



# Skene Heritage Society Newsletter

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### **Auld Carle the blacksmith**

Alexander Davidson Smith Carle (12.11.1880 - 21.02.1962) was an illegitimate child of Isabella Carle, born in Cuttyhill, Rora, near Longside, Aberdeenshire. He was best known, even at a young age, as 'auld Carle'.

After a basic education in what would have been termed the 3R's at that time, he left school when he was 10 and at 14 years of age, he was apprenticed to a blacksmith in Upper Crichton, Auchnagatt. From there he moved to Maud and then, as foreman blacksmith, to Garvie's, who were millwrights, building threshing mills and other farm equipment, in The Shiprow, Aberdeen. He also worked, over the years as a journeyman for a vet in The Shiprow; Cummings in Carmelite Street, Aberdeen; the smiddy at Cults; Bells of Tyrie, the smiddy at Alves, Morayshire; and then the Broadstrait smiddy. The smiddy in Cults, in later years, became the site for Thompson's Garage.

Elizabeth Carle (nee Imray) (10.11.1880 - 27.06.1970) was a daughter of Christina and Thomas Imray of New Pitsligo, and was 'auld Carle's' elder by two days, having been born in Aberdeen on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1880. She was known as Lizzie.

After a basic education, she left school at the age of 11 to enter domestic service. She spoke about the poor quality of food that was served to the men who worked on the farms. Brose in the morning and again at midday

constituted their staple diet and at the end of the day, the men would receive vegetables in a soup with bread and butter. She vowed always to serve the best she could to the men who worked in the Broadstrait smiddy.

Not big in stature, she was a kind, determined and hard working lady and in addition to all the household chores of cooking, washing and cleaning, she kept hens and sent eggs to the mart in Aberdeen every week. She would speak of her own upbringing and the hardships of her early days. In this era there were no grocer shops let alone supermarkets and their food of meal and vegetables came from the land, grown and not bought. She never complained and often said that patience and perseverance would overcome all difficulties.

If it is true that a hard upbringing breeds good people and that behind every successful man there is a good woman, then the blacksmith's wife at Broadstrait was a shining example.

Alexander Carle and Elizabeth Imray were married in the Richmond café in Aberdeen in December 1904. At first they lived in Rosemount Viaduct and Esslemont Avenue in Aberdeen. They moved to Cults in 1910 and to Broadstrait, for the first time, in 1912. They left the village in 1920, but returned for the second time in the summer of 1935. They had two daughters and a son.



The Broadstrait Smiddy with Carle over the anvil to the left

Their house at the Broadstrait smiddy was their home for many years. With stone floors and the barest of linoleum, it was warm

enough as long as you remained close to the Aga fire in the living room. This was also the room in which they slept. There was a front door, but no back door and, other than a small window in what was the pantry, there were no rear windows in the house. It had an outside dry toilet. There was no running water, this having to be carried in pails from the village pump which was on the main road, on the opposite side from the smiddy.

A physically strong man, he was a master at his trade and a man of good standing with a reputation second to none. 'World famous' were the words the late Bob Cruickshank from Elrick used to describe him when, some 20 years after 'auld Carle's' death, he contributed towards an article in the Press and Journal in 1981. At the age of 18 in 1898, 'auld Carle' won first prize for making and shoeing horses at the Highland Show in Aberdeen. A regular at competitions for making horseshoes and shoeing horses; he often visited such events at Inch and Dunnydeer and won many prizes, medals and awards for his work that was exhibited at agricultural shows. The shows would have been followed by social events with his contemporaries, amongst them Alec Nicol and Ian MacDonald, at which a dram or two would certainly have been taken. Well known for his skills in making horse shoes, he made and supplied shoes to blacksmiths in Aboyne, Inch and Lairg amongst others. The horse shoes produced by him were the finest there were. Such shoes, for the Clydesdale horses, were made to up to seven and a half inches across and were smooth and perfectly finished with no hammer marks.

The old smiddy building in Broadstraik was demolished in the late 1960's when the parish was earmarked for housing development and the first of the 'new' houses were built in the village along the main Aberdeen road and Straik Place. It was situated about 100 yards along the left hand side of the road towards Aberdeen, from the Broadstraik Inn. It was opposite to what is now Cruickshank Place.

Attached to the smiddy was an engine room that housed a generator to provide electricity and a shoeing shed, where the Clydesdale horses, that worked the farms, were brought in to have horse shoes fitted. There were four furnaces in the smiddy, with nearby

bellows being pumped to generate tremendous heat, to work the iron and steel before it was hammered out and shaped over the blacksmith's anvils.

At Broadstraik "Auld Carle" made horse shoes, hames, grubbers, ridgers and more, serving the farming community from far afield. The making of hames was considered a craft more than a trade and at this, he was an expert. The chains which were part of the horse harness for pulling ploughs and carts were attached to the hames that were fitted to the Clydesdale horse collars. They were made from one eighth of an inch steel plate and wood.



Carle and McDonald with wartime horse shoes

Carle made an immense contribution to the 1914/18 war effort. He employed 18 men at the time, making thousands of horseshoes for shipment to the Russian front, to the British and Russian armies, for the cavalry horses and the horses that pulled the guns. There was a lot of work in making these shoes and, because of the climatic conditions, they were made with cogs from hard tool steel, specially shaped to give the horses extra grip in the snow and ice. Enormous though his efforts were, he would not have received any special mention for his work. It was simply expected: that was the way it was at that

time. Bob Cruickshank later remembered that the smithy worked from 5am to 11pm, presumably with relays of men working.

Always enjoying a dram and with a fair capacity to down a few tipples, he entered the liquor trade and tried his hand as a publican, moving to Forfar, where he took over the Burns Bar in the town's main street. Returning to Aberdeenshire some years later, he ran the bar at the Leys Hotel in Blackburn. However, his life selling alcohol was short lived and it was not long before he returned to his trade, moving to the smiddy at the railway bridge in Alves, Morayshire and which smiddy is now a house on the main A96 Aberdeen to Inverness road.

(During this time the Broadstraik smiddy was taken over by Robert and James McDonald. One of these men had been assistant to Carle and is shown in the photographs with him - *JF*). It was in the summer of 1935 that he went back to the house and smiddy in Broadstraik and where he would be for the remainder of his life.

On the day of his golden wedding anniversary in December 1954, a reporter from The Press and Journal called to write an article for this special occasion. For "Auld Carle", now 74 years of age, it was a normal working day. The photograph featured in the newspaper showed his wife going into the smiddy, bringing him a bowl of tea, as she had done every working day over all the years in their time at Broadstraik.

A year or two later he had to call it a day. By this time, his trade was dying. There was no longer a demand for horseshoes, for the Clydesdale horses, once so famous on the farms of Aberdeenshire, were replaced by tractors to work the fields. Farming had become more mechanized and the blacksmith's anvils and bellows were replaced with new factories to manufacture farming equipment. This was the beginning of the end for the smiddys.

He died in his Broadstraik home on the 21st February 1962, at the age of 81 years. A truly remarkable man. Both he and Lizzie are buried in the Kirkton of Skene.



Sandy Carle in later life

The house, now named 'The Smiddy', was renovated in the 1980's, incorporating the building that was the byre and the barn. It was originally one of the flat roofed buildings on the Leddach Estate built for the laird, Peter Jamieson, in the 1880s. It has recently been extended.

*Submitted by grandsons,  
Jim Pirie and Sandy Carle*

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### **Body Snatching!**

Adam Milne, who had long been a crofter in Skene, went to end his days at the house of a daughter, a school teacher near Turriff. Arrangements were made for the funeral from Turriff to Skene churchyard, where the minister was to meet it. Some old Skene friends went through to Turriff for the funeral, and coming back one car somehow took a wrong turning and became detached from the rest of the procession. In it were three respected Skene farmers - West Fornet (Davie Brownie), Mains (James Smith), and Broomhill or "Breemy" (William Watt).

Coming through Inverurie they came up with the funeral. It had come to a halt in front of the inn. Our friends shook their heads over the sight. "Its nae decent" said Mains. "Auld Adam widna hae likit it" said West Fornet. So they stopped and got out. They spoke to the driver of the hearse, who had the undertaker sitting beside him, and after some persuasion got them to drive on leaving the rest of the procession to follow. The driver, however, said he was not sure of the road. So Breemy got in beside the driver of the hearse, and the undertaker was accommodated in their car. So off they went and after a few miles they were coming to Kintore, when the undertaker began to be sure they were not on the right road. At last Mains said "if this is not the way ta Skene, fit wey wid ye gyang." "But" said the undertaker, "I'm nae gan tae Skene, A'm gan tae Inch wi Mrs Jessamine."

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### Soutar Beaton



Then "The Soutars" small dark shop. How we loved our "official" visits there. With heel-rings or toe caps needed for our boots - shoes were strictly for Sundays. An old man "The Soutar"- with a young apprentice "Dod Yule". We loved it - officially- and on

"un-official" visits. Because it was always warm in there. And the welcome always friendly. The smell "homely" leather and paraffin stove. I was always greatly fascinated by the new shoes for sale. In long, polished, white boxes. The brand name of these shoes - "Gipsy Queen". The boxes had a vividly illustrated head of a dark be-ringed Gipsy Girl. I vowed then that one day - grown-up - I'd have a pair of "Gipsy Queen Shoes" ... Alas!! Like many things the Gipsy Queen brand of shoes had disappeared from "the trade" by the time I grew up.

That was how novelist Jessie Kesson remembered Soutar Beaton and his shop as she made her way from Proctor's orphanage to Skene School. Alexander Beaton was born at Monkshill of Fyvie in August 1861, son of Alexander Beaton and Jane Smith who had eleven children in all. In the 1870s after a year of farm work, he was apprenticed to a shoemaker. He later remembered there being 15 or 16 shoemakers in Fyvie at the time. "When he came to the trade every boot and shoe in the surrounding countryside was made locally." Sandy travelled abroad for seventeen years, emigrating to America where he worked in Michigan for four years. When the work dried up there he walked all the way to San Francisco. There he had a shoemaking shop for thirteen years, apparently leaving in 1906, just before the big earthquake. He returned to Britain and, just before World War I, he started in business in the shop in Kirkton of Skene. An article on Soutar Beaton appeared in the Bon Accord newspaper in 1956. By that time he was 94 years old and was still doing repairs for friends and old customers. He was fit enough to chop wood for the workshop and had only been ill twice in his life. As a boy he had scarlet fever and five years before the article was written he had been in bed for a fortnight with bronchitis. At his back door with its magnificent view he commented "I can see the hills as well as I've ever seen them. I'm as well as I ever was, only the world had changed." His recipe for this long life was that he was a bachelor and never smoked. At Skene he lived with his sister and her husband (the Torbets).

There are various memories people have of Soutar Beaton: that he never wore socks; that he was a great vegetable grower,

running out of the shop every time a horse passed by in case it had left some dung behind; always having his mouth full of tacks as he worked; being asked to light the bonfire on the Hill of Keir at the Coronation in 1953, he was then the oldest person in the parish. I think he lived to be a hundred but if anyone knows when he died please let me know.



Soutar Beaton's shop in the Kirkton is on the right. The sign says A. Beaton with two shoemakers' tools and Practical Bootmaker and Large Selection of Footwear.

Thanks to Mabel Laidlaw, grand-daughter of Mrs Torbet for sending Alistair Ogg the cutting from Bon Accord.

Jim Fiddes

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### Furious bicycle riding in Skene

*James Scott, mason, 37 Rosemount Viaduct, Aberdeen, was charged in Aberdeen Sheriff Court yesterday with having on Sunday, on the public road opposite the Home Farm of Easterskene, driven a bicycle in a furious, reckless or dangerous manner to the danger of the lieges. It was said he came into violent contact with and knocked down James Johnston (79) retired miller of Mason Lodge. He pleaded not guilty and was defended by Alexander Stronach, advocate. Several witnesses, including Mr Johnston, gave evidence in support of the charge. They said accused was going at a rate of 14 or 16 miles per hour, and there were several people on the road at the time as the church was "skailing" (emptying). One witness was not very sure about the speed. He said he just thought the accused was a*

*very good rider (laughter). He was going faster than a horse. Witness saw him knock down an old man by running at him. Mr Johnston said he was not hurt and did not want the lad punished. The Sheriff said that cyclists had no right to ride at such speed that people using the road could not get out of the way. Accused - but they are running races on the road between this and Stonehaven, and also between this and Inverness. The Sheriff - yes but if they run down any of the public they will likely be brought here (laughter). You will be fined 15 shillings, with the option of seven days imprisonment, but I don't guarantee that that lenient penalty will be adhered to in future cases.*

*Aberdeen Journal 21 July 1894 !!!*

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### Mary Mitchell and her Skene ancestors

In July I had a visit from Mary Mitchell from San Francisco. Mary had seen the last Newsletter on our website and, in particular, Rona's list of all the minsters of Skene. Two of them were her ancestors - Ludovic Dunlop and John Dunlop, father and son.

Before Mary came I managed to find out a few things to help her search. Ludovic or Lewis Dunlop was minister at Skene from 1664 to 1686, he died in 1691. Before Skene he had been minister of Tarland. He was married to Elizabeth, daughter of William Douglas, Professor of Divinity at King's College. The Skene session records show that during his time as minister both his sons, John and Alexander, preached in the church, John eventually following him as minister in 1686. John was deprived of the position in 1695 for non-jurancy. This means that he refused to swear the oath of allegiance to King William. After the restoration of the Stuarts following the Civil War, Episcopalianism was made the state religion of Scotland. When James II was overthrown and the crown offered to William of Orange, part of the agreement for Scotland to accept him as King was that Presbyterianism would become the official religion of the country. Some minsters

refused to take the oath, either because of their Episcopal beliefs or because they had already sworn an oath to King James. They were removed from office until such time as they did take the oath. It seems that John Dunlop never did and he lost his job. His brother secured a position as rector in Nunnington, Yorkshire.

In Andrew Jervise's book on Epitaphs and Inscriptions published in 1875 he records Ludovic's gravestone in Skene Churchyard with the following inscription: *Here are interred in the hope of a happy resurrection, the bones of Mr. Lud. Dunlop, a most faithful minister of this church of Skeen, for 43 years, and of another, viz. that of Tarland. To say much in his praise would perhaps saviour of vain glory; but amongst other laudable actions, it is deserving of record that the bell-tower of this church was erected in great measure at his expense. His better part now dwells in heaven with Christ. He died 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1691, aged 71 years.* Jervise also says that the stone of a much later minister, James Hogg, was placed over Dunlop's one. I managed to locate Hogg's grave, one of the flat stones just south of the church. Mary and me went to have a look at it but couldn't see any sign of Dunlop's grave underneath it. Could it have been removed since 1875 or is it under the soil somewhere?

I also found a reference in another source to a stone in St. Machar churchyard, Old Aberdeen, commemorating the Dunlops and William Douglas, though the long inscription was in Latin. With some help from Cathedral volunteers we managed to find what should have been this large stone but it was barely legible. I had a bottle of drinking water with me and when I poured it onto the stone the lettering came alive with the names of John Dunlop and William Douglas. Mary was delighted (she did a wee dance) but her camera battery was done so she had to come back another day to take a photograph. In the special collections part of King's College she was able to get access to a couple of volumes from a large collection of books donated by John Dunlop to Marischal College. How wonderful to handle books that had belonged to your ancestor from three hundred years ago. I also directed Mary to several sources in the Central Library and to the Family History Centre in

King Street where she found a few more details of her ancestors.

Mary was staying in the Old Skene Road Guesthouse and while she was here I took her to Tarland and had a quick visit to Craigievar Castle. A local cousin of a distant cousin in England also took her out - to see Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham at Crathes Castle. So despite very poor weather I think she had a good time in the North East. She intends to write up a detailed account of her ancestry and we will be sent a copy. Hopefully this might include a portrait of Ludovic which is supposed to be with some member of the family in America.

Jim Fiddes

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## Sharing Memories

Send all contributions to:

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*The main objective of the group is to gather together an archive of local history materials for the benefit of local residents. The recording of oral history is an important feature of this, as well as the collecting of photographs, newspaper articles, maps and other archive materials. Scanning facilities are available, to enable us to copy any material for our archive.*



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