



CIRCUIT OF MELROSE - Saturday 7th May 2005
Centenary of James Curle's Trimontium Excavations 1905-10

One of the celebrations of the centenary of the beginning of James Curle's excavation is a guided walk - a 'Curle Circuit' - round many of the buildings and places in Melrose with which he was associated, ending with a cup of tea in the Corn Exchange.

We have asked the owners/tenants of the various premises to give permission for people to gather at i.e. outside these places and be told something about them, by professional experts, if they are available, on the architecture, or local people knowledgeable about their history and relationship to the Curle family.

The itinerary, with approximate timings, is as follows: -

- 1.30pm St Mary's School, Melrose, formerly Abbey Park, birthplace of James Curle in 1862
- 2.00pm Rosebank, Dingleton Rd (now Eildon Housing offices), his grandfather's home
- 2.15pm The Bow, (pronounced 'bough'), Market Square, at head of Abbey St; former office of Curle Erskine, Solicitors
- 2.30pm Visit Melrose Abbey to view gravestones of Curle family, including James Curle and his brother Alexander Ormiston Curle (gravestones cleaned by the Trust)
- 2.50pm Harmony, St Mary's Road/Abbey St, formerly St Cuthbert's, where James Curle died in 1944
- 3.20pm Millmount Farm, Annay Road, Newstead, to which he walked on Sunday afternoons. (Comfort stop at Newstead Village Hall, if necessary)
- 4.00pm Melrose Youth Hostel, formerly Priorwood House, the family home where he spent most of his early and married life after his widowed mother moved to Harmony with his sisters. Then we follow James Curle's morning walk to the office via his garden (now Priorwood car park), the bridge into the Abbey grounds, the (now) back gate into the NTS Priorwood Orchard and out into Abbey Street, through the (now closed) door in the Abbey Street wall, where the stone lintel, most appropriately for our purpose, bears the date '1905' and the initials 'JC' for James Curle and 'BC' for [Alice Mary] Blanche Curle, his wife.
- 4.30pm Tea in the Corn Exchange, Melrose.

The Trust is to have another safari round the Trimontium site, starting at Newstead Millennium Milestone on Saturday 3 September at 1.30pm and ending at Drygrange Roman Stone Summerhouse at about 3.30pm, followed by tea.

A Curle Circuit round Melrose would remind people that James Curle, while being famous for his archaeological work and remarkable 1911 book about it - 'A Roman Frontier Post and its People' - was also a prominent citizen, businessman and family man in Melrose.



Grateful acknowledgements are made to Charles Alexander Strang's 'Borders and Berwick: An illustrated architectural guide to the Scottish Borders and Tweed Valley', kindly loaned by George Thomson. First published in 1994 by The Rutland Press (ISBN 1 873190 10 7) it is a storehouse of technical and historical information, lightly imparted. The RCAHMS Roxburghshire Inventory of 1956 has also been gratefully consulted.

Abbey Park

Abbey Park (St Mary's Preparatory School) c. 1 820 Birthplace of James Curle, 27 March, 1862. Two-storey three-bay classical villa with Tuscan-pilastered door piece and armorial panel over (as well as inscription to the founders of the school). Coursed squared rubble with polished ashlar dressings, piended slated roof and substantial late- 19th and 20th century additions, its classical stable block (also c. 1820) converted, 1975, to school use. Headmaster Mr J Brett.

Rosebank

Rosebank, 1814, John Smith architect
Built for grandfather James Curle WS ('He drives a hard bargain', diary of John Smith, Darnlee). Two-storey three-bay with advanced, pedimented centre bay, coursed squared rubble with ashlar dressings, slated roof. In 1845 James Curle Senior was faced with the railway being constructed at the foot of his garden and moved to Harmony Hall. (As we descend to the Square we see the Bank of Scotland, 1897, George Washington Browne, architect. 'Originally British Linen Bank [it is a] strong free Renaissance red sandstone stop to the view from Dingleton Road').

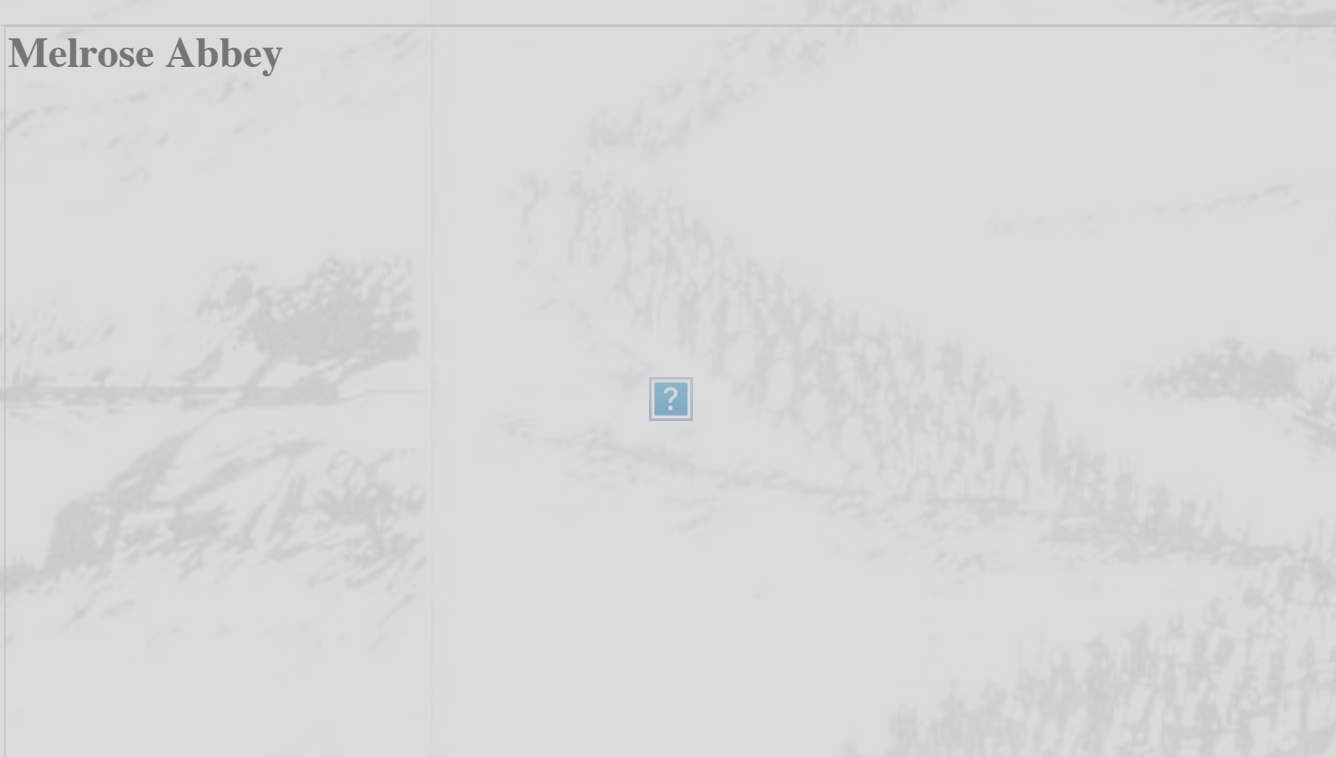
Market Place

Market Place.
Note 'Denys Mitchell's galleon sign for the late 18th century Ship Inn and the Market Cross, the new (1991) finial replacing that of 1645, an unrecognisably-eroded Unicorn with mallet (Mel) and rose, above modern shaft (with metal eye for the jongs chain) and 19th century octagonal stepped base. The 1645 cross replaced an earlier cross - a natural focal point which had developed just South of the Abbey's main arch-and-chapel entrance, where Abbey Street begins. Corn Exchange. 1862-3. David Cousin, architect. Scottish Jacobean three-storey with crow steps, strap work, hand-held mell, a rose and Roman numeral date': to the right, cast-iron Memorial Clock to Dr Meikle, 1892, with griffins and trapped birds; and name-stone of The Ormiston.

The Curle Erskine Writers' (i.e. Solicitors') office, two-storey with windows on the corner at the Bow (pronounced bough), to which James Curle (solicitor, estate and house agent, bank manager) walked up Abbey Street each morning, is now occupied by Rhymer's Fayre and a flat above. The iron-lined former strong room is now a wine store. Its door is too heavy to close.

Melrose Abbey 'from 12th century. Founded by Cistercian (white) monks having originated from [Cîteaux in Burgundy and] Rievaulx in Yorkshire, then moved from their original location at Old Melrose to that at Melrose (Little Fordell) more suited to their agricultural habits. Subject to much sacking, looting and rebuilding, most surviving work is 15th century, the high point of Scottish Decorated, with the Parish Church, 1618, built over the nave. until its removal to the Weirhill. Restoration of the Abbey remains 1822, by John Smith under the supervision of Sir Walter Scott and at the expense of the Duke of Buccleuch, the then owner.

The Curle family gravestones are in the South East exterior angle. The Trimontium Trust was granted Scheduled Monument Consent in 2005 to clean and re-letter those of James Curle and his brother Alexander Ormiston Curle, both famous archaeologists in their day (along with their colleague Sir George Macdonald of Antonine Wall and coin identification fame), the one for his work at Trimontium and the other for the discovery of the Traprain Law hack-silver hoard in 1919 and excavations at Jarlshof in Shetland.



'Despite the efforts of despoilers from both sides of the Border, a wealth of decoration on the building has still survived, much of it at high level on the abbey kirk, where the stone carvers, using stone from Dryburgh, devised and carried out designs of leaf, bud and flower They produced the gargoyles shaped like strange uncouth animals or flying dragons that belched out the rainwater, and set up the array of demons, devils and hobgoblins on the buttress intakes and gables. Sculptors or imagers gave the master touch to representations of the Christ, the Virgin, the saints and martyrs that filled the many elaborate niches; and to the angel musicians on the supporting corbels. Heads of kings, queens, lords, ladies, monks, craftsmen, Saracens and scolds looked down from their places at each side of the windows, from which their faces have smirked, smiled, scowled and grimaced throughout the centuries'.

James Curle's *A Little Book about Melrose* goes into detail about the layout of the Abbey precinct and the line of its perimeter wall.

Harmony Hall, 1807

Harmony Hall, 1807
'Reclusive behind high rubble walls, built in uncertain times, as befits the house of a local joiner, Robert Waugh, who had made his fortune in Jamaica: two-and-a-half-storey-and basement built of coursed whinstone with freestone dressings, a pedimented centre bay and Ionic porch'.

There is a family story that Sir Walter Scott (in an unusual social move) visited Melancholy Jacques - his nickname for the gloomy, if wealthy, Mr Waugh, whose house was called after his Jamaican plantation. Mr Waugh subsequently supplied Jamaican cedar for the library and drawing room at Abbotsford.

In James Curle's time the house was called St Cuthbert's (see his gravestone). There is a grass patch outside the entrance, facing E, which used to be larger and caused the carriages to manoeuvre round it. It was called Cuddy's Green, either because it was used for grazing or as one of the places where St Cuthbert's bones rested during their wanderings. The house reverted to its original name of Harmony when the Parish Church on the Weirhill, to the W, became St Cuthbert's, after World War II. The Parish Church reverted to its original name in 1984.

RCAHMS No.576 'Of the many comfortable villas in and near Melrose there is none more pleasant than this Regency house of three storeys and an attic, which stands immediately W of Melrose Abbey. On plan it comprises an oblong main block, running E and W and facing S. This was the original house. But two parallel wings have subsequently been added on the N, one on either side of the circled bay that contains the staircase. The basement or service floor is open on three sides; only on the S or front is it partly sunk, and even there the windows rise above the area. [The Trimontium Trustees are allowed to hold their quarterly meetings, and records, there].

The central part of the front is advanced and pedimented. Across the area a flight of eleven steps leads to the entrance, which is situated on the ground floor some 5 feet above ground level and sheltered within an Ionic portico.

On the first floor a lintelled Venetian window comes between the portico and the pediment and in the roof there is a central dormer, probably an addition.

The masonry of the front is unusual, being carried out in small blocks of black whinstone, not much larger than bricks, relieved by yellow freestone dressings.

The back and sides are of red and yellow freestone in low courses. At the corners there are rusticated quoins. The windows have backset margins. There is a moulded cornice at the wall-head, a belt between the basement and ground floors, and a sill-course below the ground floor windows.

The house is conveniently planned, and it may be noted that the fireplaces are situated in inside walls, after the English fashion. The entrance opens into a square central vestibule, which has shafts at each corner supporting a coved plaster ceiling. Beyond this lies the hall and staircase, where a very graceful geometric stair descends to the basement and rises to the bedroom floor and attic.

On the W of the hall the dining room balances the drawing room on the E, both rooms occupying the depth of the house. The dining-room, lit from S and W, has a fireplace on the E, flanked on each side by a doorway. These doorways have pilasters and enriched overdoors matching enriched friezes above the windows. A square recess for a sideboard in the N wall has a composite pillar at each side supporting an enriched frieze. The walls have dado panelling.

The drawing-room, lit from N, S and E, has a circled N end. The fireplace is on the W. The doors and finishings are generally of (Jamaican) cedar.

On the basement and bedroom floors there is one apartment at each corner of the main block; there is also a bedroom above the vestibule. There were originally three attic rooms in the roof, which have now been subdivided. The additions provide a pantry, library, lavatory and bath, as well as a bedroom'. [2 May 1947]

Harmony Hall Stables

Harmony Hall Stables, St Mary's Road, c. 1807
Single-storey classical range with pediment housing blind oculus and fire insurance mark.

Millmount Farm

The fields of Millmount Farm and the former Gattonsidehaugh Farm, combined and still on the Curle estate, stretch from the Tweed, on the N, across the Annay Road to the Malthouse Burn on the S, below the Prior's Walk and its housing estate; and on the E, from Newstead village to Priory Farm on the W, beside the Abbey. James Curle and the family were wont to go across the fields - and the 'plank bridge' - on a Sunday afternoon to pay a visit. The present tenant is Mr William Ker. Mrs Ker runs 'The Smelly Rug Company' which will freshen your horse blankets. Mr Ker has incorporated the stone barn into the house and built a modern barn.

Priorwood House

The Prior's Walk or Middle Walk is a path from the W end of Newstead village to Melrose, which was used by the stonemasons of Newstead going to and from the Abbey. It emerges into the Priorswalk housing scheme and then through what was the E gate of the Abbey precinct wall into the children's play area and football pitch next to the Abbey. We will turn S to see Priorwood House, the family home of the Curles for many years. On the 1826 map of Melrose it is called Prior Bank. The dining room was supplied by lift from the downstairs kitchen. The now N-facing house became in due course the Melrose Youth Hostel, under SYHA, renovated in the 1990s. The family also owned Harmony, where James Curle's four sisters eventually lived.

In Winter James Curle walked to his office in Melrose Market Place via the Green Gate near the East Port. On the S side of the house was 'the dirt track' for farm vehicles etc (now the High Road, bounded on the S itself by the huge Wall which retains the bypass). [This is described by Charles Strang as clothing 'the naively massive retaining structure ... with standard concrete blocks. Civic Trust Commendation 1989. Initial concept built in decorative references (not executed) to the Waverley Novels'.]

In Summer James Curle walked to the office through his Priorwood garden. To enter on to Abbey Street he had a portal built. We shall pass through it as he did, taking note of the carved stone lintel above which bears the legend JC 1905 BC, Alice Mary Blanchette Curle being the new Mrs Curle, a striking portrait of whom, in left profile, was painted by Sir William Nicholson. The gardener's cottage (and now NTS shop) 1875, Peddie and Kinnear, at its NW corner. The wall to Abbey Street is 18th century, great wallhead scallops filled with 1904 (Lutyens? Lorimer?) wrought-iron adverts for its contents'. It is to be noted, however, that the wrought-iron fruit and flowers are made to be seen from within the garden.

Carved Stone Lintel



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