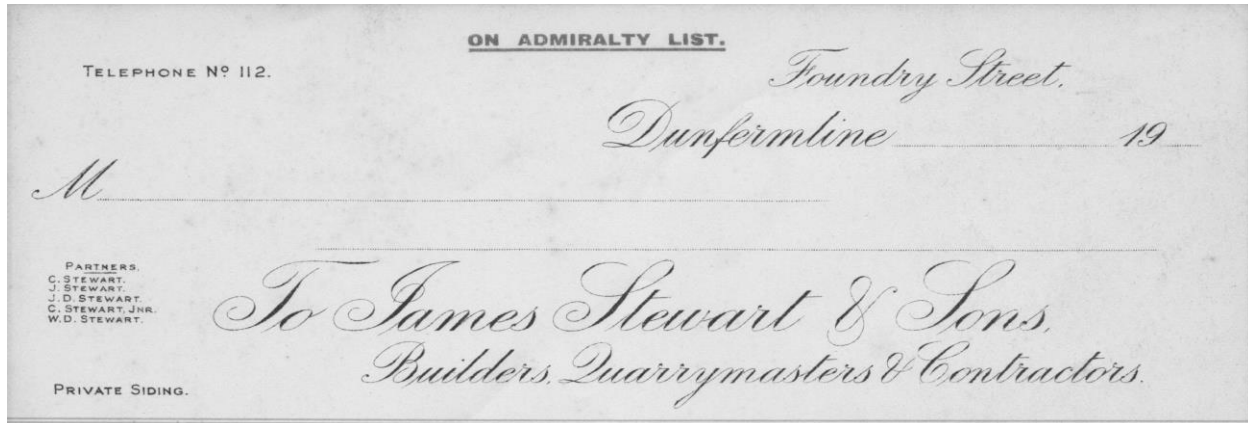


Dunfermline's Industrial Past

Charles (formerly James) Stewart & Sons, Builders,

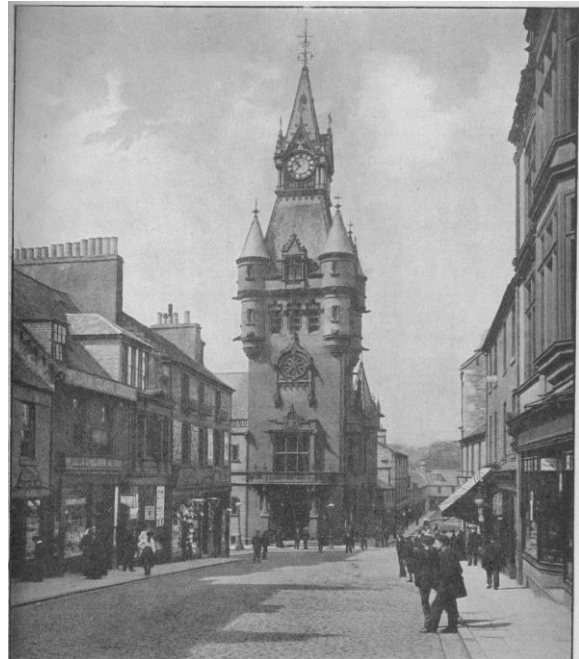
Burt Street, Grantsbank & Phoenix Lane, Dunfermline



Born in Falkland but brought up in Dunfermline, James Stewart served an apprenticeship as a stone-mason with a then noted country builder at Cowstrandburn, near Dunfermline.

He was later employed by the Dunfermline firm of Messrs W & J Hutchison, stone masons and builders. In 1876 Messrs Hutchison were awarded the contract for building the new City Chambers in Dunfermline and James Stewart was the foreman stone-mason on this project which took almost three years to complete. The ornate and impressive stonework on this building is testimony to Mr Stewart's ability and it would probably be no surprise that he started in business on his own a short time after the City Chambers building was completed in 1879.

It would appear that James Stewart was initially in partnership with one of the Hutchison family as there is a reference in one of the Trade Directories of the early 1880s of a building company of Stewart & Hutchison. If so, this partnership did not last long as the Dunferm-

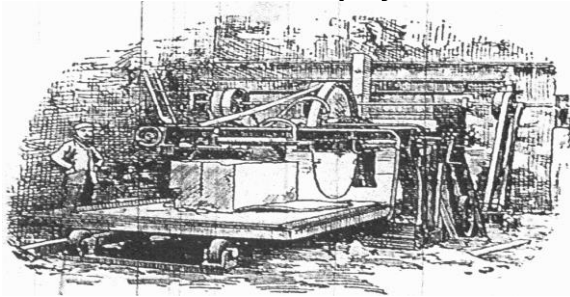


James Stewart was foreman mason on the building of Dunfermline City Chambers 1876-1879

lineTrades Directory of 1890, indicates that Mr Stewart was then trading on his own account from premises in Burt Street, Dunfermline. He also had premises at Grantsbank (now Pilmuir Street) from an early period. It may be that the Grantsbank premises and the Foundry Street premises, mentioned in the above

letter heading, were one and the same. However, from around 1912 until 1962, when the firm closed, they were based in Phoenix Lane, in the former premises of the Phoenix Foundry.

In 1900, whilst still at Grantsbank, James Stewart was enterprising enough to install in his premises a diamond saw for cutting stone which had been patented by George Anderson, Taymouth Engineering Works, Carnoustie. The saw, powered by a ten-horse nominal gas engine, had a five foot circular blade capable of nearly 600 revolutions per minute. It was able to cut stone at the rate of five inches per minute, this being much faster than anything previously used. At the same time Mr Stewart also added to his plant one of Mr Anderson's stone dressing and moulding machines. It was evident that at that early stage Stewart's plant was becoming increasingly mechanised with modern equipment although the final dressing and finishing of all stone still required to be done by hand and this was where the expertise and artistry of the stone-mason came into play.



The Anderson stone-cutting machine installed by James Stewart at Grantsbank in 1900

James Stewart had by this time established a reputation as a builder of the highest order. Monuments to his, and his work-force's skill and craftsmanship, in the form of churches, factories, schools and banks were appearing, on a regular basis, throughout the town.

In order to maintain a constant supply of good quality stone James Stewart acquired Berrylaw Quarry on the western outskirts of Dunfermline. The grey/silver

coloured stone produced at this quarry had excellent weathering qualities and was much in demand in the building industry.

One of the out-standing contracts undertaken by Stewart during the early years of the twentieth century was the building, in 1902, of the Central Baths, in Pilmuir Street. Financed by the Dunfermline born millionaire, Andrew Carnegie, this was a grand building by any standards and, whether by accident or design, the photo below showing Mr Carnegie laying the foundation stone, just managed to include Stewart's derrick with his name endorsed thereon – See top left corner.



Prior to the building of the Central Baths however, Stewart had been involved in the construction of the Old High School and the Lauder Technical College, both Priory Lane; St. Margaret's R.C. Church, Holyrood Place; Viewfield Baptist Church, East Port; along with extensions to a number of the linen factories in the town. One such example was the building in 1900 of the office and warehouse premises on the north side of Foundry Street, for Messrs Hay and Robertson. Like many of the buildings previously mentioned, this one still exists and, a cursory look at the frontage of it, illustrates the artistry of the stone-masons of that time.

At the time of the 1891 Census the Stewart family, comprising James (48), his wife Margaret (38), and children Charles (18), Euphemia (15), Margaret (13), William (11), Catherine (9), James (5), and Agnes (1), were residing at Burt Street, Dunfermline. Son Charles, who would take over the running of the firm from his father, was then described as a stone-mason.

Charles was at that time probably working on the re-construction of Pitreavie Castle, then being built on the south side of Dunfermline for Mr Erskine Beveridge, the linen factory owner. Charles would later say that he spent most of his apprenticeship working on this project.

By the turn of the century James Stewart had leased the contiguous farms of Headwell and Chamberfield, on the north side of Dunfermline, both of which he farmed with great success.

At the time of the 1901 Census, the Stewart family were residing at Headwell Farm House, and had been added to by son Robert, then 8 years. Son William, then 22 years, is also listed as working as a mason. Charles, by that time, was married to Elizabeth (see Note 2) and was residing at Burt Street Cottage, Burt Street (probably the home of the Stewarts in 1891).

The firm appears to have gone from strength to strength during the early 1900s and, around 1910-15, moved to much larger premises lately occupied by the Phoenix Iron Foundry in Phoenix Lane, Dunfermline. These premises were tailor-made for the Stewart enterprise as they had a large building, with over-head crane, and ample space for stone-cutting machinery. It also comprised a blacksmith's shop, joiner's workshop and office accommodation. Another facility was a railway siding coming into the yard from the main Dunfermline/Stirling railway. Mr Stewart, or

more likely his son, Charles, soon developed these premises into one of the best equipped and most up to date building yards in the country. Notwithstanding the increasing use of machinery, it should also be said that around this time the Stewart business was employing no fewer than 150 men of whom 100 were working masons. In those days the stone-cutting and planing machinery worked non-stop throughout the 24 hours of every day, except Sunday.

Around the time of the move to Phoenix Lane, James Stewart withdrew from the firm to devote his retirement years to running Headwell and Chamberfield Farms. His son Charles took over the reins and shortly thereafter the company name changed to Charles Stewart & Sons.

Progress continued unabated with prestigious contracts being won such as the extension of the County Buildings, in Cupar; the building of Kinnear Castle, Perthshire; along with many years of work on the reconstruction of the St Andrews University Chapel. The latter contract was most exacting and required highly skilled tradesman as it involved the reconstruction of the stone tracery of the windows and flagstones, the transept traceries, and other meticulous work designed to return this venerable edifice back into use as a place of worship. Such was Stewart's commitment at St Andrew's University that they had a branch in that town for a number of years.

In between these contracts more slightly mundane work included the building of the Kinema and Cinema Picture Houses in Dunfermline; the new Dunfermline High School at Hospitalhill; Kings Road and Park Road Schools in Rosyth, the Women's Centre in Pilmuir Street and the Inglis Street Clinic.

Probably the most iconic work carried out by the Stewart family in Dunfermline would have to be the construction of the town's War Memorials on either side of

Monastery Street, commemorating the fallen in both World Wars. They also built the Masonic Temple in Priory Lane and that impressive flight of steps leading to the West Door of Dunfermline Abbey, the gift of the late Provost Alexander of Balmule.

As the twentieth century progressed the use of stone in new building reduced and by the middle of the century serious concerns were being raised regarding the health issues relating to the working of stone. By this time the use of brick was well in vogue and the Stewart family were not slow to recognise this change. It was therefore no surprise when, in 1936 they established Wellwood Brick Company on the north side of Dunfermline.

The brickwork concern was overseen by Charles Stewart's eldest son James, whilst his other sons, Charles, Jack and William, were heavily involved at Phoenix Lane. Sadly, both Jack and William died when only in their early 30s – see Notes 5 and 6. Jack Stewart had been placed in charge of the firm's St. Andrews branch.

Charles Stewart Snr. died in January, 1961, at the age of 88 years. In his obituary in the Dunfermline Press of 4th February, he was described as *'the oldest master builder of Fife and one of Dunfermline's best known citizens, who, more than any other was responsible for the architectural construction of the modern burgh. Quality was his hallmark.'*

Until shortly prior to his death Mr Stewart attended at Phoenix Lane on an almost daily basis, being driven there from his home at Broomhead House, Dunfermline, in his stately Daimler Conquest motor car driven by his faithful chauffeur, Johnny Gordon.

By that time however, the work-force at Phoenix Lane had reduced to around six tradesmen with, in the main, only remedial masonry work being carried out.

It was therefore no surprise that the Dunfermline Press of 23rd December, 1961, carried an article where Charles Stewart Jnr. announced that the firm would close at the end of that year. Mr Stewart stated he and his brother, James, did not consider it worthwhile re-equipping the firm to compete with modern methods of building. He further pointed out that, for the previous 20 years the Government had been against apprentices coming into the trade, because of the danger of silicosis. Through this discouragement, few young men were in this section of the building industry, stone work being mainly carried out by elderly men and then only on repair jobs. Nothing new was being done in stone, the cost being fantastically high, as stone work still required a tremendous amount of work by hand. One could not do stone mouldings or other delicate work with machines.

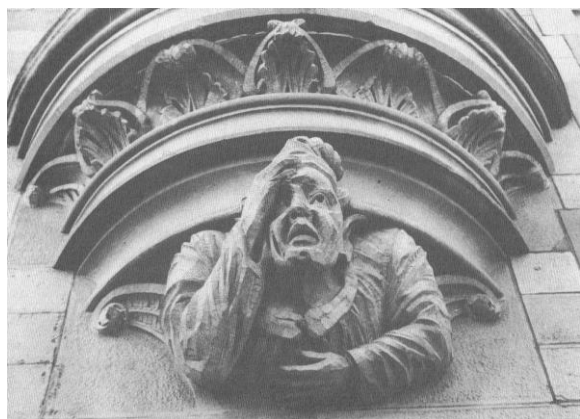
Mr Stewart added that he and his brother, James, still had Wellwood Brickworks, where over 6 million bricks were produced each year, so they weren't going into complete retirement. However, he added that their four key men in the building firm would be retiring.

These 'key men' were probably long-standing employees such as stonemason Jock Brewster, builders Tom Grant and Tommy Bain, and Tom Anderson, a joiner of excellent repute, who at that time was well into his 70s.

Also at the Phoenix Lane complex was the office of Dunfermline architects, Muirhead & Rutherford, with whom Messrs Stewart collaborated closely on many projects.

On a historic note it is worth noting that on the Kirkgate wall of Dunfermline City Chambers, there is a strange figure – see photo below – of a man with one hand holding his head and the other clutching

his stomach. The story goes that this figure is meant to represent a councillor of the time who apparently 'liked a tippie' and who, feeling somewhat worse of the wear each morning, gave regular grief to the tradesmen working on the building. If there is any substance to this story, then there is every possibility that the figure is the work of James Stewart, who was then employed as a foreman mason on the building.



Note 1 – James Stewart was born c. 1849, at either Falkland or Freuchie, the son of Charles Stewart, Ploughman, and Euphemia Murdoch. On 1st December, 1871, James, then residing at Golfdrum Street, married Margaret Reddie, (22), residing at Charlestown. The couple had eight of a family; Charles, Euphemia, Margaret, William, Catherine, James, Agnes and Robert. Mrs Stewart died on 1st August, 1905, at her home, Headwell Farm. On 7th September, 1909, at The Commercial Hotel, Inch, Aberdeen, James was re-married to Mary Will, (40), of New Rayne, near Inch. James died on 26th March, 1920, aged 70 years, at 2 Headwell Road, Dunfermline. His widow, Mary, died on 9th December, 1954, aged 85 years at 3 Kingsmill Road, Aberdeen. Her usual residence was shown as 14 Mansfield, Kintore, Aberdeen.



A unique photograph from around 1902 showing the firm's founder, James Stewart (right); his father, Charles Stewart (left), son, Charles Stewart (back) and grandson, James. The photo is almost certainly taken at the front of Headwell House, the Stewart family residence at that time and still in situ in 2010, on the north side of Headwell Road, Dunfermline.

In addition to over-seeing his building enterprise James Stewart Snr. also played a prominent part in the municipal work of Dunfermline for many years. Entering the Town Council in 1897 as a representative of the Fourth Ward he held the seat until 1911, when the burgh was extended to include Rosyth. In that year he was elected by the Second Ward. In 1902 he was appointed convener of the Drainage Committee, and in this capacity he rendered valuable and noteworthy services to the town. Under his guidance the council carried through the contract for the outfall sewer to the Forth. In 1908 he was appointed Bailie, and as a mark of esteem after his retirement from the council he was given the title of Police Judge. He was a staunch Free Mason and held a high position in Lodge Union No 250. Mr

Stewart was undoubtedly, for his time, one of Dunfermline's most enterprising sons.

Note 2 – Charles Stewart was born on 21st May, 1872, at Pilmuir Street, Dunfermline. On 27th December, 1899, at the Royal Hotel, Dunfermline, Charles married Elizabeth Downie, (26), of East Port, Dunfermline, the daughter of John Downie, a Master Cabinet Maker. Charles and Elizabeth had four sons; James, Charles, Jack and William. Sadly, Elizabeth died at Burt Street, Dunfermline, on 2nd November, 1911. She was only 38 years of age and the cause of death was Scarlet Fever/Bright's Disease. On 26th April, 1916, at the Caledonian Station Hotel, Edinburgh, Charles married Janet Mack, (41), of 37 Marchmont Road, Edinburgh. On 29th January, 1961, Charles died, aged 88 years, at Broomhead House, Dunfermline. Janet had died on 25th November, 1945, aged 71 years, also at Broomhead House.

Charles was dux boy of McChlery's School, Buffie's Brae, Dunfermline, where school fees amounted to 1d per week, paid each Monday. He left school at the age of 13, and, on taking night classes at the then new Lauder Technical College, New Row, Dunfermline, (built by his father) he again won the dux prize. He served an apprenticeship with his father who was then undertaking the re-building of Pitreavie Castle for Mr Erskine Beveridge, and young Charles later stated that he virtually 'served his time' on this job.

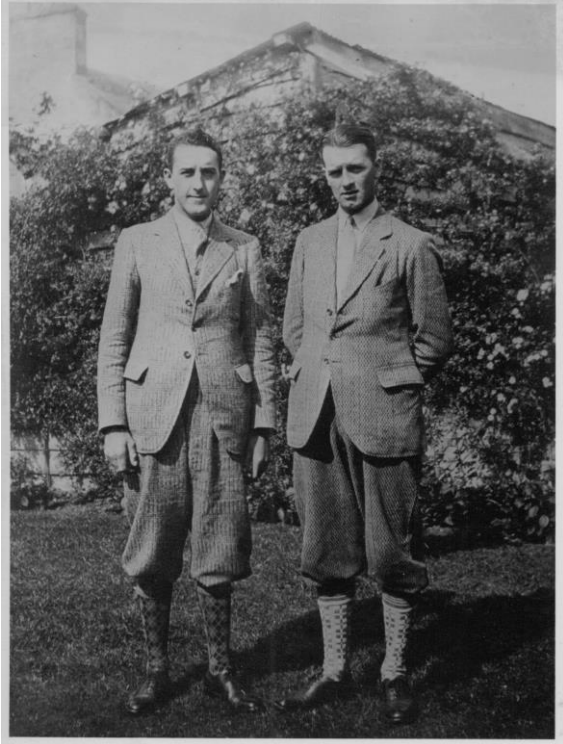
Note 3 – William Stewart, brother of Charles above, was born on 21st February, 1879, at Golfdrum Street, Dunfermline. On 25th June, 1902, at St. Margaret's Hotel, Dunfermline, William, then 24 years of age, a builder, residing at Headwell, Dunfermline, married Helen Steel Keir, (24), a dressmaker, residing at 37 Grieve Street, Dunfermline, and the daughter of Peter Keir, Shipmaster. William was only 39 years of age when he died on 8th September, 1918, at his home,

20 Cameron Street, Dunfermline, the cause being chronic nephritis.

Note 4 – James Stewart, was born on 30th December, 1901 at Burt Street, Dunfermline. On 10th April, 1935, at St Cuthbert's Parish Church, Edinburgh, James, then residing at 7 Foundry Street, Dunfermline, married Kathleen (Bunty) Drysdale or Myles, (36) a widow, residing at Broomhead House, Dunfermline. Kathleen's father was Dr Arthur Drysdale, also of Broomhead House, Dunfermline. The couple had two children, a daughter, Belinda born 27th January 1936, and a son, Charles Alan (Alan), born 15th July, 1944. James died, aged 67 years, at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, on 5th May, 1969. His widow, Kathleen, died, aged 92, on 29th January, 1991, at her home, Wellfield House, Gateside, Fife. Kathleen's first husband was John Frier Myles, a solicitor, residing at Overdale, Forfar. He died suddenly in 1934, whilst playing golf at Forfar Golf Course.

Note 5 – Charles Stewart Jnr., was born on 10th December, 1904, at Burt Street, Dunfermline. On 24th June, 1964, Charles, then 64 years and residing at Broomhead House, Dunfermline, married Helen Ann Wood Clark, (48) who was matron at the Northern Hospital, Dunfermline. Charles died, on 5th August, 1981, at 98a Pilmuir Street, Dunfermline, aged 76 years.

Note 6 – John (Jack) Downie Stewart was born on 8th June, 1903, at Burt Street, Dunfermline. Jack remained single and died at Foundry Street, Dunfermline, on 7th November, 1937, aged only 34 years. The cause of death was Brights Disease/Pericarditis.



Circa 1930 photo of brothers, Jack and Jim Stewart, grandsons of the firm's founder – See Notes 4 & 6

Note 7 – William Downie Stewart, was born on 13th July, 1909, at Burt Street, Dunfermline. He also remained single and died, aged only 31 years, on 6th November, 1940, at Broomhead House, Dunfermline. The cause of death was Cardiac Disease.

Note 7 – Check Bert McEwan's Dunfermline Heritage for other buildings erected by Stewart. Also check Carnegie Trust records for same, i.e. community centres, etc.

Note 8 – Check for what became of James Stewart's family, other than Charles.

Note 9 – Sarah Innes, 9 Bank Street, Elie, KY9 1BW – Tel. 01333 330709, is a descendent of the Robertson family of Messrs Hay & Robertson. Also has great knowledge of the Stewart family.

Note 10 – The house at Burt Street (now 7 Foundry Street) where the Stewart family

lived for many years, was apparently built by James Stewart around 1890 or slightly earlier. The house is now occupied by Brian McLaren Tel. 01383 722852.

Note 11 – Stewart built a block of houses near the top of Townhill Road during the early part of the 20th century for the firm's workers workers.