

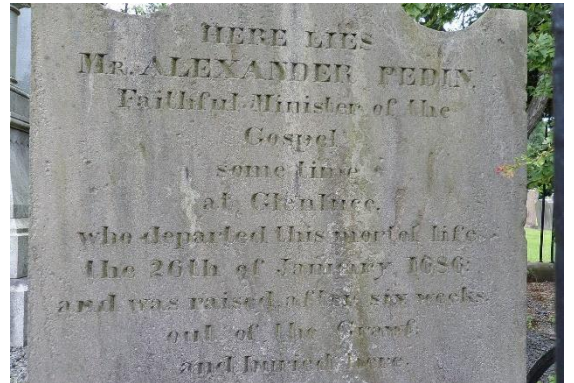
## COVENANTING TIMES

Like most of Wigtownshire, New Luce has tales of persecution during the Covenanting period.

### Alexander Peden

One of the most famous characters of the time was the preacher and alleged prophet Alexander Peden. He was educated at Glasgow University, was schoolmaster and session clerk at Tarbolton and licensed by the Presbytery of Ayr as a preacher in 1659 to serve at the Moor Kirk of Luce. New Luce was his first and only church. In October 1662 he was ousted from the church. His final sermon lasted long into the night, and on leaving he is said to have knocked three times on the door with his Bible, saying, "I arrest thee in my Master's name, that none enter thee but such as come by the door, as I have done." The church remained vacant until 1694.

Peden wandered all over Scotland as a field preacher. His style of preaching and supposed prophetic gifts gave him an enormous influence over the people of the region. He was declared a rebel, spent time in Ireland, was imprisoned on the Bass Rock and finally found shelter in a cave near his birthplace of Sorn. He died in 1686 still a rebel and is buried in Cumnock.



The current New Luce church is built on the site of the one in which Peden preached for his short time as minister of a parish church. On at least one occasion Ian Paisley brought a large contingent of his parishioners to see the site as part of a tour of local covenanting sites—his spiel was heard from down the village street.

### The killing of Alexander Linn

Alexander Shields, writing in 1690 about the well-known shooting of John Murchie and Daniel McIlwraith, mentions that at the same time Lt Gen Drummond's soldiers shot dear Alexander Linn. His tomb on the slopes of Craigmoddie Fell carries the inscription that he was 'surprised and instantly shot to death on this place' by Drummond himself. The incident probably occurred when Drummond's soldiers were known to be in nearby Colmonell and Barr in June or July 1685. Later books elaborate on the tale. He was spotted by soldiers who were suspicious of the lapwings continually sweeping down on a single spot on the heather. Finding them concealed there, they shot him immediately.



We don't know who he was, or even if he was a Covenanter. The inscription on the tomb states that he was shot for his adherence to the Covenanting cause but the soldiers didn't stop to ask before they fired. He was said to be a shepherd, which was a useful occupation for a fugitive. But he was also supposed to be one of the Linns of Larg, but he certainly wasn't a close relation of the family of Larg.

The tomb was much celebrated in the 19th century. William Symington the Reformed Presbyterian minister of Stranraer, who also had a small congregation in New Luce, held a service there in 1827, commemorated in a second stone. A third stone mentions another service in 1885, and the tomb was rebuilt with further services in 1911 and 1912.



### The curse of the house of Larg:

The preachers who had been ejected from their churches at that time were in the habit of holding



conventicles up in the moors, which attracted large numbers of people. John Welsh, minister of Irongray, a great grandson of John Knox, and another preacher with a reputation for prophecy, was preaching to a crowd on a bank of whins on Larg land when William Lin set fire to the whins and taunted him 'the old fox is burnt out'. Welsh is said to have replied 'You have grudged God's minister a whinny corner of your land. Perhaps he may not leave your children enough land to spread a tent on.' He went on to add 'You have burnt the bramble to the roots on the hillside, beware that they do not rise again from the foundations of the Larg.' PH McKerlie, one of the authors who recounted this tale, added that the House of Larg was shortly after struck by a thunderbolt and burned to the ground, as vengeance from on high.

Was this a prophecy or a curse? And was William Lin, ever afterwards vilified for his actions, in the wrong? He had been named a Justice of the Peace in 1663. In 1679 he was named deputy commissioner to sheriff Agnew to enforce the 1670 Act to suppress conventicles. The

commissioners were authorised to pursue, dissipate and apprehend conventiclors wherever they were gathered, and to have them judged, fined or imprisoned by the sheriff, deputy or JP as they saw fit. Perhaps smoking them out of the whins wasn't such a bad alternative!

### The Covenanter Laird:

Gilbert McMicking, laird of Miltonise, was an upholder of the Presbyterian faith. During the Killing Times of the 1680s he was a wanted man but managed to evade capture. He is said to have created a hidey-hole in a hollowed-out peat stack near the house, into which he would slip when soldiers were in the vicinity. But the soldiers only appeared occasionally in search of Covenanters, and could easily be spotted long before they reached the house, so mostly he went about his normal life, and dressed much as his workers would dress.

One day he was surprised by soldiers who accosted him near the house, presumably before he could slip into his peat stack. Thinking him by his dress to be a labourer or tenant, the soldiers asked him if the laird was at home. He is supposed to have replied 'He was in the house not a minute before I left.' The soldiers then headed towards the house—where naturally no laird was to be found—whilst presumably the laird headed for his hidey hole.

He survived the entire covenanting period without being apprehended. His wife was not so lucky. She was imprisoned in the open air at the back of Greyfriars Kirk, and according to PH McKerlie was only moved indoors when she went into premature labour. She was eventually released to return to Miltonise.

