

Hamilton Palace near Netherton Motte and the Collegiate Church site. The Cross itself is thought to be a British Strathclyde sculpture dating from the tenth or eleventh century.

During the mid 19th century there were three cholera outbreaks in Hamilton. There is a mass grave with a memorial stone in memory of the victim of the 1832 disaster in which 63 people died. The stone is situated within the grounds of Hamilton Bowling Club — beyond the clubhouse and just outside the churchyard wall. It reads — “This stone marks the grave of many poor who died of cholera in 1832”.

There had been moves to close down the Old Parish Churchyard from as early as 1850. However, in July, 1860, a petition was presented to the Sheriff signed by two members of the Parochial Board calling for the closure of the graveyard due to overcrowding and poor drainage. For over a year the Sheriff heard many reports detailing evidence both for and against the closure of the churchyard. The *Hamilton Advertiser* newspaper covered the case very thoroughly detailing each report in its weekly editions.

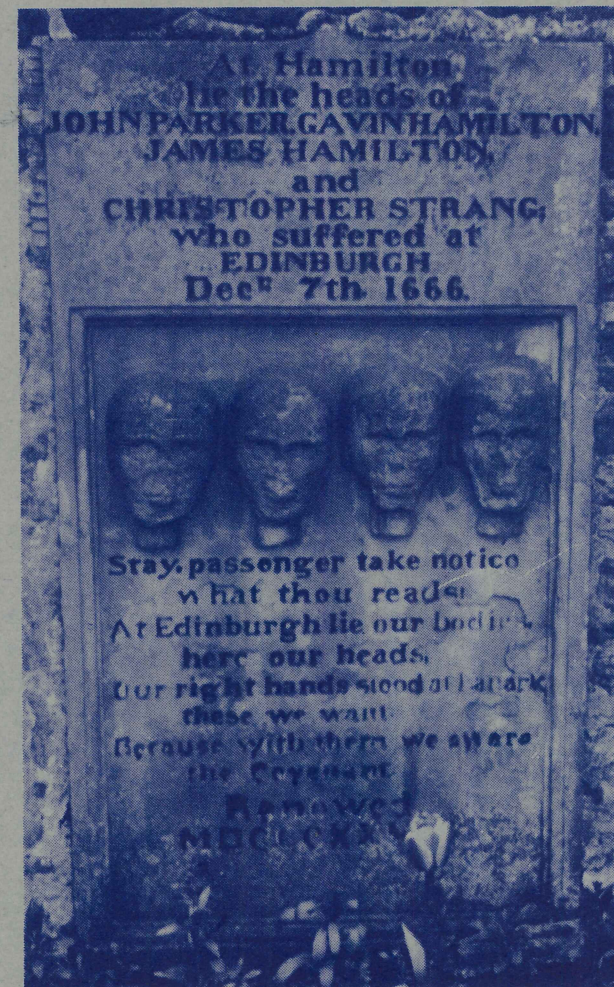
On 1st August, 1861, it was decided that the graveyard should close. The Sheriff had found that the graveyard was dangerous to health (especially to those living in the houses just outside the churchyard wall) and offensive and contrary to decency.

It should perhaps be noted that the principal objectors in the case were major shareholders in the Bent Cemetery

project — including the Provost, the Duke, Magistrates and the Parochial Board!

Recently the churchyard has been landscaped and floodlighting installed, so adding a 20th century aspect to the long history of the Old Parish Churchyard.

The landscaping work was undertaken and carried out by Hamilton District Council; and the floodlighting was installed as a gift by Philips Electrical Ltd. to mark the 250th anniversary of the present building.



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Hamilton Old Parish Churchyard

The Old Parish Churchyard, Hamilton

There is some evidence that burials took place in the Old Parish Churchyard as early as 1730; however, what is not in doubt is that the graveyard was closed in 1861 due to overcrowding. There are some gravestones erected in the churchyard with dates earlier than 1730, for example there is one stone inscribed "James Telfer 1717". This could well mean that this stone and others were formerly in the Collegiate Churchyard before its demise. The Collegiate Church was situated in what is now Strathclyde Park, and was demolished to make room for extensions to Hamilton Palace.

According to Town Council Minutes for 26th June, 1732, the ground on which the new church and churchyard were being built was where the horse and cow market had been held every Martinmas fair. The minutes also report that there would be some land left outside the churchyard dyke where houses were to be built — these were to be an important factor in the eventual closure of the graveyard.

About 1731 there was a meeting of heritors which agreed to remove the Old Collegiate Church graveyard to the Old Parish Churchyard. Old James Strang (said to be the brother of martyr Christopher Strang) was rather dissatisfied with this arrangement. Sometime later he enclosed a portion of ground in the corner of Fairhill Park, Meikle Earnock, near the old tumulus, as a burial ground for his family and feuars of the village.

A survey of the gravestones in the Old Parish Churchyard was carried out in 1984 describing the state of each stone and recording any inscription still legible. This produced some interesting results. According to the survey there are some 787 gravestones in the church, with the most common trades mentioned on the stones being bakers, manufacturers, masons, merchants and shoemakers.

There are interesting inscriptions on many of the gravestones such as the one to Joseph Kirby which tells us that he "lost his life in the discharge of his duty as a gamekeeper" in 1849.

Another stone was erected by the Rev. William Buchan for his mother and sister-in-law. He was the minister who left the Old Parish Church in 1835 to set up St. John's Church in Hamilton.

Near the side door of the church is a gravestone which is inscribed in English on one side and French on the other. This marks the grave of the young son of Victor Le Blonde, who was the French house steward at Hamilton Palace.

Some of the people buried in the graveyard seem to have been far-travelled; there are stones with such exotic place names as Ceylon, Australia and Demerara inscribed on them. It is known that some Hamilton families had sugar plantations in the East Indies. There is also a gravestone to Dr. John Cook, Physician, who had been Surgeon-General to the Russian Army and who died in 1790. After returning from Russia, Dr. Cook purchased Allanshaw Estate and wrote a book on his travels.

Around the time that the infamous graverobbers Burke and Hare were to the fore, watchmen were employed in the graveyard at night. Cries of "All's Well" could be heard echoing across the town between the watchmen of the Old Parish Churchyard and Muir Street Relief Churchyard. They must have been good at their jobs as there is no evidence of graverobbers having been active in the area.

There is a small stone hut just inside the front gates of the churchyard where the elders sheltered to gather the collection. It may also have been used by the watchmen at night.

The most famous artifacts in the church are the Martyrs Memorial and the Netherton Cross.

The Martyrs Memorial is built into the East wall of the churchyard, and commemorates four Covenanters who were taken prisoner at the Battle of Rullion Green, and later hanged at Edinburgh on 7th December, 1666. The heads and right hands of the four, named on the memorial as John Parker, Gavin Hamilton, James Hamilton and Christopher Strang, were cut off. Their heads were displayed at the town cross of Hamilton as a warning. Their hands were displayed in Lanark where they swore their oath.

The Netherton Cross has been in the churchyard since 1926. It stands outside the front of the Church on a base inscribed "The Netherton Cross removed from its original site in the Nether Haugh and re-erected here March 1926". The Cross had been situated in the grounds of