SILVERBURN

Heart  Mind  Soul
‘Siller Burn’, from the old Scots for 'Silver' and 'stream' could have three origins, according to the earliest attempts to explain the name:

◊ There may have been a legend concerning treasure hidden there at some time. (Liddall 1896)

◊ There may have been a small silver deposit found in the area.

◊ The sparkling water of the burn may have suggested the sheen of silver.
Contents

Introduction 1 - 4
Historical Timeline 4 - 5
Russell Family History 6
Trees in Silverburn 7
Flax Industry History 8
Location 9
Future Plans 10 - 11

Historical references courtesy of Medieval Methil

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Introduction:

Background of Levenmouth

Many people who visit or pass through the Levenmouth area are unaware of the vast wealth of history which stretches back to the time of the Vikings and beyond.

The origin of the name “Leven” comes from the Pictish word for “flood.” The nearby Loch Leven, being the loch responsible, was also given the name. A settlement is believed to have formed at the mouth of the River Leven close to the area around Scoonie Brae at the founding of the church of "scoyne".

However, the first time a mention of the current town appeared in the history books was in the middle of the 15th Century, according to two separate records referring to the town's name as "levynnis-mouth". These mentioned an urgent need for repair work at the town's monastery and named George Durie, a local estate owner, as the keeper of the Harbour.

In 1854 the Leven Railway opened, linking the town with Thornton Junction on the Edinburgh - Aberdeen main line. This led to the opportunity for Levenmouth to become a tourist resort popular with visitors from the west of Scotland. Later in the 19th century the Leven Railway became part of a loop line of the North British Railway linking Thornton Junction and Leuchars Junction via St Andrews. The railway between Leven and St. Andrews closed in 1965.

In 1887, John Bartholomew’s Gazetteer of the British Isles stated “The principal industries (in Leven) are flax-spinning and linen-weaving, and in the neighbourhood are foundries, bone-dust and corn mills, brickworks etc.”
The weaving of linen is one of the chief branches of the trade of Leven, and affords employment to about 170 persons, who work at handlooms in their own dwellings; there are also five mills for the spinning of flax and tow, in which 250 persons are engaged, of whom upwards of 150 are females.

The trade of the port consists at present in the exportation of linen-cloth and yarn, bone-dust for manure, grain, potatoes, whisky, cast and pig iron, ochre, and bricks and tiles; and in the importation of flax, hemp, malt, coal, stone for building, timber, slates, herrings, and bones to grind for manure.’ It may not be generally so well known, but Silverburn Estate, in its earlier form, was owned by the Durie Family from 1260. They were a very prominent and influential family whose part in the history of Scotland cannot be understated. George Durie was perhaps the most pre-eminent of that name. This same George was canonised after dying a martyr’s death at the time of the Reformation in Scotland.

The Levenmouth area was a hotbed of Smuggling and Piracy, as was the rest of the South Fife Coast for several centuries, but it is worth pointing out that the Vikings not only called in to raid the area, including the foreshore at Silverburn, but also settled there, giving a name to their settlement which was later changed to Buckhaven. The Vikings knew the area even before the Duries were there, with the treasures of the Celtic Culdee monks being an early attraction with later, those of the Roman Catholic monks continuing to be a draw to the Northern raiders, who, it must be remembered, were also settlers. The Duries settled in Fife and there are records of their presence there from as early as 1119.
History of Silverburn

Silverburn was the estate of the Russell family who were owners of the Tullis Russell paper making business. The Estate was formerly leased to Mr David Russell by Charles Maitland Christie of Durie in 1854. Arthur Russell bought the Estate in 1866 and rebuilt Silverburn House. The dower house (traditionally for the use of the former owner's widow) which was called Corriemar was also built and a flax mill was established on the site. David Russell died in 1906. His son, (also named David and later, Sir David Russell) was born at Silverburn in 1872. He was very interested in trees and many were planted during his residence which comprised some unusual specimens which continue to grow to this day.
The flax mill closed around 1930, though the 'retting pond' for treatment of the raw flax is still in existence, though very much in need of a good clean out, and perhaps restocking with local freshwater fish and amphibians. In 1973, Sir David Russell’s grandson, Major Russell, gifted the houses and grounds to Leven Town Council, but also stipulating, however, through the National Trust for Scotland that the “subjects should remain forever as a quiet area used for the benefit of the public in general and the people of Leven in particular for nature trails, quiet parkland and organised camping.” It is estimated that, in the 1990’s, Silverburn Park Estate was attracting over 20,000 visitors per annum. In common with many Parks at the time, one great attraction for families was the ‘Mini Farm.’

### Historical Timeline of Silverburn

- **1260** – Silverburn Estate owned by the Durie family.
- **1854** – Leased to the Russell Family.
- **1866** – Bought by the Russell Family. Silverburn House rebuilt, established Flax Mill and retting business.
- **Early 1900s (circa)** – Craft House constructed at the rear of Silverburn House.
1929 – Sir David Russell returns to Silverburn House, plants many types of trees on the Estate.

1930s (circa) – Flax Mill closed.

1943-45 – Land used as a base for Polish soldiers, unknown if Silverburn House was occupied.

1970 – Silverburn and Corriemar Houses no longer housing patients for Stratheden Hospital.

1973 – Gifted to Leven Town Council by Major Russell.

1985 – Offices re-opened as Mini-Farm.

Mid to late 1980s – Kirkcaldy District Council undertook a job creation programme to reinstate Silverburn House as a Residential Centre. Another project sought to upgrade and widen a pedestrian link between Scoonie Golf Course and Silverburn.

1997 – Fife Council partners with private enterprises, referred to as the Silverburn Trust, to look at turning Silverburn Estate into a Scottish Music/Arts & Crafts Centre. Neither option undertaken.

2002 – Mini-Farm closed down following policy change on the operation of Animal Centres in Fife. Letham Glen and Silverburn Advisory Group formed shortly after to hinder the decline of the Estate.

2004 – Following a struggle to retain members, the above Group aimed to create a constituted body in which to gain aid from grant funding, renamed to Silverburn and Letham Glen Development Group.

Mid to late 2000s (circa) – Silverburn and Corriemar Houses deemed depilated, closed to the public and boarded up.

2011/12 – Fife Council sets up a proposal to lease part or all of the Estate to interested groups who wish to officially regenerate the Estate, with FEAT being selected as the preferred partner of Fife Council and awarded time to develop their initial plans for the revitalisation of the park.
Russell Family History

Mr David Russell was estimated to be born in 1831, in Colesie/Solbesse in Fife. Silverburn was originally part of the Barony of Durie and was leased to Mr David Russell by Charles Maitland Christie of Durie in 1854. Arthur Russell purchased the land in 1866 and rebuilt Silverburn House. A dower house known as Corriemar was also built and a flax mill was established on the site. Mr David Russell died in 1906. David’s son, who later became Sir David Russell was born at Silverburn in 1872 and in 1912 married, went to live in Aithernie House. He returned to Silverburn in 1929. He was educated at Clifton Bank School, St Andrews before entering the family paper business, working first at the company’s merchant house in Edinburgh. While in Edinburgh he attended evening classes at Heriot Watt College, studying Engineering, Botany and Geology. From the mid-1890s, he worked in partnership with his elder brother, Robert Russell (1871-1939), in modernising the mills, developing new product lines and expanding the company’s markets. Sir David had a great interest in trees and planted many of them, including some rare and unusual species. In 1973/74 Sir David Russell’s grandson, Major Russell (Head of Tullis Russell Paperworks) gifted the house and grounds to Leven Town Council, but linked to the National Trust for Scotland to ensure that:

“subjects should remain forever as a quiet area used for the benefit of the public in general and the people of Leven in particular for nature trails, quiet parkland and organised camping”.

6
Trees in Silverburn

The park occupies an area of 11 hectares (27 acres) with the woods occupying about half this area. Silverburn is home to a number of different trees which stems from a keen hobby of the young David Russell, including sycamore, beech, oak, lime, Scots pine, Corsican/Austrian pine, poplar, holly, larch, Norway spruce, Douglas fir, silver fir, silver birch, Japanese larch, gean, sweet chestnut, horse chestnut, cherry, conifers, yew, cypress, and unusual varieties of ash among them. At the rear of Silverburn House is a grove of giant redwoods (Sequoiadendron giganteum) with their thick spongy bark. Already, they have diameters of around 150 cms and they are just babies! These Giant American Redwoods are a real feature of the park.

John Steinbeck once wrote:

“The redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stay with you always. No one has ever successfully painted or photographed a redwood tree. The feeling they produce is not transferable. From them comes silence and awe. It’s not only their unbelievable stature, nor the colour which seems to shift and vary under your eyes, no, they are not like any trees we know, they are ambassadors from another time.”
Flax Industry History

Around 1854, David Russell leased from the Estate of Durie, Silverburn. He rebuilt Silverburn and established the Flax Mill and Retting business. Flax was either imported or grown locally. It was prepared for spinning at Silverburn and the fibre was soaked in the retting ponds for about 10 days to prepare the fibre. The factory was run by steam power. The flax mill was one of the first buildings to be roofed with the new building material “corrugated iron” - the roof of which still the same material today.

The mill closed around 1930, however the innovative roof is the reason the mill was given listed building status. The fibres used to produce flax must first have its exterior rotton off in a pool before said fibres can be harvested, a purpose the Retting Pond served in the transition of flax to linen. This technique seems to have existed in Scotland since before the Battle of Bannockburn. Towards the close of the 16th Century, linen goods formed a good part of Scotland’s exports, having an estimated export value of £1.3 million by 1822. It should be pointed out, however, that flax was not the only material used to make linen – there was also jute, hemp and tow, so it’s uncertain what flax’s overall profit margins were. 1822 would also be the year in which the official linen stamp – originally made to counter low quality linen – would be abolished, which hints at a possible loss of accuracy on post-1822 figures.
Location

Silverburn is located on the southern edge of the A915 East Tourist Route, approximately half way between the coastal towns of Leven and Lundin Links. Silverburn Park adjoins three golf courses and has pedestrian links to Leven and the Forth Estuary Coastal Path.

The property is adjacent to the south, west and east to 3 golf courses: Scoonie, Lundin Links and Leven Links courses and bounded to the north by Miledyke Wood and the A915 to the north west.

The Park overall comprises of 11 hectares (27.18 acres) in total made of a variety of distinct areas including 3.6 hectares of pastures and gardens.
Plans for the Future

Since 2012, FEAT (Fife Employment Access Trust) have been investigating and developing plans to turn Silverburn estate into a centre of wellbeing for the local community of Levenmouth and the whole of Fife. At the time of print, FEAT are pursuing several ideas, recognising a need for income-generating activities to combine with community activities to ensure the estate can have a long-term, sustainable future.

The three main buildings are all in a state of considerable disrepair. Of the three, the Flax Mill has the most potential, because of its size and location. We are working with an architect to see what can be done to restore the building, possibly over several phases as it will incur considerable costs.

The mill is big enough that we would be able to include space for offices, meetings, and some occasional events. Camping is specifically mentioned as one of the conditions of transfer. Silverburn’s location on the coastal path means it is well placed for walkers and other tourists. We are exploring both camping and the creation of some hostel space in the old flax mill.

The woodlands are attractive, but need some work. We have had a woodland management plan drawn up, showing what needs to be done through the year to keep the woodland in good order. We see this as an opportunity to allow people to learn new skills, or train for a job in this line of work. As well as people using the woodland for walks, there is scope for organised events like forest schools. This may be an option for local schools, and also people from a little further afield.
Many people have said they want to see the animals brought back. This is not straightforward or cheap, because it requires staff all year round to feed and care for the animals. We are taking advice from the Federation of City Farms about the practicality of having some version of a mini-farm, however this is likely to be a much longer-term prospect. We know that as more people use Silverburn, there will be a need for a cafe facility. We want to include a cafe in the flax mill, and we are exploring the creation of a temporary facility there could be in the meantime. There is space for gardening, and we would like to introduce growing projects, both as a therapeutic activity and as training for future employment.

Our plans are summarised in a short film available on our facebook page, which is also the place to go for regular progress updates—
www.facebook.com/heartmindsoulsilverburn

We hope to see more happy faces at Silverburn in the years to come!
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Who we are:

Heart Mind & Soul: Silverburn is a long-term regeneration plan for Silverburn Estate, led by Fife Employment Access Trust (FEAT).

The redevelopment of the estate is a huge undertaking and will take several years to realise. This booklet is designed to highlight the plans for the future, but also look back on Silverburn’s past.

FEAT were established in 1994 and have delivered a wide range of services with the aim of supporting people with mental health conditions to access employment - as well as having a key role in promoting positive messages about mental health to reduce stigma and discrimination.

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