

# The Truth

**A BELL FOR THE TOWN HALL.** – We understand that it is intended to place in the tower of the hall the bell presented to the town more than half a century ago by Purser John Warden, R.N. The bell was part of his share of the spoil in the capture of a French frigate by the crew of the British war vessel on which he was aboard, during the period when Englishmen were told to hate a Frenchman as they hated the d\_\_\_l. Notwithstanding the interesting incident connected with the appropriation of the bell, and notwithstanding that it is quite sound and of capital tone, the bell has been, except at rare intervals, doomed to obscurity since its arrival in Alyth. We are informed that on high occasions it used to be hung up between two trees and tolled, but in recent years it has rarely seen the light of day. However, the Town Hall will be a worthy receptacle for the bell, and the contemplated utilising of it now affords one more illustration of the proverb:- “Keep a thing seven years and you will find a use for it.”

Extract from the National Archives of Scotland catalogue: Reference # GD16/35/62

"Letter from John Warden of H.M.S. Horatio to James McNicoll sending a bell captured by the said ship from the French frigate la Necessite for the use of the inhabitants of Alyth; with draft reply. Alyth."

[Letter from Warden delivered with Bell]

Alyth 11 June 1810

Sir,  
The Bell of the French frigate La Necessite captured by His Majesty's Ship the Horatio has arrived here. Through you I present the same to the inhabitants of the town of Alyth, trusting they will find it a useful article.

With respect  
I am  
Sir  
Your most obedient servant  
Warden

James McNicoll, Esq.  
Craig

[Reply]

Sir  
I am immeasurably favored with your letter of this date advising of the arrival in Alyth of the Bell of the French frigate La Necessite captured by His Majesty's Ship Horatio, and through me presenting said bell to the inhabitants of the town of Alyth

I shall take an early opportunity of communicating to the inhabitants this particular instance of your attachment to them, and I flatter myself they will be proud to accept it and in a proper situation to erect the piece not only as showing their gratitude & respect to you, but as celebrating in their town a trophy of the superior valour of British Seamen over the Enemy of their country.

That you have the good fortune to be a sharer in an action which enables the inhabitants of your native town to display the bell of a French Ship is truly gratifying and assuredly gives real pleasure to your friends and acquaintances connected with the town of Alyth and to none more than

My dear Sir  
your faithful humble servant

Craig 11 June 1810

John Warden Esq.  
of His Majesty's Ship  
Horatio

**Nb James McNicoll's memorial, a pink marble obelisk, stands in Alyth Parish Church grounds.**



The damaged crown

# The Myth

For more than half a century the origins of the bell as told in many papers and even "Scot's Magazine in 1996" was somewhat different.

The last time the bell was rung was Year 2000 "Millennium" Hogmanay, heritage exhibition. Many people climbed the bell tower steps throughout the evening to pull the rope and it echoed many times throughout the town until well after midnight. Reputation had it that the bell was cracked, this was correct as was discovered later. A request came from the Fisheries Museum, Anstruther, to borrow the bell in October 2005 for a Trafalgar exhibition and upon removal from the tower it was discovered that the Crown underneath the wooden "Napoleon's Hat" (a support to mount it for ringing by bell rope) was indeed broken and could not be guaranteed to break when being rung so it was decided to display the Bell in the Town Hall foyer. The wooden support trestle, having been treated, is complete and assembled in the Belfry.

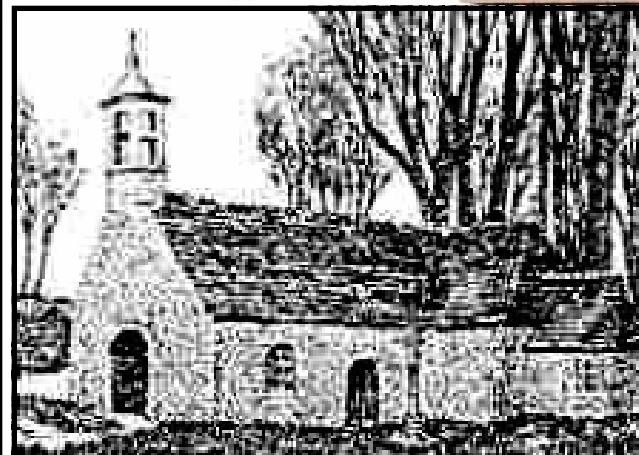
## HISTORIC BELL TO BE RUNG FOR JUBILEE THE FRENCH CONNECTION

ON Monday, 6th June, the bell in Alyth Town Hall will be rung in honour of the Queen's Jubilee Year. The story of the bell may not be so well-known to the younger generation in Alyth, and possibly not at all, to the more recent residents. The bell was cast at Lepine's Foundry in Quimper in 1789 as an inscription round the top indicates. Translated it reads: "I was made for St. Tey in the time of The Master The Viscount of Coatpont, Rector of Poullan". Also on the side of the bell a large cross calvary and the words "Lepine, As the year 1789 was the year of the outbreak of the French Revolution it was indeed a bad time for church bells, as the revolutionaries were intent on destroying all buildings etc. with historic links. The Alyth bell was only saved by the intervention of a group of villagers who bought the church containing the bell. When Napoleon rose to power the next threat came with the urgency to forge weapons for his mighty conquests in

### ALYTH'S LINK WITH NAPOLEON

It was at this time that the bell became the possession of a Dr William Warden, born in Alyth on 1st May, 1777, and son of the landlord of the then Bamff Arms. As ship's surgeon he was aboard the ship which took Napoleon to his exile on St. Helena and he got to know the French leader well during the voyage and also during his nine months on the island. Dr Warden gifted the bell to Alyth School early in the 19th century but when the school moved to new premises it was gifted to the town. We are most indebted to Mr W. J. Adam for the foregoing information and a further article will appear giving more details regarding Dr Warden who was an ancestor of Mr Adam.

The Alyth Voice for some time now has been in contact with the American descendents of both John & Dr William Warden and if anyone knows the whereabouts of Mr W.J. Adam the author of this article then perhaps they could put them in touch with the Voice to help descendents in America with their research into the family.



The Chapel at Poullan, near Brest in France from where the Bell came. The inscription reads: "J'ai ete faite pour St Tey du temps de Mre Le Bescon de Coatpont, Rtr de Poullan. Corentin Lastennet Fabrique".

6—BLAIRGOWRIE ADVERTISER, April 27, 1989

## ADVERTISING FEATURE

# SPOTLIGHT ON ALYTH

THE origins of the name Alyth stretch back to at least July, 1405, when the second Antipope, Benedict XIII, granted at Genoa the petition of "Alexander de Brothy, of noble birth, for dispensation to hold the vicarage of Alicht," now known as Alyth.

Alexander was a student at Orleans at the time, under the Bishop of Dunkeld, and the vicarage of Alyth was granted as a bursary or scholarship at Orleans University.

That it was a continental university was inevitable as there was none in Scotland. The oldest, St Andrews, was not founded until 1413.

"Alicht" was the spelling used for Alyth in the Middle Ages, so it was appropriate that the motto "A Licht Abune" was adopted by Alyth Town council in 1961, to go with the coat of arms.

Travellers in Strathmore were said to have observed "a licht" from the site of the present town, and so the name was derived.

Another Alyth link with the past is the bell in Alyth Town Hall which celebrates the 200th anniversary of its

casting next year. It was cast at Lepine's Foundry in Quimper in 1789 as an inscription around the top indicates.

Translated it reads: "I was made for St Tey in the time of The Master The Viscount of Coatpont, Rector of Poullan."

Also on the side of the bell are a large cross calvary and the words "Lepine, Founder, Quimper, 1789."

As the year 1789 was the year of the outbreak of the French revolution it was indeed a bad time for church bells, as the revolutionaries were intent on destroying all buildings, etc., with historic links.

The Alyth bell was saved only by the intervention of a group of villagers who bought the church containing the bell.

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The Bell with its "Napoleon's Hat", rocker and bell rope before it went on loan to Anstruther fisheries Museum, which was before it was sand-blast cleaned by Classic Cars Alyth and restored to its present condition.

The Bell from the French Frigate La Union. This splendid war trophy was acquired by Surgeon Wm Warden following the capture of the frigate in 1805. He presented the bell to the school in his home town of Alyth, and it eventually came to hang in the Town Hall belfry there.

The bell was originally cast for the Chapel of Saint-Tey in Brittany. The inscription around the bell records the date of manufacture, 1789, and the name of the bell-founder, Lepine of Quimper. The bell had been taken from the chapel for use in the frigate when she was launched at St. Malo.

On show in Anstruther