

Skirling 750

The one-day Skirling 750 exhibition in Skirling Village Hall on Saturday 26th October celebrated 750 years of the village's history. From 10 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, a steady stream of visitors came through the doors. Residents, former residents, and visitors alike wrote in the comments book of their astonishment at how much history lies within one small village. The event was organized by Bob and Isobel Hunter and funding came from the SSE Clyde Wind Farm via the Skirling Community Development Trust.

Seismic Events

- In the 16th century, Regent Moray's men blew up Skirling Castle to punish the Cockburn family for supporting Mary, Queen of Scots.
- Soon after, horse and cattle fairs arrived. The network of drove roads converging on Skirling made it an ideal site, and well into the 19th century the village hosted the largest horse fair in the south of Scotland.
- In the 17th century, Colonel James Douglas—one of the fiercest persecutors of the Covenanters—was for a time Laird of Skirling. At the same period, Covenanter Peter Gillies of Waulkmill was forced to flee, later captured and executed with four others at Mauchline in Ayrshire.
- From the early 18th to the late 20th century, the Carmichael family were the Skirling lairds, bringing long-term stability to the village. Lord Carmichael commissioned the building of Skirling House—one of Scotland's notable Arts and Crafts houses—embellished with fine wrought ironwork.

Everyday Life

- Kirk records from the 17th century tell of charity given to "a man who had his house burnt, a child burned and his wife distracted," to "six poor soldiers," and even "for helping to build the boat at Thankerton."
- The farming story was also told: the introduction of sheep farming brought clearances much like those in the Highlands, followed by a quieter period of prosperity based on mixed arable and pastureland, much as today.
- In the early 20th century Skirling was a busy place—with a shop, post office, smiddy with petrol pumps, joiner's shop, sawmill, Skirling Mill, Watson & Newbigging electricians, Clarkson's transport business, and of course the village school and church.
- In the 1970s and 80s the village resounded with the sound of motorbikes when trials were held on Galalaw land, with several local lads competing successfully.
- Nature and wildlife also featured, including the late Ian Thomson's list of around fifty bird species seen in his garden and the surrounding woods, along with several species of bats. More than fifty different wild plants have been identified on Gallowsknowe behind the village.

An Evening to Remember

In the evening, a good crowd gathered to enjoy refreshments and to listen to brothers George and Charlie Wheeler-Carmichael share stories of growing up in Skirling House. Afterwards, visitors lingered among the displays, exchanging memories and anecdotes of village life.

Looking Ahead

It was a grand day. Although the exhibition in the hall could only last one day, plans are afoot for it to appear at Biggar Museum—possibly as soon as December—giving many more people the chance to discover the story of this extraordinary little village and its people. It is also envisaged that a visual record of the event and some of its exhibits will be available online as part of an eco-museum".