

Community fights to save church linked to Burke and Hare

A fight to save a village church where it is claimed notorious grave robbers Burke and Hare almost met their demise has been launched.

Newton Parish Church, in Midlothian, was visited by the body snatchers more than once and a bullet hole on a gravestone is, local legend says, thought to have been fired at them during one of their grisly trips.

Now the local community has launched a bid to buy the 18th century church after it was put on the market by the Church of Scotland.

The Friends of Old Newton Parish Church say the rich history of the small kirk should be kept in the community and treasured.

As well as being a regular target of Burke and Hare, who stole freshly buried bodies from graves to sell to Edinburgh surgeon Robert Knox who used them for research and teaching, the church yard is also a final resting place for war heroes.



1824500 SERGEANT
T. DUNN
FLIGHT ENGINEER
ROYAL AIR FORCE
11TH APRIL 1944 AGE 19



LEAVE YOU ON EAGLES' WINGS
AND BROUGHT YOU UNTO MYSELF





Among the heroes is RAF flight engineer Sergeant Thomas Dunn, who died at the age of just 19 after the plane he was carrying out a bombing exercise on crashed at RAF Winthrope.

And the church has a unique link to the mining heritage of the surrounding area with a balcony built by miners after they petitioned for years to be allowed to attend service.

They were eventually allowed to attend but had to use a separate staircase they built which took them into a balcony which hid them from the congregation.

The Church of Scotland put the kirk on the market last week with offers over £98,000.

The news sparked a wave of action from the local community leading to the setting up of the group and calls for it to be withdrawn from sale to give them time to raise the money.

A spokesperson for the group said: "The old Newton Parish Church has so much heritage and meaning to the community that we want to be able to keep it as a facility for generations to come.

“We have a youth group who want to use it and there are plans to carry on holding weddings and funerals at the church as well as local events, concerts and other entertainment.

“We are assured raising the funds is possible, we just need the Church of Scotland to give us the time to do it.”

A Church of Scotland spokesperson said: ”

“We can confirm that we have received an approach from the community regarding the sale of Newton Parish Church, but are unable to say more while the sale process continues.

“In 2021, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland called on each of its Presbytery areas to draw up mission plans for their areas.

“Under the mission plan agreed by Lothian Presbytery, Newton parish, which covers Danderhall, Shawfair and some neighbouring villages united with St John’s and Kings Park Church in Dalkeith to form Dalkeith: St John’s and Newton Parish Church.

“Newton Church held its final service in January 2023, but the new congregation continues to use the church hall in Danderhall as their base for activities and services in Newton parish with Sunday services held fortnightly at 9.30am, to which all are welcome.

“We understand fully the wide range of emotions involved in the closure of any of our buildings, but having fewer congregational buildings will reduce pressure on congregational finances, freeing up funds and general income for other Church missional activities and a more sustainable situation, allowing the Church and our congregations continue to make a positive impact on the communities they serve.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter