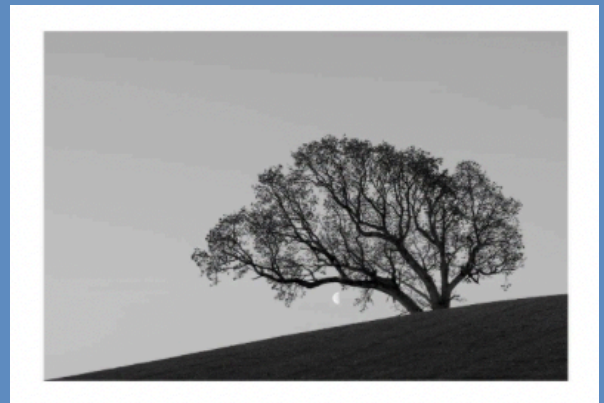
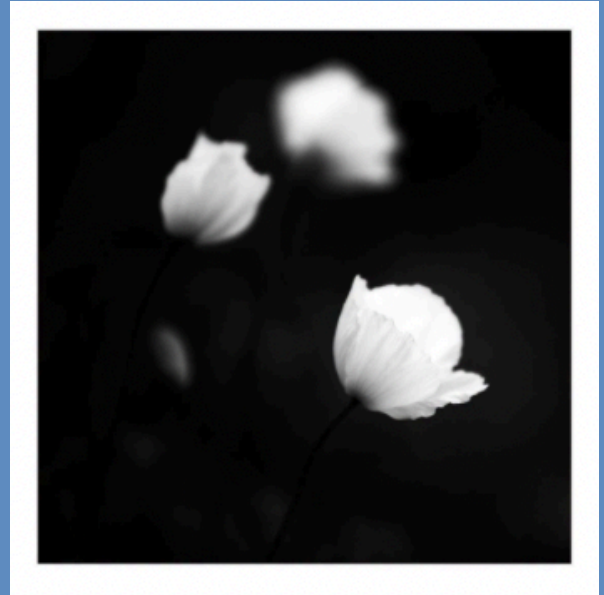
Our local photographer, Hugh Maxwell continues to gain international recognition.

"Fantastic news to share!

Two of my images have been shortlisted by the judges in the black & white round 2 of Amateur Photographer of the Year 2026. This is a highly prestigious international competition and I'm absolutely delighted. The first image is Poppies #2 which was taken in my back garden and the second is of a tree cradling the moon at Auchincruive.

I will find out shortly if either photo is going to make the top 10 or be published in the magazine. The standard of entry is fantastic and both images are winners for me!" HM

The Darvel Bulletin is simply delighted with the recognition that an excellent Darvel photographer continues to receive.



QTS

**Big Thanks
to
QTS for generously
power-washing
The Corner paving.
It looks great!**

Darvel Snippets...



Loudoun Darvel Masonic Club
West Donnington Street,
Darvel

- Mondays: 9.30am-12.30pm
- Wednesdays: 12.00-1.30pm
- Fridays: 12.30-2.30pm

Mondays

Wednesdays



Fridays

Darvel Snippets...



Irvine Parish Church Picnic in the Corner



On Sunday 7 June members of the Irvine Parish Church had a most enjoyable service and social occasion at the Corner, despite the poor weather on the day.

A Busy Year Ahead for Gardeners' Corner



- September 2026 market - plants and home grown lettuce, tomatoes and peppers, with a bulb workshop for kids.
- Kidzone in April 2027: Bulb planting workshop
- April 2027 market - plant sales
- May 2027 - plant sale outside the Gardner residence
- June 2027 market - plant sales
- August 2027 market - plant sales and home grown tomatoes and peppers.

All proceeds go towards DART's community projects

DIG's Halloween Quiz Night

Join Us for a Spooktacular Halloween Quiz Night!

Darvel Masonic Club

Friday 24 October 2025
7.30pm to 10.30pm

Max 6 per team - £4 per person including nibbles

Cash Bar Service for drinks
Raffle for DIG funds

Raffle prizes gratefully accepted on the night



Get ready for a frightfully fun evening filled with tricky questions and spooky surprises! Gather your friends and test your knowledge, so don't miss out on this hauntingly good time!



What's on in Darvel this year...



Friday 6 February	Valentine Quiz Night, 7-9pm	DIG
Friday 20 March	Music & Cake, 2-4pm	Bowling Club
Sunday 29 March	Easter Egg Hunt	Lanfine, DIG
Wednesday 8 April	Kidzone, 11-2pm	The Corner
Saturday 18 April	Simple Minds/Deacon Blue Tribute	Town Hall, DMC
Friday 24 April	"Born in Kyle" with Billy Kay	Town Hall, DART
Saturday 25 April	Corner Market, 10-2pm	The Corner, DART
Saturday 25 April	Blast Off - Live Music 6-9pm	The Corner, DART
Friday 8 - Monday 11 May	Walkfest	Valley Walkfest
Saturday 16 May	Darvélo Cycling Festival	The Corner
Saturday 23 May	Corner Market, 10-2pm	The Corner, DART
Saturday 13 June	Café Day in the Square	DIG
Wednesday 17 June	Matt Richmond Annual Outing	Phone 07500 963231
Saturday 20 June	Darvel Gala	DART
Saturday 27 June	Corner Market, 10-2pm	DART
Saturday 22 August	Corner Market, 10-2pm	DART
Friday 28 August	Music & Cake, 2-4pm	Bowling Club
Friday 4 September	Flower Show	Darvel Horticultural Society
Friday 25 September	Music & Cake, 2-4pm	Bowling Club
Saturday 26 September	Corner Market, 10-2pm	DART
Friday 2 October	Country & Western Evening	The Corner, DART
Wednesday 7 - Saturday 10 October	Lace Festival Exhibition	Town Hall, DART
Saturday 10 October	The Warp & the Weft "Conversation"	Town Hall, DART
Saturday 10 October	Lace Trail Walk 10.00am registration	departs Town Hall, DART
Wednesday 14 October	Kidzone, 11-2pm	The Corner
Friday 23 October	Halloween Market, 4-8pm	The Corner, DART
Friday 30 October	Music & Cake, 2-4pm	Bowling Club
Saturday 14 November	Christmas Fayre	Town Hall, DIG
Friday 27 November	Corner Christmas Market, 5-9pm	The Corner, DART
Saturday 28 November	Music & Cake, 2-4pm	Bowling Club
Friday 11 December	Music & Cake, 2-4pm	Bowling Club



Darvel Gala Queen and Attendant



WWW.DISCOVERDARVEL.COM