



GILMERTON COVE

On the edge of Edinburgh there is the old Mining Village of Gilmerton, easily reached by car on the A722 or the A720 Bye-Pass and from the City centre by bus.

This Village goes back to around 1100 AD and perhaps before, the original name was PENJACOB then in 1165 the name was changed to Gillemoreston depicting a Farm. Gilmerton is situated in an area called the “ Drum “ this meaning it is on high ground, at one time the Village hosted the deepest Coal Mine in Scotland. Although the Village had a few farms around it, the Village was to become mainly a Mining Village, all the houses being Miners dwellings, then Carters would follow as the Mines produced more Coal. Coal would not be the only produce, we find that there were great Lime Stone quarry’s as well, at first starting on the ground level then mining underground for it.

THE COVE

The Village of Gilmerton has a far more interesting story to tell other than Coal or Limestone production, Gilmerton has what is known as the “ Cove “, we expect a Cove to be at the coast but we have to remember that Cove is Scot’s for Cave.

So what is so interesting about the Gilmerton Cove, it is around ten feet under ground and it was at one time a dwelling for a local family. A local blacksmith by the name of George Paterson laid claim to have dug out the Cove himself, he claimed that it took him five years to complete, and when completed was used for his business and family home, it has been suggested that it was used as a drinking den.

To have done this amount of work on his own would have been a mammoth task, he is stated as starting the work in 1719 and completed it in 1724, if he was digging out the Cove how did he carry out his Blacksmith’s role, why did he still use the Cottage above, the Cottage was small depending on how many were in the family.

Many theories have been put forward as to what the Cove was for, did the Knights Templar use it as a hiding place when they were disbanded in 1560, when the reformation in Scotland took hold. Was it used for Masonic meetings, there are certainly Masonic signs carved into the tables, these signs I feel would have been put there after George Paterson died about 1735, I don’t think he would have allowed anyone to carve on his tables. Another thought is it may have been used by the Hellfire Club, a Witches Coven has been thought of, or was it used by the Covenanters when they were outlawed so they could hold meetings.

There is a well about six feet deep but it may have been capped off at one point for safety, there is also a drainage sump to allow water to escape.

There are tunnels that have been filled in, some suggestions are, they lead to Graigmillar Castle, Edmonston House, Moredun House even Rosslyn Chapel or Newbattle Abbey. I doubt if the latter two would count as the base of the Cove is around 10 feet from ground level, it would mean tunnelling deeper as the ground level from the Cove drops a fair bit.

Due to the development of the coal industry through the years, the Mine workings would probably be in the way of any tunnel now, as would the under ground Lime workings, we know that there are many old Mine shafts in the area. One tunnel in

particular within the Cove could be the resting place of George Paterson, the tunnel has been filled in at some point in time.

When walking through this wonderful setting you have to say to yourself, why are there so many windows built into the walls, why so many seats, everywhere you go there is plenty of seating accommodation. Why are there so many drilled holes, what were they for or where do they lead, this is all fascinating stuff and gets your mind working overtime.

We know George Paterson was a Parishioner at Liberton Kirk, but there is no proper date for his death, as stated earlier it could have been 1735, this is about 100 years before it became compulsory to report any death. He is reported as attending the Kirk so I would imagine his children would have been baptised there as well, another interesting point is how many did he have.

There are four possible candidates by the name of Paterson,

My points of view as to what the Cove could have been are.

1) It could have been used by Lepers, many believe that Liberton means “ Leper Town “ but have been unable to find where they were located and Gilmerton is in the Liberton Parish area.

2) It may have been a safe haven for those who were Roman Catholics, they were hunted at the Reformation, I recently heard that at one time Catholics were not allowed in Gilmerton Village, the Cove could have been used as a Chapel

3) Back in the 1600's Actors used to put on a play about Robin Hood at Gilmerton, there was an Inn up Ellen's Glen Road called the Robin's Nest, and it possibly got it's name from the Play that was put on, later a around the 1950's a newer Pub was built on Gilmerton Road with the same name. But what if the Cove was a pub or Inn before Paterson took possession, it may have been an even earlier “ Robins Nest “ and perhaps this is where the Actors stayed afterwards for a meal a drink and bed for the night.

Alexander Pennecuik a Edinburgh Merchant come poet and a scoundrel wrote this poem, it was put on a wooden panel and inserted into the space above the fireplace.

Upon the earth thrives villainy and woe
But happiness and I do dwell below
My hands hewed out this rock into a cell
Wherein from din of life I safely dwell
On Jacobs pillow nightly lies my head
My house when living and my grave when dead
Inscribe upon it when I am dead and gone
I lived and died within my mothers womb

No matter what this is the place to visit, just to see this work of art with your own eyes is worthwhile, a chance to take in the past and see how one local family lived. The tour takes about an hour but you will never stop talking about it, you even get to wear a safety helmet, and if you have children they are welcome too, afterwards you can tell the Tour Guide your points of view about the Cove.

Link to the Cove website. <http://www.gilmertoncove.org.uk/>

Chev. Archie Young. KCTpl. FSA Scot