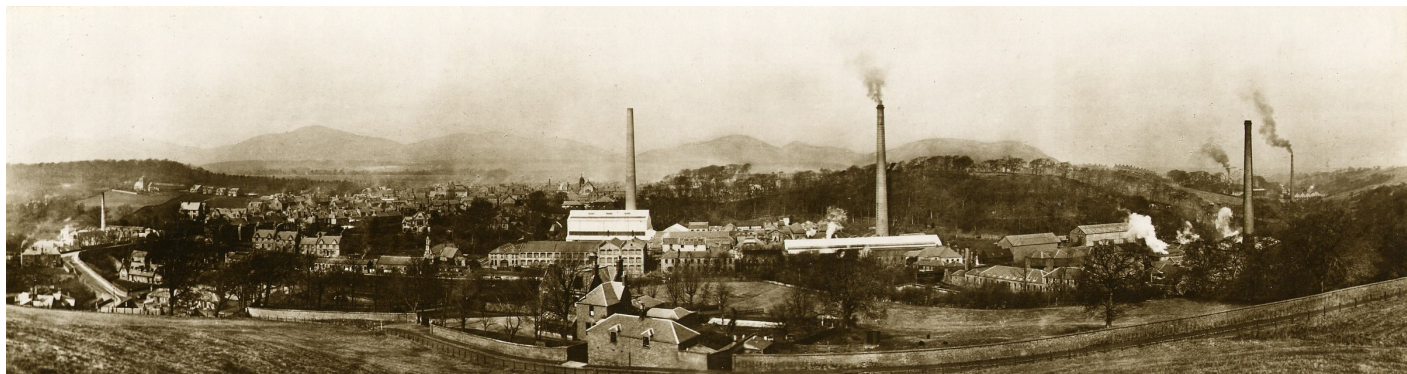


Penicuik Historical Society

Penicuik Historical Society was founded in 1974 with the aim of promoting investigation into the history of the locality. Penicuik has a rich and varied past with its papermaking heritage, the first cotton mill in Scotland and the presence of thousands of prisoners during the Napoleonic Wars - just a few examples of its unique and fascinating history.



Membership of Penicuik Historical Society is renewed annually, with the membership year commencing in September. The organisation and running of the Society is carried out by a committee elected by the members at an annual AGM, normally held in March. Monthly meetings which include a talk take place from September to April. Archive volunteers are recruited from the members. The Society has benefited greatly from the enthusiasm, interest and knowledge of its many members for almost fifty years. In recent times promoting investigation into Penicuik's history has developed in two ways.

Firstly, ensuring that the town's heritage is preserved in the Society's archive for present and future generations. The Society's archive is based in the flat originally provided for the caretaker when the Cowan Institute (Town Hall) first opened in 1894. Midlothian Council made this space available in 1984 as a home for the archive as previously the archive collection had been kept in the homes of members. It is appropriate that the Society's base is the former Cowan Institute which was endowed with an extensive library, both reference and lending, and a museum - Penicuik's only library at the time. Some of the items in the archive collection can be traced back to the original library and museum.

Since 1984 the archive rooms have been transformed with metal cabinets, map chests and the use of archival storage materials. This has mainly been possible through grants such as 'Awards for All'. A team of volunteers work cataloguing and researching the Society's archive collection under the management of a volunteer archive manager. The team of local history enthusiasts includes people with long standing Penicuik family associations who have a wealth of knowledge about the town. They provide the expertise to identify people and places in old photographs. Currently, the catalogue database consists of articles, books,



CDs, DVDs, display boards, documents, photographs, postcards, slides, maps, plans, newspapers, periodicals, prints and framed pictures. The Society also has a collection of historically important Friendly Society Banners, such as the one shown above, which are too large to be stored in the archives and are in the care of Midlothian Council.

The Society follows the guidelines used by professional archives in the heritage sector. Donations and enquiries are logged and guidance is followed with regard to copyright and other matters. The archive has benefited from liaison with the National Archives of Scotland, now NRS, as the Society's archive houses a number of unique items which are jointly catalogued. The archive is used by people researching Penicuik's past and information and images from the archive feature in a number of publications. The archive team assists those visiting the archives as well as corresponding with those unable to visit in person. The Society receives many requests from the Scottish diaspora in North America, Australia and New Zealand and also from elsewhere. The continuing generosity of the local community, as well as people from further afield, means the archive collection is continuing to expand.

Secondly, the Society aims to promote Penicuik's past in a variety of ways. The Society organises monthly talks in Penicuik Town Hall for members and visitors. Usually, one or two talks each session focus specifically on the town's history. The Society also provides speakers, whenever possible, to talk about aspects of Penicuik's history to other history groups, local organisations, day centres and at other events. Exhibitions, Doors Open Days and the Society's website [\[www.penicuikpapermaking.org\]](http://www.penicuikpapermaking.org) also help promote and share the town's local history. The Society, a number of years ago, produced 'The History of Penicuik and the Surrounding Area'. This was a five volume publication, researched by members, covering many aspects of Penicuik's past. These booklets can be purchased at meetings.

An event worthy of special mention is Penicuik Historical Society's week long exhibition in 2009 to mark the tercentenary of papermaking in Penicuik which was funded by a Heritage Lottery Grant and Midlothian Council. This exhibition, with displays in both halls of the Town Hall and the

opportunity to make paper, was a significant event and the culmination of a great deal of preparation and research by volunteers. A legacy of this initiative is the Society's website which was professionally designed. Volunteers participated in the research, the exhibition and the associated oral history project which recorded and transcribed memories of former workers in the local paper mills. The interviews and transcriptions were done in conjunction with Penicuik Oral History Group and the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University where the recordings are archived.



As a custodian of Penicuik's heritage the Society shares items with other institutions and organisations. For example, the Mauricewood Colliery Disaster Relief Fund Minute Book of 1889, which was donated to the Society in need of conservation (see image left) was conserved with the generous assistance of a grant from the Scottish Coal

Industry Special Welfare Fund. It was then made available to Midlothian Council so that it could be digitised for use in the Local Studies Library. The technical detailed plans of Penicuik's water supply were donated to the National Archives of Scotland in return for copies for our files. Penicuik Papermaking Museum has been provided with esparto grass, an important source of paper in the past, and a town papermaking sign, both on long-term loan.

When necessary, advice and consultation takes place with the relevant experts from Scotland's museums and archives. The Society has also liaised with Penicuik Library to provide exhibitions and talks, for example Midlothian Heritage Week. Unfortunately, the Library Quiet Room is no longer available as a permanent venue for changing displays provided by the Society. Individual members of the archive team engage in research with the aim of promoting the Society and Penicuik through their activities. Examples include research in connection with the Midlothian World War 1 Roll of Honour and transcription work with Midlothian Recording Angels, a group working to transcribe and publish Midlothian's churchyard and other memorials. Newspaper articles have informed readers about items in the Society's collection such as the wood and straw box shown above. This box is believed to have been made and then sold at a local market by a prisoner at Valleyfield during the Napoleonic Wars.



Since the launch of the Penicuik Regeneration Project, the Society has provided information and photographs to assist the regeneration team and there has been co-operation with events such as Doors Open Days, talks and exhibitions. The Society has been delighted to benefit from advice and help from the Penicuik Regeneration Project archivist who is assisting the Society by scanning photographs and documents for preservation purposes and to facilitate their future use.

For information about joining the Society or any other information, please see the monthly article in the Penicuik and District Town Crier or email the Society [\[info@penicuikpapermaking.org\]](mailto:info@penicuikpapermaking.org).

Secretary and Archive Manager
Penicuik Historical Society
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