

Finding Greyfriars Bobby – the film star

The cremated remains of the Skye Terrier who starred in the 1961 Disney movie about Greyfriars Bobby were commemorated on Friday and placed in the custody of Greyfriars Kirk where a casket is now on display.

There is already a commemorative headstone in the cemetery to the famous dog.

Depute Lord Provost Lezley Marion Cameron, said: “Greyfriars Bobby’s memorial reads ‘Let his loyalty and devotion be a lesson to us all’.

“Countless visitors continue to see Bobby’s grave, his statue, and the many mementos of his life displayed in our Museum of Edinburgh. I’m delighted this further part of the iconic and timeless story of a little dog who would not leave his master’s grave, is going to be on display for visitors to discover. Bobby’s is a story held in enormous respect and affection by people around the world, as is the famous film it inspired. Bobby truly is a world-famous pet, holding a special place in people’s hearts and it’s lovely to be part of this special commemoration.”

John Lawson, City of Edinburgh Archaeologist, explained the story. He said: "We're here today to celebrate Greyfriars Bobby II – the central star of the 1961 Walt Disney movie, who was a major star actually in the 1960s and early 70s in his own right. He was buried in the Borders, I think in about 1974 after a very eventful life, I believe.

"And it's really a case of local people gain in touch the heritage. The person who found it David Hunter is distantly related to the owner. He found out that the site was going to be redeveloped for housing and he said, Well, I've got to find the grave for this dog, you know, and make it more publicly known.

"And after a two year search, like all good stories, he found it on the last day apparently. David came to us at the Council to try and think about reburying it here in Greyfriars Kirk. We can't bury animals in graveyards, as it's against the law, but we thought we've got to to help out. And it's been a real project between David ourselves the council, the Kirk which has been fantastic. And the Grassmarket Community Project who have made a fantastic purpose built casket for the cremated remains. So it's just a fantastic story and we've taken, the remains of Bobby which have been donated to us. These will be kept as part of our archaeological collections, but we're loaning it on a long term loan to Greyfriars Kirk to be put on display."

Jo Elliott Session Clerk at Greyfriars said: "We're expecting two million people to come through the kirkyard and we know they come because of Greyfriars Bobby."

The film starred the Skye Terrier also called Bobby, which was gifted to the then Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders Police, William Merrilees, by Mr Walt Disney after the film was released

Following the film's release, Mr Walt Disney gave Bobby to his friend Chief Constable William Merrilees OBE. Mr Merrilees felt that it would be better if Bobby lived with a family, so

he gave him to one of his senior officers – Chief Inspector John Turner. Bobby lived happily for the rest of his days with the Turner family in Morningside. Dean Turner who was John's son said: "He was a lovely wee dog. We just treated him like any normal family pet, it was hard to believe he was a film star."

Lead campaigner David Hunter said that he knew the dog was buried in land in Dolphinton about to be developed for housing. He was a relative of the Turner family, and led a community campaign to find out what happened to Bobby and have his ashes interred at Greyfriars Kirk.

Over the years the site of his grave had been lost. But with the kind permission of the landowners Mr Hunter and a team of three volunteers, Paul Macdonald, George Gordon and Paul Aitken, undertook an 18 month search for the remains. He said: "The land had The grave was destroyed in 2008 and the monument removed, and the land regressed to forest. When I discovered this in 2020 when they were about to build houses there there was a nervous phone call made to the landowners."

A specially commissioned casket has been crafted from the wood of an old cherry tree that once stood in the Kirkyard. Designed and made by craftsmen from The Grassmarket Community Project. The casket and the ashes were donated to The City of Edinburgh Council in 2023 and now form part of its archaeology collections and have been loaned to Greyfriars Kirk for display.

The casket is now on display inside the Church together with information about the film and Bobby's charity work in the city and his life after the film.

There was a short procession, led by bagpiper Ranald (10) a pupil at George Heriot's as the casket was carried into the Kirk by Evan Stanton (8).

Six Skye terriers were in attendance as a guard of honour.

The exhibition at the Church is open seven days a week.



Evan Stanton (8) grandson of one of the volunteers who found he remains and piper from George Heriot's School 10 year-old Ranald led the procession into the church PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter