

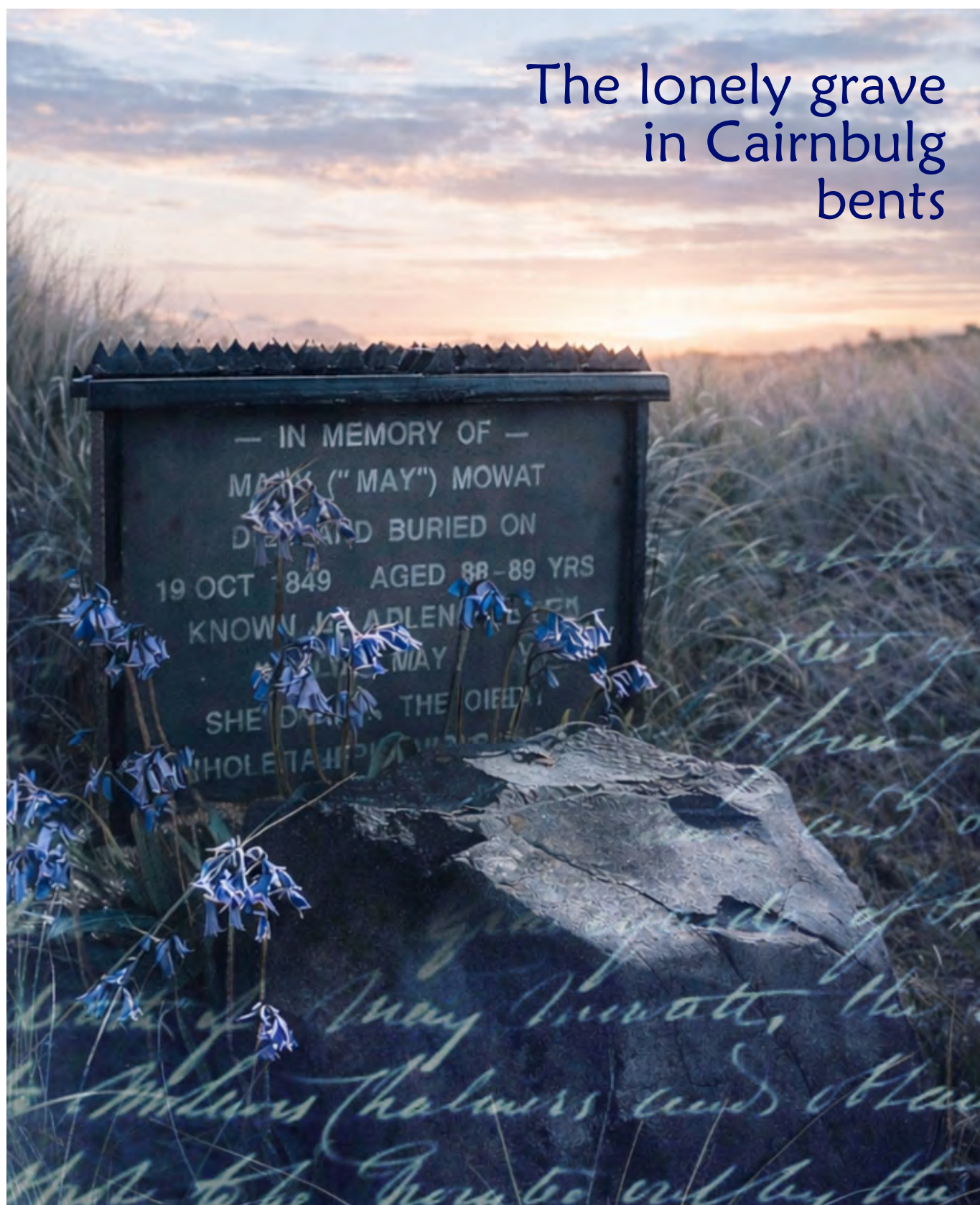
Journal

Aberdeen & North-East Scotland
Family History Society



Number 177: February 2026

The lonely grave in Cairnbulg bents



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- Monumental Inscription look-ups for many North-East Scottish graveyards
- A Members' Forum for exchanging ideas, assistance with "brick walls", and much else.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our February 2026 issue and to a whole new year ahead. We hope that one of your New Year's resolutions is to write up your family stories and we hope your researches go well. Don't forget that, as a Society member, you have access to the Member-only areas of our website. This will get you access to all the back issues of the Journal, which can often lead you to helpful nuggets from previous articles. Just use the search function to type in a surname or placename that you are interested in and you will be directed to any previous articles featuring them in the title.

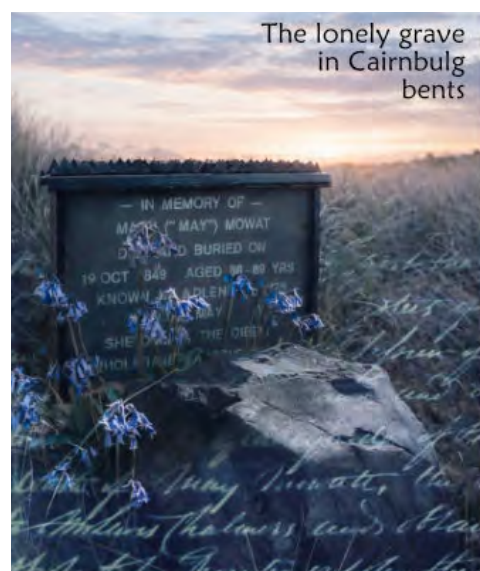
Thank you for the positive feedback we received about our foray into food in the previous issue. One correspondent commented how much fun she had reminiscing about the kitchen utensils we illustrated in our centre spread. We received a couple of entertaining stories that were sparked by the traditional recipes. These include the recipes for haggis and for plum pudding you'll see later on. Now you might say this is out of season and belongs to the Xmas and New Year celebrations we left behind in December/January but plum duff, clootie dumpling and various other iterations of a rich fruit steamed pudding are often served in the North-East instead of birthday cake, so we make no apology for suggesting you add one to your repertoire.

Connecting with authors

If one of our stories touches a chord with you, please do get in touch. We no longer publish the personal email addresses of authors but we are still happy to put you in touch with them if you find you have a family connection or further information to add to their story. While we write the Journal for members, we know that copies will appear in public places such as libraries. This means that, as per current UK regulations on the protection of personal information of living individuals, we cannot share email addresses in a public document. However, we know that making connections and sharing family information is one of the most important and rewarding parts of family-history research and we will always do our best to facilitate exchanges between members.

Coincidences

Unexpected coincidences and serendipitous discoveries are what keep many of us motivated in our research. In this issue we share some examples of these strange alignments of events. We think there must be many more good stories out there to match the coincidences provided by Alan Johnston and Sally Low in their stories. As Sally says, please trump that by telling us about the unusual connections you have found in your family-history enquiries. The deadline for receiving submissions for Journal 178 (May 2026) is 10th April 2026.



The lonely grave
in Cairnbulg
bents

The Editorial Team:

Alex McKenzie; Barbara Bodden; Bobbie Jeal; Yvonne Milbank; Matthew Davidson; Ivor Normand; Steve Edwards; Elaine Petrie.

Cover image: The grave of May Mowatt, a victim of the 1849 cholera epidemic that swept Scotland. Its impact was keenly felt in the North-East fishing villages. She is buried in the grassy area near the sea, rather than in a cemetery or kirkyard. Jim Campbell tells us the story behind this unusual grave.

Cover design: Steve Edwards

ARTICLES

The Lonely Grave of May Mowatt, Cholera Victim

The April 2004 issues of the Fraserburgh Herald and Northern Advertiser contain a fascinating account of how an old blind woman who died in the 1849 cholera epidemic ended up buried in the Cairnbulg tall grass. Written by C.G. (Charlie) Stephen, a native of Cairnbulg, it describes his search into these events and how he unearthed the original Sheriff Court interdict that played a major part in the story. Charlie died in 2023, aged 95, and it is fitting that he be remembered for his impressive research. The following is based on his account, but also includes some historical background from the Kirkyard of St Combs MI booklet (AA184) published by ANESFHS and written by the author of this article.

In the sandy bents near the coastguard climbing pole just north of the village of Cairnbulg there is a squarish dark grey stone. It has a certain symmetry suggesting it was selected with care. Although it contains no inscription, it marks the grave of an old blind widow, May Mowatt, or Blen May as she was known, who died of cholera alone in her Cairnbulg home, 19th October, 1849.

Her death is noted in the minutes of the Rathen Parochial Board meeting of 20th October 1849, which read: "The Inspector reports that yesterday an old woman in Cairnbulg, a pauper, named May Mowatt was found in the morning in her bed in the last stage of cholera, and died in about an hour after. The Inspector believed that her son-in-law George Duthie was taking proper care of her. This it appears he had done previous to the appearance of cholera in the town, but after that the poor woman had been left alone in the house all night, and no notice of that had been given to the Inspector".



The isolated grave in the Cairnbulg bents

Photo: J. Campbell

So, since the authorities knew of her death, why wasn't she buried in the St Combs kirkyard along with the more than 50 residents of the fishing villages of Cairnbulg and Inverallochy who died during the epidemic and who were interred in an unmarked communal grave? An understanding of why requires a look into the history of that time.

The ancient kirk and kirkyard of St Combs, parish of Lonmay, sit on a bent [grass]-covered knoll about 150 yards from the sea shore. Although now surrounded on three sides by houses of the village of St Combs, it probably stood alone in the sand dunes and open land for centuries. Little remains of the kirk itself. It predates the Reformation and was abandoned in 1607 when a new Lonmay church (now known as the Lonmay Old Kirk), complete with kirkyard, was built two miles inland.

Judging from the St Combs kirkyard burial records of the first half of the 19th century, most interments were from Cairnbulg and Inverallochy, the St Combs villagers perhaps preferring the inland kirkyard. This is something of an anomaly, however, since the twin villages are within the parish of Rathen, directly north of Lonmay, and there are two kirkyards of Rathen, the older one dating back to the 17th century or earlier. Situated inland, however, these kirkyards appear to have been used by landward Rathen communities and not, judging from the names engraved on gravestones dating back to 1623, any of the fisher families. A practical reason is probably distance: the Rathen kirkyards are about five miles from the twin villages whereas St Combs kirkyard is a little less than two miles.

There is also a historical reason: the village of St Combs is situated on ground that used to be within the lands of Cairnglass, the coastal boundaries of which stretched from the Mill

Burn between Charleston and St Combs to the Strype, a small burn flowing into the sea a quarter mile south of St Combs. In the 17th century, Cairnglass was part of the Inverallochy estate, but in 1703 it was separated off, eventually becoming part of the Cairness estate in 1776 when it was purchased by Charles Gordon of Buthlaw who founded the village of St Combs in 1785. By then, however, the Rathen fisherfolk had established their burial rights and family locations within the St Combs kirkyard, the men digging the graves themselves, as the minutes of the Lonmay Parochial Board meeting of 9th October 1849 note, “sometimes deep sometimes shallow”.

This practice continued unchecked into the 19th century, although as St Combs expanded it became more of an issue. Matters came to a head with the 1849 cholera epidemic. Concerned about the possible spread of infection from the funeral processions of cholera victims from the twin villages passing by the village of St Combs, as well as the rather casual, and potentially unhealthy, burial arrangements, the Heritors (landowners) and Kirk Session of Lonmay (a body of church elders) appealed to the Aberdeenshire Sheriff Court in Peterhead for an interdict to prevent Rathen inhabitants from using the St Combs kirkyard.

The documents of the ensuing legal proceedings in the Sheriff Court detailing the extensive arguments and counterarguments have been preserved in West Register House in Edinburgh

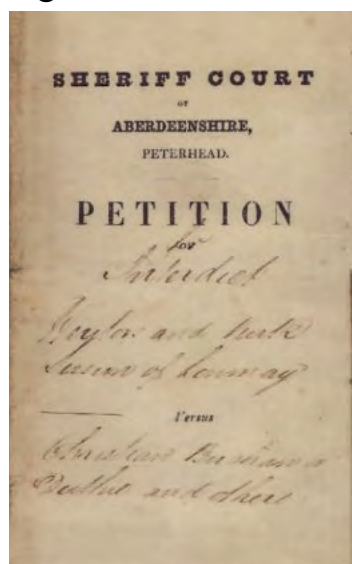


Photo: J. Campbell

(Peterhead Court Records, Box File SC4/22/19, 1850), the gist of which is as follows. While acknowledging the long-established use of the kirkyard by the Rathen villagers, the Petitioners (i.e. the Heritors and Lonmay Kirk Session) maintained that the former had no legal right to this since the kirkyard came under the jurisdiction of the Lonmay church authorities. The Rathen Respondents (Cairnbulg/Inverallochy villagers) countered that the St Combs kirk had been abandoned for over two centuries and that the Lonmay parish kirk and kirkyard now existed two miles inland. The outcome was that Sheriff Substitute James Skelton found in favour of the Petitioners' plea and soon granted an interim interdict. Faced with the reality that cholera victims still had to be buried, however, his final decree was that interments from outside Lonmay parish could continue in the kirkyard, but only under the direction of the officially appointed Lonmay gravedigger – something the Lonmay authorities had always been willing to allow. The matter of jurisdiction over the kirkyard was left to await settlement later.

Understandably, this decision was not received well by the Rathen villagers. A section of the interdict notes, “As an illustration of the Spirit in which the Respondents and their neighbours in Rathen were disposed to act, the Petitioners may have noticed the reception the officer who served the petition [the interdict] met with at their hands, he and his assistant having been greatly abused, and nearly deforced by them while in the discharge of that duty”. But for centuries they had personally seen to the burial of their dead, and now what was being required of them was to employ an official from another parish to bury their own relatives – and even to have to pay for this. It was almost too much. Nevertheless, Rathen burials continued in the kirkyard.

Still, the question remains: why, of all the villagers who died of cholera, was Blen May the only one buried in the bents? The minutes of the 20th October 1849 meeting of the Rathen Parochial Board provide a partial answer. Item 13 reads, in full, “The Inspector begs to report that an interdict has been served at the instance of the Trustees of the late General Gordon of Cairness and of the Kirk Session of Lonmay, on certain fishermen, prohibiting them and others from burying their dead in the Graveyard of St Combs. Yesterday on the death of May Mowatt, the relatives immediately went to Mr Lewis Chalmers [factor of the

Cairnbulg estate] and obtained leave to bury her in a spot pointed out by the Cairnbulg committee. A spot was pointed out and the body buried”.

The wording of Item 13 is unusual as it covers two unrelated items. The way the terse description of Blen May's burial was added to the announcement of the interdict conveys the impression it was an awkward issue to be dispensed with as quickly and quietly as possible. It is clear, however, that it was by request of her relatives that Blen May was buried in the bents. The statement that Rathen burials in the kirkyard were possibly about to be prohibited was probably a major factor in their decision. But what happened with the others, such as Alex. Stephen “Brickie” of Cairnbulg, whose deaths occurred around the same time? The records provide no details.

The minutes do not include the names of the relatives who petitioned the factor, but these were likely to include the family of May's son-in-law, George Duthie, husband of her daughter Sarah, who had been looking after her. George and Sarah had a son George, born around 1835, who became a grocer in Cairnbulg. His strong family ties are apparent given the two tall granite gravestones in the St Combs kirkyard he had erected, one for his beloved sister Ann and her family, the other for his parents George and Sarah, all of whom were later buried there. On the base of his parents' stone there is a heart-shaped symbol with the words “My heart lies here”.

Grocer George was about 14 years old in 1849, and therefore spent most of his life knowing that his granny was interred in the bents. Living in the same village, he must have known her personally before she died, and may even have helped his father take care of her. Yet while able to afford impressive monuments for his immediate family, is it not surprising that he didn't see fit to include any commemoration of her? But a whole generation had passed before he had his family stones erected, a generation that seems to have wanted to forget the entire episode.

Blen May's grave looks peaceful in the sunshine, decorated with bluebells in the spring and larger flowers later in the summer. A metal commemorative board has been erected behind the stone (by Charlie Stephen himself). But knowing what we now do about the events of her death, should her remains be removed to a more appropriate resting place? Why did her relatives make the decision to have her buried there? These and other questions may never be resolved. In the meantime, the lonely grave in the Cairnbulg bents remains as a memorial to an old blind woman who died of cholera, and to a traumatic time in the history of her village.

Jim Campbell, Port Hope, Ontario

—oOo—

The Schoolmaster's Children

In my article “A Schoolmaster of Braemar” in Journal 175 (May 2025), pp. 25–27, I gave an account of my 2g-grandfather, William McQueen, and his wife Henrietta Leslie. This article gives a summary of the lives of their children.

Jane McQueen was William and Henrietta's oldest child, born on 22nd October 1821, just over a year after her parents married. Jane was 15 years old when her mother died and she inherited her role as Schoolmistress of domestic skills for girls. The school, in which her father was headmaster, was supported by the Society in Scotland for Propogating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK). When her father lost his post because of his preference for the newly created Free Church of Scotland, Jane was also dismissed. Jane married Peter Farquharson in late 1850 or early 1851. Peter was 15 years her senior. At the time of the 1851 census, they were living at Ballochresk beside the River Gairn about a mile north of its mouth at the Dee. Peter's occupation was listed as “Master”. In 1861 they were living at Culsh, a farm adjacent to their previous house. Peter was listed as a farmer. They had four sons between

one and nine, and four servants living with them: a ploughman, a labourer, a dairymaid, and a cowherd. Peter died, aged 62, on 11th January 1868 from an abscess of the prostate. Jane, aged 59, died on June 24th 1880, from subcutaneous apoplexy. Her four children were still managing the farm in the census of 1881.

Ann McQueen, born 4th February 1823, was my great-grandmother. She married John McKenzie, son of Colin – the miller at Mill of Inver – on 9th October 1845. They moved to Tomintoul, about 23 miles north of Crathie, to operate the gristmill there. I have written about Ann and John and their children in “Oats & Porridge, Part 1” (Journal 152 (August 2019), pp. 30–33) and will only mention here that the family emigrated to Canada in 1856 and from there to the USA in 1861. Ann died on 28th August 1883, aged 60, and is buried in Burke, NY, USA.

John McQueen, born 25th September 1824, entered King's College, Aberdeen in 1846 and graduated with an M.A. in March of 1850. In the census of 1851, he is listed as “visitor” at the home of John Fleming in Mount Street in Old Machar, Aberdeen. However, given the number of visitors at this address, I believe he was probably a boarder rather than an overnight guest. His occupation is listed as “Free Church Divinity Student A.M.” John attended New College, Edinburgh from 1852–54. He was licensed as Minister in 1855 and was ordained in August 1855 in the Free Church at Kirkmichael as the colleague and successor to Alexander Tulloch. On 4th September 1856, he married his predecessor's daughter Anne Margaret Tulloch, originally of Auchbreck, Banffshire.

The 1861 census shows the family living at the Kirkmichael Free Church Manse with a three-year-old son. In the 1871 census the son is not listed, but I don't find any record of his



*Kirkmichael
Manse (left)
and Kirk*

*Photos:
A. McQueen*



death, so perhaps he was away from home. There were, however, two daughters, aged four and seven. John died of apoplexy on 18th April 1880, at the Free Manse. Anne died on 4th July 1884, in Coulmore, Inverness.

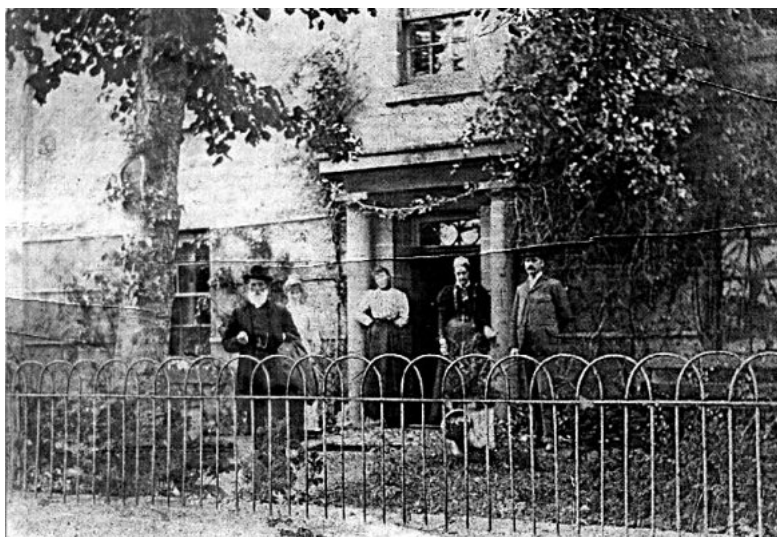
Alexander McQueen was born on 16th July 1826. I am not certain where he was at the time of the 1841 census, which has two entries for Alexander McQueen of the right age born in Aberdeenshire, but neither showing the parish of birth. I think the most likely candidate is the Alexander McQueen found at a house in Huntly Street, Old Machar whose occupation is given as “Sh. Ap.”, possibly either an apprentice shoemaker or shopman. The other possibility is that he was one of the boarders recorded in High Street, Inverurie, with no occupation listed. The 1851 census shows an Alexander McQueen from Braemar as a lodger in Bon Accord Street in Old Machar listed as “Cabinet Maker Journeyman”. It is the Old Macher residence that makes me think the 1841 Old Machar location more likely. Sometime after this census Alexander emigrated to Australia, where he died in Melbourne on 24th December 1858, as indicated on the McQueen gravestone in Braemar.

Henrietta McQueen was born on 24th February 1828. The 1841 and 1851 censuses show her living with her father in Braemar. In 1851 she was listed as housekeeper. I have found no record of her after 1851.

Mary and Christian McQueen were twin girls born on 15th February 1831 and were living at home in the 1841 census. Christian died on 5th January 1845, and is buried with her parents in Braemar cemetery. Mary was working as a domestic servant for Rev. Farquhar McRae, the Braemar Free Church minister, in 1851. In 1861 she was working as a dressmaker and had two nieces at her home, probably the children of her sister Jane Farquharson.

Mary disappeared from view in the 1871 census. There were 43 Mary McQueens who married in Scotland between 1860 and 1871 who could be candidates, but none seems an obvious match. There was also a Mary McQueen who was killed in Dumfries in 1872 when the goods wagon she was riding in was struck by a train, but there is no information to suggest that she was from Braemar.

Richard Rose McQueen was the baby of the family, born on 30th September 1833. He was only a few months over two years old when his mother died. In the 1851 census Richard was listed as a visitor (but was perhaps actually a boarder) together with his brother John, at the home of John Fleming in Mount Street in Old Machar. He is described as "Student at Gymnasium" which may refer to the Chanonry School (also known as the Gymnasium) which opened in 1848 to prepare boys for university.



Richard McQueen (left) and household outside Archiestown Manse. Photo: A. McQueen

In 1861 Richard was living with the Kent family in Edinburgh and was a "Theological Student" at the University and New College. He was ordained at Westport, Hawick, Roxburghshire in 1869. On 24th June 1870 he married and his marriage registration lists his occupation as "Free Church Minister". His English bride was Margaret Phillips, who was the widow of George King, with two sons by him, Josiah (15) and James (11). George was a brewer in Hawick who died on 25th April 1865, at the age of 33. In the census of 1871, the McQueen family were all living in Hawick, and Richard was listed as "Minister of Territorial Free Church". In 1872 he was transferred to a home mission in Dundee.

An announcement published in the *Dundee Courier & Argus* on 30th September 1875, stated that "on Monday a deputation from the Free Church congregation at Archiestown appeared at the Free Presbytery of Aberdeen intimating that they had unanimously elected the Rev. R.R. McQueen, of Wilson Territorial Church, Dundee, and requesting the Presbytery to moderate a call in his favour".

Richard and Margaret had a son in 1878. The census of 1881 shows the three of them, plus a domestic servant, resident at the Free Church Manse in Archiestown, Knockando. Richard is listed as Minister of Knockando Free Church. In July 1885 an article in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* reported on a meeting held under the auspices of the Scottish Farmers' Alliance. Rev. McQueen held the chair and introduced the business, "expressing his hearty sympathy with the objects [tenants' rights] of the Alliance".

At the time of the census of 1891 the household still consisted of the two adults, their only son, and a servant. Richard was still Minister of Knockando Free Church.

The turn of the century saw a flurry of activity in Richard's life. He retired from his position at Knockando in 1899. Margaret died in Carlisle (probably her place of birth) in September of 1900. Early in 1901 Richard married Annie Elizabeth MacWilliam in Carlisle. Annie was

born in Aberlour in 1859, and was 25 years younger than Richard. Aberlour is adjacent to Knockando, so they undoubtedly met during his years of ministry there. None of the McQueen family appear in the 1901 census in either Scotland or England, but in 1911 Richard, Annie, and Annie's brother Alex Forbes MacWilliam were living at "Rose Rae", a seaside cottage in Whitstable in Kent. Richard died there in March 1915.

Alexander McKenzie, Florida

—oOo—

The Sangsters of Cruden

We recently featured an article about a Sangster family of clockmakers from Cruden parish (Journal 176 (November 2025), pp.13–14). We are delighted to have further information on the family, provided by Alan Sangster, who owns an original Sangster clock.

Counting ten generations back, I can trace my family tree to Thomas Sangster (born 1711) and Isobel Sime, who married in Cruden in 1735. They were the parents of Barbara Sangster (born 1736) and she in turn married John Sangster in 1772 in Cruden. Their son Alexander, born in 1779, was the noted clockmaker. According to R.M. Lawrance's article about



A James Sangster clockface

clockmakers, Alexander was also a farmer, at Sandend, near the village of Whinnyfold in Cruden parish. His prized bull would be taken out to other farms to help with "shimming neeps" (thinning out turnip seedlings). Alexander was a colourful character and would reputedly murmur into the animal's ear: "Come awa' noo, laddie; there's little [payment] for work, still less for idleness".

Alexander married Jean Tait in 1810 and together they had seven children, including James (1821–1901) who became well known as a clockmaker in his own right, earning the nickname "Watchy Sangster". We are told that James "was of a lively disposition, and brimful of humour, like his father before him" and that he was a popular speaker at local events. James married Elizabeth Gray of East Broadmuir farm, Slains in 1842.

Christian Gray, Elizabeth's sister, married my 2g-grandfather, John Sangster, in 1863 and their son, my great-grandfather, also John Sangster, was born at Broadmuir farm in 1864. He was apprenticed as a clockmaker with his uncle



John Sangster, grain merchant



Alan Sangster with a "Watchy Sangster" clock

James but had to work at home on the farm during the day and make clock parts at night. Fed up with this, he ran off to Aberdeen and became a grain merchant. He had stables in Virginia Street where he kept a horse and carriage and would travel round the agriculture shows buying crops for shipment from Aberdeen. He would tally the grain cargos going aboard the large sailing ships and was reputed to be the fastest weigher on the Quay.

The Sangster family information was researched by my relative, the late Norma Johnston who produced a comprehensive family tree. Very helpfully she placed her research online and you can find out more about the Sangsters here: <https://www.genealogy.com/ftm/m/c/c/Norma-Mcculloch-lanarkshire/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-Index.html#Sangster>. If you have difficulties with the long URL, try this link: <https://tinyurl.com/25eet74c>.

I have a clock made by James Sangster (1821–1901) and my son Donald has one made by James's father, Alexander Sangster (1779–1857).

Source

All photos: Alan Sangster

Lawrance, R.M., “Notes on Old Clockmakers – XVI”, *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (29th June 1921). The article can be accessed via the British Newspaper Archive website.

Alan Sangster, Cruden Bay

—oOo—

The Thom Family of Dunnottar

My first introduction to the exotic world represented by Aberdeen and North-East Scotland came in 1956, when I graduated from college with my B.A. in Biology and Chemistry and was hired as a research assistant at the New York Zoological Society. We sailed on the *Alcoa Partner* from New York to Trinidad, British West Indies, where I raised butterflies and was a general go-fer. On a get-together at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in St. Augustine, everyone was astir when one of their students, Alistair, arrived in his kilt! He was exotic to me and very dashing and glamorous. Of course, some of us wanted to ask “the question”, which was never answered although the pixie-gremlin in me was sore tempted to discover the answer. I never spoke with Alistair, but always remembered he was from some place called “Aberdeen” in Scotland. Many years later I learned that my own family came from near Aberdeen.



Map: S. Edwards

My mother, Marion Soby Young, wanted to join the Daughters of the American Revolution and began to trace her family tree. She eventually became a Registrar in that organisation. As she aged, I eventually took over the tree. My mother lived in the age of paper, stamps and snail mail. I lived in the age of the computer and although I have never visited Scotland, today I can visit via Google Earth. Lucky me!

An obituary from the *New York Herald* newspaper of 16th July 1864, read, “THOM – In this city, on Thursday, July 14, after a long and painful illness, Charles Thom, a native of Stonehaven, Scotland, died 55 years and 2 months” and asked London and Aberdeen papers to copy the notice. Two days later, Charles was buried in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. This plot was owned by Armstrongs with a Bowker and some Goddersons, Gritmans, Halls, and Pettigrews also buried there. I am still trying to trace who these other people are. If I am successful, I may find they too have Scottish roots.



Charles Thom
Photo B. Bodden

Charles Abercrombie Thom is my maternal 2g-grandfather. He was born on 1st May 1805 in Dunnottar, Kincardineshire. I was thrilled to think that meant he was born at the castle, but I am now told that Dunnottar is simply a parish on the south side of Stonehaven and that the castle had been abandoned since well before the time of his birth. Charles’s father was George Thom, a merchant in Stonehaven and the baptism was witnessed by John Richardson and Charles Abercrombie, who was apparently distinguished enough to merit the title “Esquire”.

Despite this auspicious start, Charles lost his father when he was nine years old and his mother when he was 13. He became a cabinet maker and removed to Edinburgh to ply his trade. He

married Mary Gourlay on 29th April 1828, at Canongate Kirk. He made her a set of mahogany bedroom furniture including a bed, mirror, chest of drawers and sewing table, some of which are still in the family. In 1833, it seems that Charles was hired to work in New York City for the famous American furniture maker, Duncan Phyfe, who had changed the spelling of his name from Fife around 1793. His family was originally from Loch Fannich, west of Inverness. Phyfe's furniture had become very popular and he recruited many cabinetmakers, including Charles, to make his furniture for the mass market. There are no remaining records from the Duncan Phyfe company. The proof of the association in my case is that many Phyfes and Thoms intermarried.

Charles and Mary had nine children. One of them was Marion Emma Thom who married James Harding Phyfe. They are my great-grandparents. They had a daughter, Rachel who married John Soby and were my mother's parents. Sadly, Rachel died a few days before my mother's seventh birthday leaving her to be raised by her grandmother, Marion Emma, fondly known to us as Gramma Phyfe.



*Mary Gourlay,
Photo: B. Bodden*

Until I began to study my Scottish heritage, I had no idea of how Scottish I was due to that gap of one generation. My DNA says I have about 67% Scottish DNA but this also includes those paternal genes from Sunderland, England. I did not appreciate that my mother had absorbed so much Scottish culture which then came down to me. Now that explains a lot!

Every Christmas growing up, my mother made Grandma's Plum Pudding. I assume this was a recipe brought from Scotland by my great-grandmother, Mary Gourlay, who probably served it to those nine children and to Charles Abercrombie Thom, late of Dunnottar.

Grandma Phyfe's Plum Pudding

- 1 cup finely chopped beef suet (ask butcher) preferably from kidneys;
- 1 cup dark corn syrup (or ½ cup molasses) mixed with ¼ tsp baking soda.
- ¼ pound each candied cherries, citron, orange peel;
- 2 cups all-purpose flour; 1 cup soft bread crumbs; 1 cup dried currants;
- 1 cup sliced blanched almonds; ½ cup seedless raisins; ½ cup sugar;
- ½ tsp each nutmeg, cloves, allspice; 2 tsp baking powder; 1 tsp cinnamon;
- 2 eggs (beaten); ½ cup milk; ½ cup whisky or brandy; 1 tsp salt

Combine suet and crumbs, add syrup and eggs, blend. Sift dry ingredients; add alternately with milk and whisky. Add fruit and nuts. Fill a well-greased 1½ quart mold 2/3 full. Cover tightly. Steam for 3 hours. Serve hot with foamy sauce.

Foamy Sauce for Grandma's Plum Pudding

Beat 2 egg yolks until stiff and lemon-colored. Add a dash of salt and 1 tbsp whisky. Add 1 cup confectioner's sugar (icing sugar) gradually. Fold in 1 cup heavy (double) cream whipped. Add more whisky if desired. Serves 12. Note: Cannot be made too far ahead of time as it separates.

Barbara Phyfe Young Bodden, California

A Recipe for Haggis

I enjoyed reading the articles on food in Journal 176 (November 2025). But there was one recipe missing... Haggis!

My researches on the history of the long-gone hamlet of Raws of Noth and its associated farm of Bogs of Noth near Gartly in Aberdeenshire, revealed some folded papers detailing this glorious dish. It was in the form of a talk given by one of the ladies associated with the farm, whom I have been told was Margaret (Eliza) Harvey (1869–1963). Unfortunately, there is no date on the talk and although it was found folded in a small notebook dated 1879, I suspect the talk was given in the first half of the 20th Century. I'm also uncertain to whom the talk was addressed, as the speaker started, "President & Sister Members". Might this have been a WRI or a local church group?

Eliza explained that, "Haggis is a very thrifty dish and certainly ought to be more popular than it is. It takes a long time to prepare a haggis; that's maybe one reason it is not more used in these quick meal days. It takes about six hours. I don't mean six hours of steady work, but the time after you begin boiling, before it is ready to serve." Understandably, in the quick meal days of the present, few would spend so long creating this dish! And what would our Eliza have had to say about a McDonald's meal?

The recipe now belongs to Joan Harvey, one-time resident of the Bogs of Noth farm, who has given permission for me to use it. The Harvey family rented the farm from about 1878, then purchased it in 1937 from the Duke of Richmond and Gordon. The last Harvey to own the farm was John G.T. Harvey who passed away in 1980. Joan Harvey, now resident in Moray, is his daughter.



Eliza Harvey (right) and friend

Photo: C. Harris

A copy of the original has been deposited in the ANESFHS Research Centre.

Scotch Haggis

1 sheep's pluck [lungs and windpipe]

a sheep's stomach

½ lb suet

1 onion

½ lb oatmeal

pepper & salt

1 lb mince (beef)

Procure a sheep's pluck and stomach bag, wash the pluck well and put it on to boil in a pot, allowing the wind-pipe to hang out of the pot so that any impurities will come out by it. Boil gently from one-and-a-half to two hours.

Get the stomach bag nicely cleaned by the butcher, wash it thoroughly and put it on in cold water and bring to the boil which will cause the bag to contract. Take it out of the pot immediately. Wash and scrape it well and lay it in salted water until needed. Mince the best parts of the lungs and heart, grate the best parts of the liver and put them all in a large basin. Toast the oatmeal well and add to it the contents of the basin.

Chop the suet very finely, add an onion very finely chopped up, 2 teaspoonfuls of salt, 1 teaspoonful of black pepper, and a breakfast cupful of the liquor in which the pluck was boiled to moisten and mix the whole.

Now take up the stomach bag, keep the fat or smooth side inside, and fill it up, but not quite full. Sew up the opening, put in boiling water, to boil gently for three hours.

Prick the haggis several times, with a darning needle, to prevent it from bursting, put a plate under it, to prevent it sticking to the bottom of the pot.

Colin R. Harris, Inch

—oOo—

Raspberry Brandy

To make RASPBERRY BRANDY.

GATHER the raspberries when the sun is hot upon them, and as soon as ever you have got them, to every five quarts of raspberries put one quart of the best brandy, boil a quart of water five minutes with a pound of double refined sugar in it, and pour it boiling hot on the berries, let it stand all night, then add nine quarts more brandy, stir it about very well, put it in a stone bottle, and let it stand a month or six weeks ; when fine bottle it.

Our Mystery Objects wizard, Graham Robertson, sent us this tasty recipe ... or should we call it a "receipt" in honour of its echoes of the days of Jane Austen? Indeed, he tells us that the recipe is from the 1782 edition of The Experienced English Housekeeper by Elizabeth Raffald. He adds that "It's full of the weird and wonderful. The receipt for making 'common' biscuits requires you to whisk for an hour and a half!"

If raspberries are in season with you, you might be just as happy to eat them fresh, or forego the brandy and make a fine pot of jam! Let us know if you try the brandy, Graham!

—oOo—

From North-East Scotland to New Jersey



Derrick Johnstone

Photo: D. Johnstone

In the early 1680s, a remarkable – but now little-known – colonial venture linked Scotland's North-East with a fledgling settlement across the Atlantic. Known as East Jersey, this province occupied the eastern half of what is now New Jersey, USA. Between 1683 and 1702, several hundred Scots, including many from Aberdeen, Banff, Kincardine and Moray, crossed the ocean to begin new lives. Their successes provide a sharp contrast to the experiences of those who left for Darien ten or so years later.

Many were drawn by economic prospects: land ownership, trade, or skilled work. There were Quakers weary of persecution and wishing to practise their ideals in a new community. And for another significant group, their journey was forced: Covenanters sentenced to transportation after rebellion or nonconformity. The latter did not come from the North-East, but they had spent many weeks prior to their departure held in atrocious conditions in the "Whigs Vault" in Dunnottar Castle.

The North-East was prominent in this story. Merchant networks from Aberdeen and Montrose provided shipping, finance and logistical support. Families such as the Barclays of Ury (Stonehaven) and the Gordons of Pitlurg (Keith) invested in the venture or acted as intermediaries. Quaker meetings in Aberdeen and Ury played a key role in recruitment, while other prominent Aberdonians, though not Quakers, backed the scheme for commercial reasons.

Among the emigrants were artisans, merchants, farmers and entire families whose surnames still resonate in the region today. Many travelled as servants, where they committed themselves to work under contract for a period, typically four years, in return for their upkeep and the award of 30 or more acres at the end of their indenture. (Green sector in pie

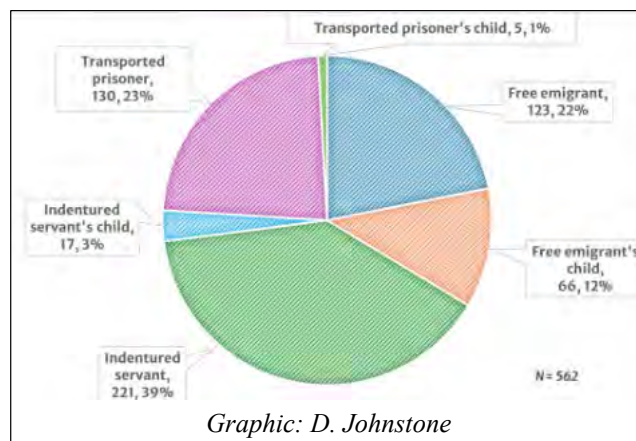
chart on the right.) Some settled in communities named after where they came from, “New Aberdeen” on the Jersey Shore being one example. Perth Amboy was established as the main town and port, named after the Earl of Perth and the Native American name, Ompoge, for the point on which it was situated.

At the centre of the Scottish push into East Jersey was Robert Barclay of Ury (1648–90), the leading Quaker theologian of his time. In 1682, Barclay was appointed “Governor for Life” of the province by fellow investors including the Earl of Perth, soon to become Chancellor of Scotland. Barclay never intended to emigrate; rather his concern was to earn a return to secure the finances of the family estate at Ury. But his big role was strategic: he promoted the colony, encouraged investment, and worked to attract fellow Scots, particularly Quakers. In the end, the East Jersey settlement proved to be much more broadly Scottish in character, with the Quakers significantly outnumbered by Episcopalians and Presbyterians.

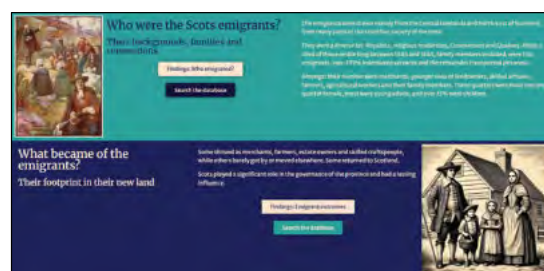
The contribution from the North-East went far beyond those who actually sailed. There were investors such as Barclay and David Falconer who never left Scotland but held land in the colony; emigration agents who recruited settlers; and correspondents who maintained family and business ties across the Atlantic. Available records reveal webs of kinship and commerce stretching from the harbour of Aberdeen to Perth Amboy in East Jersey and on to nearby New York.

I have created the East Jersey Bound website (<https://eastjerseybound.scot>) which summarises my postgraduate research at the University of Glasgow and provides pen portraits of some of the emigrants. It holds a database of over 600 emigrants and over 2,800 people in total, including their kin and associates and those who died at sea in transit. The site attempts to capture where the emigrants came from and what became of them, with details added of their previous and next generations. My dissertation provides more of the background, considers the motivations behind decisions to leave for the New World, and explores how they fared, socially and economically.

The database lets you search for emigrants, their origins, and their networks – whether you’re following a DNA lead or chasing a family story. Anyone in the North-East curious about early Scottish links to America, or wondering if an ancestor made the voyage, can explore a fascinating chapter in the region’s history.



Screenshots from the East Jersey Bound website, showing site navigation links.



For genealogists, this period offers a rich but challenging field. Passenger lists are fragmentary, names appear in variant spellings, and many settlers later moved elsewhere in colonial America. Yet through land deeds, wills, church records and court papers – in Scotland and in New Jersey – it’s possible to trace the lives and wider kin of those who sailed.

Many surnames from the North-East are found in East Jersey records: Alexander; Barclay; Burnett; Craig; Forbes; Falconer; Galloway; Gordon; Hardy; Innes; Jaffray; Keith; Laing; Molleson; Skene; Willocks. I am continuing to develop *East Jersey Bound*, following research leads and adding pen portraits. If you have connections and/or knowledge about the emigrant families, please get in touch by email to info@eastjerseybound.scot.

Sources

East Jersey Bound website <https://eastjerseybound.scot>.

Derrick Johnstone, "Scots Emigrants to East Jersey 1682–1702: Motivations and Outcomes" (M.Phil. dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2025). It is available to view online at: <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/85247>.

info@eastjerseybound.scot

Derrick Johnstone, Glasgow

—oOo—

The Sleights of Aberdeenshire – and Elsewhere

This brief account of the Sleight family recounts how the patriarch, Peter Sleight (1786–1868), came to Aberdeenshire in the early 19th century, and how some of his descendants became part of the North-East farming community, whilst others have settled in other parts of Britain – and beyond.

At a celebratory dinner in his honour in Strichen in 1890, John Sleight (1826–1918), factor of Strichen Estate, told the audience about his father's arrival from the Borders in 1810. Peter Sleight grew up on Slighhouses near Duns, a farm owned by the family of James Hutton, farming improver and geologist. Peter's father, another John Sleight, worked as farm manager on the estate. We believe that Peter also worked at Phantassie in East Lothian, a farm owned by the Rennie family who were also well-known farming improvers. John related how Peter, at the age of 24, was invited to come to the North-East by the Aberdeenshire Farming Improvers who were keen to enhance the quality of farming in the North-East. Peter became farm manager at Auchterellon Mains near Ellon, and he and his family moved to Strichen Mains about 1835.

Peter married Elspet Sim of Slains in 1822 and they had three sons, John, Charles and Peter, and three daughters, Jean, Ann and Elspet. Elspet died aged 18 and is buried in Ellon churchyard. Jean and Ann are buried in Turriff graveyard, having moved to Turriff when the Ann married John Taylor.

Charles (1829–94) was a teacher in New Pitsligo and Tarves, and became rector of Peterhead Academy, before moving to Aberdeen Grammar School where he was master of mathematics. An article written by a pupil indicated that he was stern and respected. He married Agnes Lumsden and they had several children, only one of whom seems to have married. Charles was buried in Nellfield Cemetery in Aberdeen, but he is commemorated on the Sleight gravestone in Tarves Kirkyard.

Charles's son, also Charles, was born in Aberdeen in 1881. He was sent to Uruguay by the Bank of London and South America Ltd in the 1890s (we are not sure just how this came about). His descendants married into local families and their descendants now live in Argentina.

As with all the best families there is a mystery! Peter and Elspet's youngest, also Peter, born 1832, moved to London in 1850. We wonder why he left the North-East at such a young age and there is much speculation, but no clear evidence. Peter found lodgings and married Mary Ann Reid, his landlady's daughter, with whom he had several children. He married again towards the end of his life. One of his descendants moved to Australia and their descendants live in New South Wales.

But it is Peter's oldest son, John Sleigh of Strichen, born on 6th January 1826 in Auchterellon, who is perhaps the most important Sleigh. He married Ann Gall of Old Deer in October 1858. They had six children, three daughters and three sons. John trained as a surveyor and agricultural architect in Aberdeen and returned to work on the estate. He became factor of Strichen Estate in 1858 at the age of thirty-two, which seems young for such an important post. The Estate had recently been sold by the Fraser family to the Bairstows of Coatbridge, wealthy steel-makers.

At that time the Estate consisted of tenanted farms and crofts, many of which lacked proper drainage, dykes, or good steadings, and the soil was poor, much in need of enrichment. John embarked on a plan of improvement and development working over many years in tandem with the farmers and crofters. Details of some of the work can be found in estate books held by the Local Studies office in Oldmeldrum. In an article in the newsletter of the Scottish Maps Forum, Douglas Lockhart wrote that as a result of John's work, Strichen became a classic example of tenant-led agricultural improvement.

John was factor until his death in 1918, by which time he had become the longest-serving factor in Scotland, having worked in Strichen for 60 years. Additionally, he was factor of Auchmedden estate for 42 years (also owned by the Bairstows) and of Fedderate for 26 years.

As factor of the Auchmedden estate, he was involved in the improvement of Pennan. He set out plots on available land to address the demand for housing, joined the call for a church to be built, and helped secure funding for improvements to the harbour.

John Sleigh was also involved in many local – and not so local – committees. Towards the end of his life, Aberdeenshire Council commissioned his portrait photograph, and listed over twenty committees which he chaired or was a member of, including the North of Scotland Agricultural College, the County Licensing Committee and the Strichen Curling Club – his influence was far-ranging.

At the dinner in 1890 John and Ann were presented with full-length portraits, painted by the well-known artist Archibald David Reid, who had been born in Aberdeen. The portraits were given by the Sleigh family to Aberdeenshire Council. Currently (January 2026), the portraits of Mr and Mrs Sleigh can still be seen in Strichen Library. At a second dinner in 1905, the couple received other gifts, including an illustrated address from tenants and friends as a tribute to John's work on the estate and elsewhere.

In 1911, John's son, Charles William Sleigh (1863–1949), who was factor of Blackwood Estate near Lesmahagow, came home to help his father and subsequently took over until the estate was broken up in 1924. Charles remained in Strichen and served as an Aberdeenshire councillor for years, becoming Vice-Convenor in 1932 and then Convenor of the Council. He was also active in many local committees, including the drama club. Charles was married to Agnes Mason and they had three children, James Charles, John Manson and Frederick Charles.

As regards John and Ann's other children, one of the daughters, Cecilia married James Philip, one of the Strichen estate farmers and there are still Philips in Aberdeenshire. We are



The Sleigh Commemorative scroll.

Photo: J. Sleigh



*The Sleigh portraits.
By kind permission of
Aberdeenshire Council.*

Photo: J. Sleigh



not sure what happened to Eliza Ann and Louisa Jane, neither of whom married. There is a family story that they ran a dame school, possibly in Nairn.

John Patrick Sleigh (born 1867) married the Strichen chemist's daughter, Jeannie Milne Lee. They farmed first at Crimond. John then became tenant of St John's Wells near Fyvie in 1901 and bought the farm from Haddo Estate in 1919, along with the nearby farm of Andrewsford. John Patrick's four sons, John, Alec, Harry and Charles, all became farmers in Aberdeenshire and noted breeders of Clydesdale horses, Shetland ponies, Shorthorn cattle and North Country Cheviot sheep. His daughter Christina married a Durno of Uppermill at Tarves.

George Baird Sleigh (born 1872) became a doctor, first in Aboyne and then Alyth. One of his sons, John, was also a doctor.

Henry Paterson Sleigh (born c.1876) was educated at Aberdeen Grammar School, and graduated from Aberdeen University with an M.B. He became a doctor in Hull and then Leeds. One of his sons, Alan Hunter Sleigh, became headmaster of the prestigious King Edward VII Academy in Lincolnshire.

And where are the Sleighs now? There are Sleighs on four continents. There are branches of the family, in Australia, Canada, Argentina and Hong Kong as well as in England and, of course, in Aberdeenshire. For those keen to trace the details, we have placed two family trees in the Society Research Centre.

Judith Sleigh, Aberdeenshire

—oOo—

Family Legends: Fyvie Castle, Gerrards and Florences

In Journal 176 (November 2025) you asked for stories about family myths. I have two, one on my wife's side and one on mine but both relate to Fyvie Castle.

My wife's is about her Gerrard family. It says that two Gerrard brothers (both masons) from somewhere in France were employed in repairs to the castle. That's about all I know. My wife died last year but I may be able to extract further information from her four brothers.

I have a bit more on mine. It derives mainly from a letter written on 19th April 1896 by my grand-aunt. This letter was found during some renovation works, buried in a wall of a shop in Harray, Orkney, and featured in an article in the local paper. Here is an extract: "This house is being built by William Jolly, Merchant, Harray aged 38 years. His father was a Kincardineshire man and had a farm in Shapinsay called West-Hill. His mother Margaret Dinnison belonged to Ness, Shapinsay. The present William Jolly is married to Jessie Florence, aged 36. She was born in Durris, Kincardineshire, where her mother belonged.

Her mother's name was Elizabeth Lawson, and her father's Peter Florence. He belonged to Fyvie in Aberdeenshire. It is believed among us that the Florences first came from the town of Florence in Italy. The story runs thus:- That when Lord Fyvie was visiting the town of Florence many generations ago he brought a musician home with him; but not being able to pronounce his name, he called him 'Florence' after the town. That man was said to be the ancestor of all the Florences".

It certainly looks that way as Fyvie is still hoatching with Florences. Jessie Marr Florence was my great granny.

Rognvald Spence

—oOo—

A Spooky Coincidence: Ingrams and Thirds

Some time ago, I was looking for information on my wife's distant cousin Mary Ingram, who was born in Campbellford, Ontario in 1843 and died there in 1879. The side bar on Ancestry showed a Find a Grave entry. By luck the photo for the entry showed two stones and to the right of the stone commemorating Mary Ingram and her husband, James Innes, was the one for my distant cousin George Neil Third, who was born in Seymour, Ontario in 1887 and died in Campbellford in 1947.

When I double checked recently, the original photo, which appeared to show the stones side by side, had been replaced by a close-up of the inscription. However, a supplementary photo showed both stones with George Third's stone clearly in the row behind. As a bonus, another stone in the row behind included George's brother J(ames) Herbert Third (1895–1958) along with Herbert's wife, Clara Stevens, and her parents, Thomas James Stevens and Anne Jones.



Photo: The Silent Forgotten

Sources

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/180566805/mary-innes>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/180456024/george-neil-third>

Alan Johnston, Aberdeen

—oOo—

Lion Tamers and Polar Bear Ticklers

We all have family stories and photos that are priceless, and sometimes un-provable. During WW2, my dad (in the Army) "borrowed" a tank to take my mum (in the WAAF) out on a date on the sand-dunes near Lossiemouth, but there is no corroborative evidence in his War Diary!

My best photo, however, is this one of my Grandpa Johnston, tickling Peter the Polar Bear under the chin, at Belfast Zoo in the 1960s. I thought this would trump anyone else's animal story – how wrong could I be? I was on holiday recently and talking to a young woman about family-history and our shared love of animals. I told her that Grandpa's brother was a well-known "animal whisperer" and, although I had no



Photo: S. Low



Photo: S. Low

photographic proof of his skills, I did have this photo of Grandpa and the polar bear. “Well”, she said, and after a very dramatic pause, continued, “my 2g-grandfather was a lion tamer!”

My chin hit the floor! It turned out that Ambrose Salvona, of Italian extraction, was indeed a lion tamer with the circus and was buried at Inverness. I offered to visit his grave when I was next staying with my cousins in Invergordon. You know how one story always leads to another? My cousin Catherine, when teaching many years ago in Evanton, was told that, in the 1920s as the circus was heading north, the elephant became over-heated. The circus stopped at the stream running through the village and the primary school children were all taken out to see the elephant in the water! My father was born in Evanton in 1916 but maybe was too young to have been at school then. I posted the whole tale on my Facebook page and another friend confirmed the elephant story which she had been told by an old patient when she was a nurse in Inverness!

Our ancestors are never forgotten with tales like these. Ambrose’s grave has been newly lettered by a distant relative and I laid lion-coloured flowers for him on a very cold and snowy day. Peter the Polar Bear would have enjoyed the weather.

Can you trump these animal stories?

Sally Low, Edinburgh

—oOo—

Loss of the Watt Family and the Fishing Boat, *Rose*, 1899



Christian Watt

Photo: S. Packer

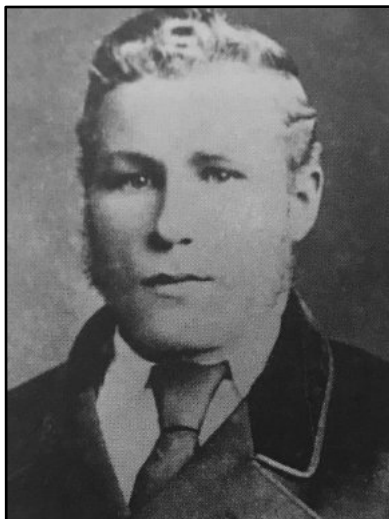
I never met my paternal grandmother, Christian Watt, born in Crovie in 1881. She lived there most of her life along with her parents Helen and John “Curly” Watt. Helen’s maiden name was also Watt, and Curly was the tee-name, or by-name, given to our branch of Watts. The majority of people in the tiny fishing village were named Watt or Wiseman so tee-names helped to differentiate between them. This was a common practice in Scotland, particularly in fishing communities. Christian was born roughly in the middle of 11 siblings. She married and left the village at the age of 40 but only had two years as a married woman as she died 10 days after the birth of my father, her first and only child, in 1923.

Crovie is a beautiful place, nestled in an alcove on the shore line – stunning when the sun shines but frightening when stormy. My Watt family lived at number 26 Crovie, one of a single line of houses. Because of the sometimes harsh weather, the house eventually stood in ruins but was sold and rebuilt by its new owners.

On the afternoon of 16th March 1899, the *Rose* (BF343), a 60-foot fife fishing boat, set sail from nearby Gamrie (Gardenstown) with a crew of six men and a boy, heading for the fishing ground at Balta, Shetland. The skipper, John Watt, was my granny’s brother-in-law, married to her eldest sister, Jane Ann. Also on board was her young brother, John William “Curly” Watt, aged 16, on his very first fishing trip, taking the place of his father, my great-grandfather, John Watt. The other men, some married with children, were all related in some

way and all surnamed Watt. The sea was flat calm when they left so they took extra stores with them as the lack of wind meant a long, slow trip. Later, about 20 miles north of Fraserburgh, the wind suddenly changed to storm force and it is believed the boat was hit by a passing steam trawler. It would have been dark with only a paraffin lamp up on the mast and difficult to see. The trawler may not have realised what had happened when they felt a jolt but when they did later hear about the missing *Rose*, and put two and two together, the crew decided to keep quiet. This version of events was told many years later by a crew member of the steam trawler who wanted to clear his conscience.

The following week, the worried families in Crovie and Gamrie congregated to wait for the delivery of a telegram in the vain hope that the men were safe somewhere. It was not to be, and when a telegram did eventually arrive, it brought bad news. A Peterhead boat had picked up several oars and two buoys clearly marked with *Rose*. The items had been tied together giving the impression that the men had tried to quickly build a makeshift raft. Even if successful they would have succumbed to the cold waters of the North Sea. A pair of boots was washed ashore a few months later with a framed photo inside.



John Watt



Ann Watt

Photo: S. Packer

An appeal was launched in the newspapers by the Gardenstown ministers with the aim of raising money for the women and children, struggling since the loss of the family bread winners and with no provision for their futures. As the newspaper appeal said, "Owing to the hard times of late years, it is little the fishing folk, however willing, can do for one another in seasons of distress" (*Banffshire Journal*, 11th April, 1899). Various fish curers and salesmen contributed but the number of contributors and the sums listed the following week look modest by modern standards (*Aberdeen Press & Journal*, 19th April 1899). None of the men's bodies were ever found. Their deaths were registered five months later.

The story was recounted by Dr John Watt Robertson in his memoirs. This John was the grandson of skipper John Watt of the *Rose* and documented the tragedy in his book. John Robertson started his career as a fisherman but after a work injury to his arm, he studied to become a medical doctor – quite a change in direction. He was a GP on Harris for 22 years.

Source

Robertson, Dr J.W. (2014), *Leaving the Nets, Trusting Him: The memoirs of Dr John Watt Robertson* (Crossroads (Harris) Care Attendant Scheme).

Sonia Packer, Aberdeen

—oOo—

Home Cures of Henrietta MacKenzie

Henrietta McKenzie, born 1899, grew up in a crofting family on Lewis and went to University in Aberdeen. Her recollections of home cures would have been very familiar to those growing up in North-East farming or fishing communities.

One took the ordinary epidemics such as measles and whooping cough as necessary nuisances – the sooner children caught them and got it over, the better. With measles you



Henrietta
McKenzie.

Photo: A.
Doxford

were sent to bed in a darkened room. No light – fine – but no drink, not even water, and you were parched. Where that idea came from I know not – certainly a doctor was not called for anything as routine as measles. No complications were expected and I can certainly not remember anything to the contrary. But Scarlet Fever! That was different – one kept away from that and, if the patient did survive, which was the exception, he generally had some residual weakness which could last for life. Fortunately, such cases were rare. No one ever appeared to have toothache; just as well because there was no dentist on the island! If you did have twinges, oil of cloves was dripped on to cotton wool and rammed in or wrapped round the tooth. A wool sock was then filled with cooking salt, heated and held against the aching cheek – and very comforting it was.

Bronchitis was more serious so a poultice was the answer to that – heated linseed meal. A boil called for another variety of poultice: bread soaked in boiling water, sprinkled with Epsom salts and placed on the affected part. Sometimes sugar was used, maybe when there were no Epsom salts or possibly for a different type of sore. And for grazed knees there was a bottle of rendered hen fat and a tail feather wedged in the cork to paint it on the wound. Was it faith that banished the soreness?

Source

“Henrietta’s Journal”, transcribed by her daughter, Anna Garden.

Anna Doxford, née Garden, Somerset

—oOo—

North-East Fishing Villages and the Great Shetland Fishing

Alan Grant drew our attention to this newspaper story which mentioned his great-grandfather, Captain George Mackay, Harbourmaster at Fraserburgh. It's a reminder of just how rich a resource the British Newspaper Archive can be for family-historians. It provides family stories and also important social history to help us understand how our forebears lived. We thought this bustling scene and the annual mass exodus of the fishing fleets to Shetland was worth another look. We have paired these stories with contemporary photographs. Many more can be found on The Silver City Vault website and, for those in Aberdeen, we have prints of some of these old photographs available to browse in our King Street Research Centre.

Great Shetland Fishing. Departure of the Expedition. Animated Scene At Fraserburgh.

The annual departure of fishcurers, coopers, gutting women, clerks, German correspondents, etc., from Fraserburgh to the North Isles of Shetland took place yesterday afternoon. The crowd of about 400 or 500 that went as passengers on board the St Nicholas was somewhat mixed, comprising as it did hardy Highland women from practically the Butt of Lewis on the one hand, and on the other the neatly begloved and sprightly Teuton from the “Unter den Linden” of Berlin. All were in the best of humour, and the excellent arrangements made by the North Scotland and Orkney and Shetland Shipping Company for the comfort of the passengers contributed much to the happy state of affairs. During the afternoon the middle jetty was largely occupied by piles of luggage, while the stir on the pier was something extraordinary, and this increased the hour of sailing approached. It took some “engineering” to get the crowd board and safely “housed up”, but Captain Mackay, Harbourmaster, who is an adept at the work, soon had order out of chaos, and everyone in their place, and, what was better, pleased with their surroundings. As the hour for sailing approached the excitement increased, but the best of order was observed up to the last. Some happy individuals made themselves happier on the eve of leaving, and this increased their feelings of tenderness and human sympathy, as evinced in the demonstrative farewells to

and with their friends. When the steamer left the harbour at 6.30 p.m. her deck was crowded with people in every part, who loudly cheered and waved their hats, etc., to their friends on shore, who were equally hearty their reply. At the time of was northerly, with a drizzling rain falling, and the weather inclined to be foggy.

Source

Dundee Evening Telegraph, Saturday 14th June 1902.

The Shetland Fishing.

A great fleet of boats left Fraserburgh Harbour yesterday for Shetland, and the piers were a scene of much activity all day long. Provisions were taken aboard in large quantities, and the fishermen's wives were present in considerable numbers seeing that their men's clothes, bedding, etc., were all in order. Big crowds of bairns were at the pierheads bidding their parents adieu, and altogether the scene at the harbour was rather an interesting one, and would have been especially so to strangers unacquainted with the life and manners of the



*Fishwives at Point Law, Aberdeen Harbour around 1900, photographed by George Washington Wilson.
Reproduced by kind permission of Aberdeen City Libraries / The Silver City Vault.*

local fishermen. In the morning, about nine o'clock, quite a large fleet of herring boats came round Cairnbulg Point, and proceeded north past Kinnaird Head. For a time the bay resembled the appearance it has during the regular herring fishing in July and August. It appeared that the fleet in question was the Peterhead and Firth of Forth boats en route for Baltasound and other places in the North Isles.

Source

The Aberdeen Daily Journal, 12th June 1902

Buchan Villages and Herring Fishing.

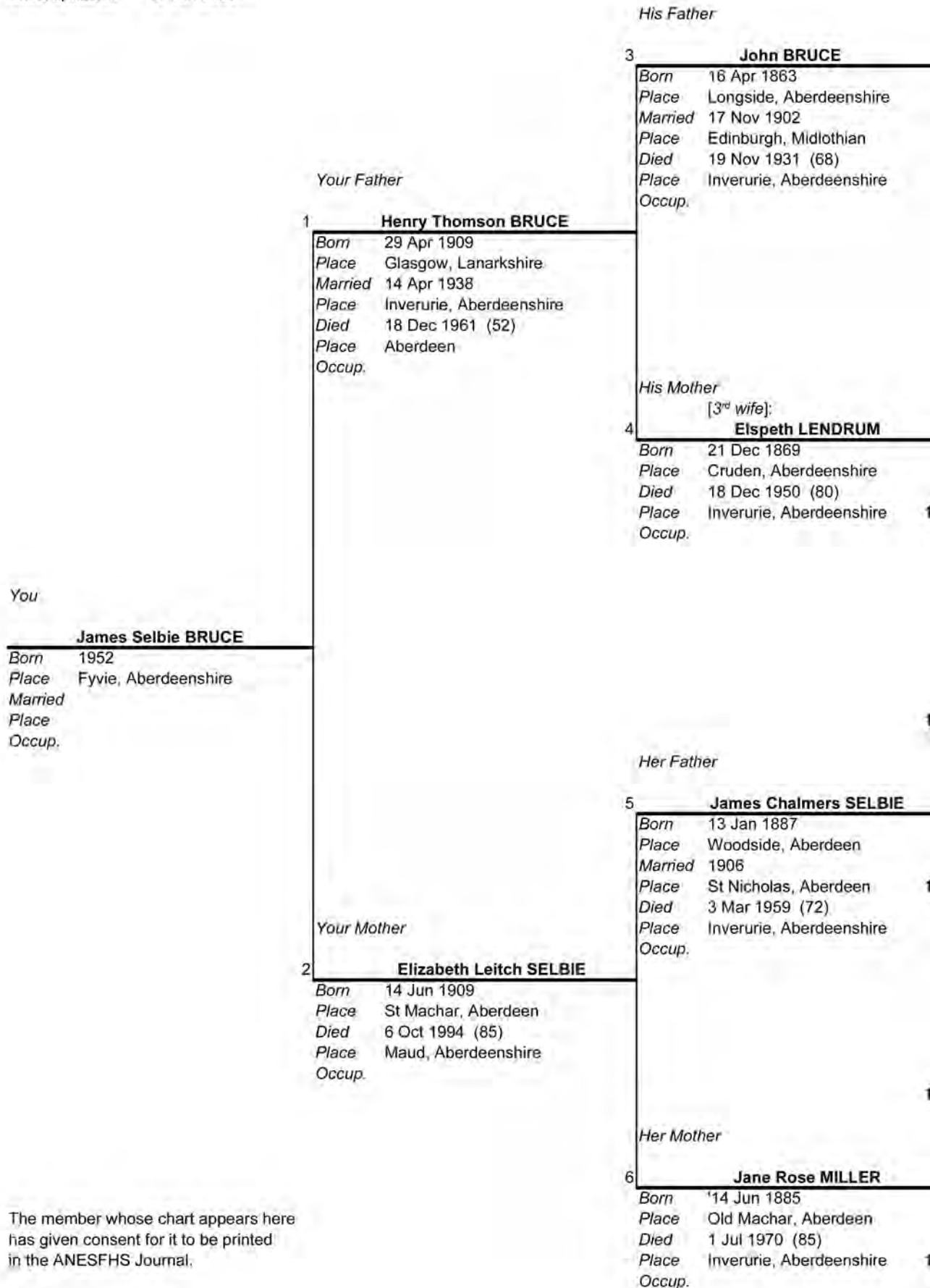
Upwards of 600 persons left the fishing villages of Inverallochy, Cairnbulg, and St Combs in the course of the past fortnight in connection with the Shetland herring fishing. During the past few years the major part of the income of the villagers has been derived from the Shetland Isles.

Source

Aberdeen Press and Journal, Thursday 19th June 1902.

Record of Ancestors

Member No.: 21191
Chart updated: 10 Jan 2026



The member whose chart appears here
has given consent for it to be printed
in the ANESFHS Journal.

Form designed by:
Aberdeen & NE Scotland FHS,
158-164 King Street,
Aberdeen AB24 5BD.

7	John BRUCE	<i>Born</i>	about 1833		
		<i>Place</i>	Rathen, Aberdeenshire		
		<i>Married</i>	29 Nov 1859		
		<i>Place</i>	Crimond, Aberdeenshire		
8	Ann B. HEPBURN	<i>Died</i>	9 Nov 1895 (62)		
		<i>Place</i>	Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire		
		<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	23 Jan 1838		
9	John LENDRUM	<i>Place</i>	Crimond, Aberdeenshire		
		<i>Married</i>	17 Jun 1858		
		<i>Place</i>	Cruden, Aberdeenshire		
		<i>Died</i>	26 Feb 1901 (74)		
0	Margaret SMITH	<i>Place</i>	Cruden, Aberdeenshire		
		<i>Born</i>	18 Jan 1832		
		<i>Place</i>	Cruden, Aberdeenshire		
		<i>Died</i>	1 Dec 1906 (74)		
1	David SELBIE	<i>Place</i>	St Nicholas, Aberdeen		
		<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	1 Aug 1862		
		<i>Place</i>	Old Machar, Aberdeen		
2	Jane CHALMERS	<i>Married</i>	5 Oct 1883		
		<i>Place</i>	Old Machar, Aberdeen		
		<i>Died</i>	8 Feb 1939 (76)		
		<i>Place</i>	Aberdeen		
3	Francis MILLER	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	1864		
		<i>Place</i>	Heckmondwike, Yorkshire		
		<i>Married</i>	31 Dec 1883		
4	Elizabeth LEITCH	<i>Place</i>	Old Machar, Aberdeen		
		<i>Died</i>	20 Mar 1936 (72)		
		<i>Place</i>	Aberdeen		
		<i>Occup.</i>			
5	James BRUCE	<i>Born</i>	about 1802		
		<i>Married</i>	29 Jan 1825		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Died</i>	12 May 1873 (71)		
6	Janet WHYTE	<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	about 1807		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Died</i>	18 Dec 1864 (57)		Rathen, Aberdeenshire
7	William HEPBURN	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	about 1780		
		<i>Married</i>			
		<i>Place</i>			
8	Barbara FIDDLER	<i>Died</i>	6 Mar 1860 (80)		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	about 1798		
9	Alexander LENDRUM	<i>Died</i>	5 May 1885 (86)		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	26 Aug 1781		
0	Elspet WALLACE	<i>Married</i>			
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Died</i>	10 May 1830 (48)		
		<i>Place</i>			
1	William SMITH	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	5 Nov 1784		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Died</i>	4 Feb 1865 (80)		Cruden, Aberdeenshire
2	Margaret ROBERTSON	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	27 Apr 1787		
		<i>Married</i>			
		<i>Place</i>			
3	David SELBIE	<i>Died</i>	27 Feb 1870 (82)		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	13 Mar 1799		
4	Isabella BEGG	<i>Died</i>	20 Jul 1885 (86)		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Occup.</i>			Longside, Aberdeenshire
		<i>Born</i>	21 Jan 1830		
5	James CHALMERS	<i>Married</i>	1862		
		<i>Place</i>			Maryculter, Kincardineshire
		<i>Died</i>	21 Oct 1910 (80)		
		<i>Place</i>			Woodside, Aberdeen
6	Ann STEWART	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	about 1837		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Died</i>	20 Dec 1862 (25)		Old Machar, Aberdeen
7	Francis MILLER	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	26 Feb 1830		
		<i>Married</i>			
		<i>Place</i>			
8	Elizabeth FRANCE	<i>Died</i>	after 1883		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	about 1835		
9	James LEITCH	<i>Died</i>	20 Jun 1914 (79)		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Occup.</i>			Woodside, Aberdeen
		<i>Born</i>	Apr 1841		
0	Jane ROSE	<i>Married</i>			
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Died</i>	19 May 1916 (75)		
		<i>Place</i>			
1	James BRUCE	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	Apr 1841		
		<i>Married</i>			
		<i>Place</i>			
2	Elizabeth LEITCH	<i>Died</i>	Aug 1888 (47)		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	about 1838		
3	James LEITCH	<i>Married</i>	1860		
		<i>Place</i>			Old Machar, Aberdeen
		<i>Died</i>	9 Jan 1917 (79)		
		<i>Place</i>			
4	James BRUCE	<i>Occup.</i>			
		<i>Born</i>	about 1839		
		<i>Place</i>			
		<i>Died</i>	31 May 1891 (52)		Old Aberdeen



Left: Fishwives selling their wares in the Green, a market area in Aberdeen. Reproduced by kind permission of Aberdeen City Libraries / The Silver City Vault.

Right: Jean Flett Sutherland (née Thomson) (1906–61), at work in one of the fishhouses in Buckie. Photo: S. MacDonald

—oOo—

Notes on Using the British Newspaper Archive

These newspaper extracts are all available on the British Newspaper Archive. For those not familiar with the site, you register an account then, similar to Scotland's People, it is free to search for articles and you pay for credits to read them in full. You can then download the scanned page you have paid for and can also copy and save the machine-generated transcription that is available. The transcription needs to be carefully checked and corrected but it gives you a good start. You can pay for a monthly or annual subscription but you can also use their “Pay As You Go” option to buy a bundle of credits (or pages) which is useful if you want to consult the site from time to time. Society members who can get to our Research Centre in Aberdeen can use the site for free there. Happy hunting!



Journal team

—oOo—





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SOCIETY MEETINGS AND REPORTS

Aberdeen Meeting

Sandy Riddell, “St Machar’s Charter Room”

18th October 2025

Few entering by the Bride’s Porch at St Machar’s Cathedral are aware that above them sits a Charter room which houses more than 600 years of the church’s history. And it’s not just a musty collection of old papers and artefacts. Sandy Riddell, St Machar’s archivist, pointed out that this is a living record of a community of faith that has existed on the site for 1300 years.

Sandy promised us not just a history of the church but suggestions as to how the collection might be of value to family historians, especially as the records are available to the public to view. Sandy explained how the new internal stairs access and the opening up of a charter room, funded by the McRobert Trust, now gives easy access to a display that is packed with historical records and data. The room is known as the Walter Duncan Charter Room to commemorate the Cathedral’s first archivist whose knowledge of the collection and the church’s history was veritably encyclopaedic.



St Machar's Bride Porch

Photo: S. Riddell

In the middle of the 15th century, St Machar’s housed a very fine library collection but much was destroyed during the Reformation. We get a hint of its former splendour through fragments of records that survived and through the *Epistolaire* of Bishop Gavin Dunbar (bishop from 1518–32). The Charter Room holds a facsimile of the *Epistolaire* which contains epistles to be sung through the year as well as an inventory of treasures gifted to the church through Dunbar. During the rising against Mary Queen of Scots, the treasury was placed with the Earl of Huntly for safe keeping. Alas, when Mary’s forces seized Strathbogie Castle in 1562 the hoard became spoils of war and Mary distributed ornamented vestments and other rich goods both to Lord Darnley and the Earl of Bothwell. As Sandy noted, it is ironic that it was Scotland’s last Catholic monarch who broke up and lost the church’s heritage.

The room houses many rare books and charters, the oldest of which dates from the time of Robert II in 1383. In one fine example from 1504, Bishop William Elphinstone granted the feu of the Brewery at Old Aberdeen to Gilbert Piot and his wife Margaret and their heirs, who, in return, paid two marks annually for prayers to be sung for Bishop Henry Leighton, an earlier bishop who initiated much of the important construction work for the cathedral.



*Seal of Gavin Dunbar,
Bishop of Aberdeen
1518–32.*

Photo: S. Riddell

The Kirk Session minutes run from 1621 to the present day, with a mysterious gap between 1763–89 where a set of records went missing a century ago. As with other congregations, the earlier Sessions spent a lot of time discussing church discipline, including punishing acts of fornication. But other misdemeanours also incurred severe penalties. An act of sabbath-breaking by winnowing corn was punished with a fine of 20 shillings and an act of repentance. On one occasion in the 1630s a group of five persons who between them consumed 11 pints of beer on a Sabbath were required to pay a fine and undergo public repentance. Those of us used to only ever viewing

Kirk Session minutes via the Scotland's People website would be thrilled at the opportunity to consult original documents like this.

The cathedral's baptismal records are the ones consulted most frequently by the public and are invaluable in tracing family members. Today around 12 baptisms are recorded annually but in 1902–07 the two ministers at the cathedral conducted around 500 baptisms and these often took place in the parents' homes or at the manse rather than in the cathedral. The paternal occupations are also an interesting guide to the nature of the economic and social character of the community in the old town.

The Sick Labourers' Fund, introduced in 1805, was an important innovation and one which will be of interest to family-historians. By 1851 the investment fund had risen to £1,000. The regulations governing the distribution of funds make interesting reading. Similarly, a list from the 1830s of paupers receiving aid gives fascinating details of individuals, including comments on their characters. Even where the accounts don't refer to your own relatives there is lots of fascinating social history to be gleaned concerning the nature of life at the period.

Sandy is working to transcribe various sets of records to make them more accessible. He described an experiment to decipher a particularly difficult document by using AI. The initial results looked promising but when his daughter repeated the exercise with the same document, the AI programme came up with a different transcription. One challenge for the future lies in the many different formats in which the modern records have been "preserved". The rapid changes in technology and the speedy obsolescence of different storage media (floppy disks, for example) present a challenge for maintaining the archive and keeping its records up to date. We are glad that dedicated individuals like Sandy and his predecessor Walter Duncan have been doing their bit to conserve the treasures of the Charter Room.

Those who are interested to find out more about the history of St Machar's and its holdings should consult *St Machar's Cathedral: A Living History*, which has been prepared by a group of friends of the cathedral. The book features essays and over 150 pictures of the distinctive features of the cathedral such as its stained glass windows and heraldic ceiling. The book is available to buy via office@stmachar.com or in the cathedral shop. It costs £17.99 and for postage and packaging add £3.

Journal team

—oOo—

Karen Shaw, "William Smith: Aberdeen Artist and Explorer"

22nd November 2025

Karen Shaw began by apologising for not being a very polished speaker but she completely entranced us by introducing us to two topics that few of us had heard of before. In this two-for-one bargain we learned not only about the life and work of William Smith but also the work of the Scottish Women's Hospital (SWH).

Inspired by a set of Serbian stamps commemorating heroines, mostly Scottish, of the SWH, Karen learned that it had been set up by the famous medical pioneer, Dr Elsie Inglis. Inglis was a suffragist and active in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Society (NUWSS) as well as a campaigning doctor. In 1894 she set up a maternity hospital run entirely by women. At the onset of WW1, she tried to arrange medical support for the British forces. After meeting with refusals from UK officialdom and being told to sit at home and wait



Photo: K. Shaw

the conclusion of the war, she helped set up field hospitals for the allied armies across a range of locations in France, Corsica and Russia.

William Smith was one of a small group of men who helped support the work of the SWH and this is what led Karen to follow his story. William was born in April 1868 to William Smith and Mary Duncan. He was the third son in their family of six. Smith's father ran the Bon Accord Press, a well-known printing business in Union Terrace, Aberdeen, and the family was settled for many years in Brighton Place. William pursued his studies at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen and then progressed to further study in Edinburgh before spending time travelling, including in Norway rather than just the usual Mediterranean or Grand Tour destinations.

Somehow he managed to be recruited as expedition artist on an Arctic exploratory voyage conducted by Prince Albert of Monaco in 1899. William's work can now be found in an oceanographic museum in Monaco. A fellow crew member was the Scots explorer, William Speirs Bruce so this made Smith an ideal candidate to prepare post expedition exhibition materials for Bruce on his return from leading the 1902–04 Scottish Antarctic voyage.

On his return to Aberdeen, Smith set up his studio in Union Street in Aberdeen. Karen found that Post Office directories were a very helpful resource in tracking the career of William Smith and his Aberdeen colleagues. He played a leading role in the Aberdeen Artists' Society and mentored a number of young artists in the early 1900s, including Robert Douglas Strachan who became renowned for his stained-glass window designs. His work can be seen in King's College Chapel and St Machar's Cathedral.

However WW1 disrupted many of these activities. The SWH offered women an opportunity to travel and to "do their bit" for the war effort. A few men were also involved, for example as mechanics. William applied and was successfully deployed on an expedition to Serbia and seems to have done a variety of tasks from basic clerical or administrative work to general orderly tasks. Typhus was rife in the area and had depleted the local medical teams. The nurses deployed there all had previous experience of working in fever hospitals.

The Serbian forces were sore pressed and outnumbered and were forced to make a tactical retreat. Smith was involved in this "Great Retreat" through the mountains in the dead of winter and acted as a war correspondent, sending sketches of scenes from the hazardous journey to illustrated UK newspapers such as *The Graphic*. Most of the SWH contingent made it safely home.

Once back in Aberdeen, he used his photographs and slides to deliver talks to raise funds for the SWH, including presenting to members of the royal family who were staying in Balmoral at the time. After the war he continued his artistic work and, after his death in 1941, he was interred in the family grave in Allenvale Cemetery

Some lively questions followed and we all agreed it would be great to invite Karen back to tell us more about the SWH and some of the pioneering local women who were involved in it. To find out more about British nurses during both wars go to the Scarlet Finders website at <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk>. And for more images of William Smith and his work, go to Musée Océanographique de Monaco at <https://musee.oceano.org>.



William Smith fourth from bottom.

Photo courtesy of Musée Océanographique de Monaco

Moray/Banff Group Report

Between November and January we enjoyed three interesting and, we hope, useful meetings.

As a change from our usual focus on researching in North-East Scotland for our ancestors, our November meeting looked further afield using the topic “Beyond Scotland”. Obviously, this included England, Wales and Ireland so we began by looking there at some of the possible sources that we could turn to. We considered Family History Societies, local and national Archives, social media and also websites which threw some light on the ways in which administration had been reorganised over the years. Statutory registration began in July 1837 in England and Wales but 1864 in Ireland, though non-Catholic marriages were recorded from April 1845, so we turned to sources for these records and for censuses and other useful material.

Moving further afield, it was impossible to have a close look at all the various countries abroad so we concentrated on how we could find information about them, often in the form of well-targeted questions which could be asked. Family Search is a free and excellent source of worldwide information and a good starting point and Googling can be surprisingly productive too. A lengthy PowerPoint presentation, circulated to all participants afterwards, brought all of this together.

We opted for both a face-to-face and a Zoom Christmas celebration, starting at the end of November with a wonderful Christmas Lunch at our local Threaplands Garden Centre. Fifteen of us gathered there to enjoy not only the meal but also a welcome chance to catch up with each other and to compare all the genealogical progress made in 2025.

This was followed by a virtual Christmas Lunch on Zoom on our usual first Saturday of the month in December. We were asked “If you could invite just three ancestors to your Christmas Lunch, who would you invite and what question would you want to ask of each of them?” This turned out to be fascinating because, while some of us were desperate to break down a brick wall or two, a surprising number of the questions were along the lines of “I want to know what ... was like”. A lengthy time spent on an emigrant ship gave rise to one of these questions while others were keen to find out more about living and working conditions.

A year ago we had all put forward our New Year genealogy resolutions so we used our January meeting, “All Those Good Intentions”, to look back at these and assess how we had got on. Some members had worked hard at their plans, not only with the ideas themselves but also in planning how they could get the most out of their research. Many of us had hoped to make a determined effort to write up our family history story and there were mixed results with this. Some had made real progress, some had made a start and others had at least given the matter serious thought in preparation for settling down to it.

moray.banff@anesfhs.org.uk

Mary Evans, Elgin

—oOo—

Edinburgh Group

Gary Allanach: “Interesting Ways to Present Your Research”

8th November 2025

This is a topic very close to my heart and, while I’ve spoken in the past about how to conserve your records, I haven’t got around to sharing, so I was on the edge of my seat and glued to Gary’s every word!

Once we’ve finished our research (ha!), or when we’ve found something fascinating, it does seem a good idea to share it with our family, but how do we do this in an interesting way so

that the younger members become involved – rather than muttering, “Granny’s off again.”

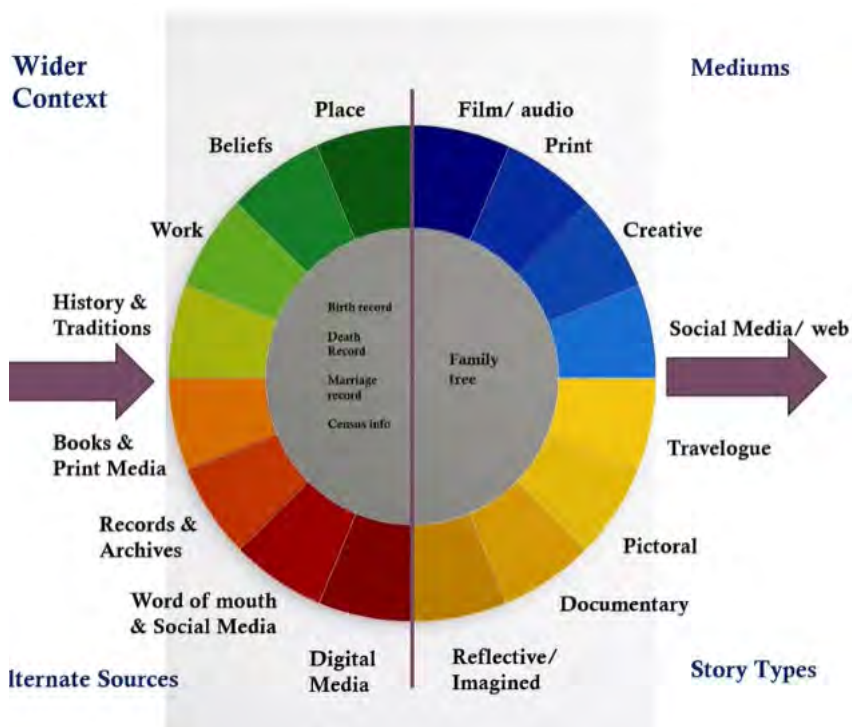
Gary’s first point was to ask us to think about our “audience”; who will be reading, or watching if we have videos, and why should we bring our stories to life? Well – no need to be shy here – our family stories are our history, even our country’s history, and if it is forgotten then it will disappear forever. Memories fade, buildings become ruins, documents are lost (or in my case, nibbled by mice). That should be our motivation to bring our family tree to life. Gary said that he likes to document the physical places his family lived. While we may not all have a drone for this, it was so pleasing to learn how to use maps, alongside current photos and videos, to establish where our families lived; putting this online also means that overseas family can participate and contribute.

But how do we pass on the stories? Gary suggested different media for different generations. A traditional tree might suit someone older, however, a video will engage the younger members. Maybe write a book, or create a website? Gary started his research around Covid time and as he has a very unusual surname he was able to create a website which he encouraged us to view at: <https://allanach.co.uk>. We all agree that our history is interwoven with that of Scotland and our “little” stories are just as worthwhile and need to be preserved. “Hook the family into the big stories,” said Gary.

Genealogists often get fixated by the small details on the Statutory Records, but do look at the wider spectrum of information. A recurrent theme in Gary’s talk was how to engage the young ones and how to add colour to the basic birth, marriage and death records we’ve spent years finding. All they want to know is, “Were we famous?”

Gary suggested we take our basic research and combine it with other material so that we don’t limit our stories to black and white information; in order to present our research in an engaging manner, we need to add much wider context. For instance, think about maps: we are all aware of the NLS map library where the side-by-side facility is fantastic. We could also look at a wider bank of resources and information available such as: digital media, newspapers, local records and archives, church records, archaeology, songs and bothy ballads, NLS resources, TROVE, “Open Library” for books, photographs and paintings, Government records (such as Petitions about Corn Laws), maritime records, military records, and so on. Gary made sure we knew all about the alternate sources (visual and auditory) for linking our basic facts and small family tales, memories and traditions, into a wider, more colourful story.

Gary advised us not to discount social media and reminded us not rely solely on Google! He went on to suggest that when we decide how to present our ancestors’ stories, we could be more imaginative. Stories do not always need to be written in a documentary style – we



*Gary's helpful wheel of possibilities... don't limit your options.
Graphic: G. Allanach*

could present information as a travelogue or even in an imagined way. Paintings could take the place of photographs to illustrate these.

University theses (searchable on university websites) are an unused source and could be useful; Gary found one on whisky smuggling. He was also extremely lucky to find one of his earlier family members had written a book about his years as a farm worker. The author, John Taylor, had married into the Allanach family and wrote a very detailed account of his time as a farm servant in the 1860s. This would give a wonderful insight into daily life for those of us with “Ag. Labs” in our family tree. Check Gary’s website for more information on this.

Other books and publications can help with wider events focusing on the history, folklore and traditions of life in Scotland. Try *Jacobites of 1715 and 1745. North East Scotland* by Frances McDonnell and Roy’s Military Map. Always look for ways to embellish your research, suggested Gary, and when looking up newspaper archives remember to search for places (using village or farm names) as well as people. There are so many ways to share your ancestors’ stories that you may want to create a website and encourage family members to add to it, or you may just want to document lives and share written stories via a published book. “Look outside the box!” said Gary – playing-cards, jigsaws and advent calendars could spark discussions and memories.

Use the sources, use their stories – the forgotten are waiting to be remembered. “The more you share”, said Gary, “the more others will share back with you”. Someone, somewhere, wants to hear your story.

Sally Low, Edinburgh

—oOo—

Glasgow Group

Ken Nisbet, “Let The Punishment Fit the Crime”

29th November 2025

In Autumn 2023 we enjoyed a very successful in-person-only meeting themed “Ancestors Behaving Badly” when we shared tales of our criminal ancestors. Fascinating though their sad, mad and bad antics were, curiosity made us question the repercussions of their activities. This autumn Ken Nisbet shared his knowledge of the Victorian justice system and sources we could use to find out more about our criminal’s fate.

Ken discussed the range of courts administering swift justice and the resulting fines, duration of sentence and destinations of those found guilty by each court. He outlined the evolving history of criminal justice in Scotland including the role of tolbooths, bridewells, jails, prisons, transportation and capital punishment. When transportation was abolished in the mid 1850s, the criminal justice system we know now began to take shape. Earlier on, offences against property were treated more harshly than offences against a person, but this too changed over time.

Woven throughout this most comprehensive talk were examples of a wide range of resources which could be accessed, allowing us to peer into the dark and murky side of our ancestry. The written records are various, illustrating the kind leniency shown towards young boys scrumping apples to the lengthy and harsh sentences for murder or incest. In the middle is the very sad, revolving door of liberty and incarceration for those drifting to the wrong side through poverty or hopelessness. A most striking feature of some records is the mugshots. As one who craves family photos, this is an area I fear to tread.

Newspapers are a great source for giving some background and detail to the offence. They are easy to search and can be found on Findmypast and the British Newspaper Archive.

The talk was highly informative and adds another dimension to getting to know your family in the past.

The next meeting of the Glasgow Group is on 31st Jan 2026 (Zoom only), followed by a Members' Day Meeting in May 2026 (in person only) – keep in touch for details.

Useful resources (some involve payment)

General Information for prison and punishment over time:

<https://yourscottisharchives.com/prisoners-and-prisons>;

Prisoner Records (some with photographs):

https://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk/search-records/prison-registers/prison_records;

Uncovering a criminal:

<https://www.scottishindexes.com/scotlandscriminaldatabase.aspx>;

Excellent resources for our geographical area to be found on <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>:

Court, Land, Wills & Financial – Aberdeenshire, Scotland, Criminal and Court Records, 1841–1922;

Schools, Directories & Church Histories – Aberdeenshire, Scotland, Police Records, 1818–1948 (some photos).

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Glasgow Group

—oOo—

Southern Ontario Group Report

Jess Smith, “Scottish Travellers”

15th November 2025

Jess Smith is a Scottish writer and storyteller who has written seven books, including a booklet on Traveller dialects and her own childhood experiences. She has travelled to many book festivals throughout the UK, Australia, Europe and North America and has received a British Empire Medal for services to the Traveller community. In our latest online meeting, our Southern Ontario Group and guests were delighted to hear her personal stories about growing up as a Traveller person in Scotland.

Jess started by stating that there has been a resurgence in all things of Scottish heritage including bagpipes, singing, crafts and storytelling. She opened with talking about her childhood living in a caravan and then a bus with her parents, and later transitioning to settled life. After the Second World War, her father had a hard time settling and could not give up the Traveller's life, so a bus was converted (much to her mother's dismay) and the whole large family travelled for 10 years in it, seeing much of the UK and attending different schools. Jess told us about the prejudices and discrimination that the Travellers faced and how the government and church tried to crack down on their community in order to make them settle. Some children were even removed from the home and sent overseas. Jess tells her stories with the hope of healing the past.

Jess shared her life story and writing journey, including how she discovered her father's manuscript that was his effort to document their cultural history through writing. It was never published, and she later took up writing to honour his legacy. She wrote about the Tinker School and discussed her recent publication *Button Bog: Voices and Treasures from a Traveller's Kist* and her work preserving the Tinker's Heart monument, which was shortlisted for the Scottish Heritage Angel Awards. Jess emphasized the importance of preserving Traveller history and culture, noting that Travellers are diverse and that her stories represent only her personal experiences.

Jess also shared her family's superstitions and beliefs and discussed the historical persecution of Travellers in Scotland, including the Act Against Witchcraft and the Act Against Egyptians. She explained that Travellers would create myths and legends to survive, and described burial traditions, including the practice of burning everything with the deceased in wagons. She also told us about a place called Tinker's Heart where many Travellers got married. They also gathered in certain places to trade and have fellowship with each other. Aikey Brae in Aberdeenshire was one such place, and Vinegar Hill in Paisley was another. Many Travellers were tinkers or tinsmiths, hawkers and lacemakers. They also took on temporary farm work and collected used clothing for trade.

Jess discussed ongoing DNA studies at Edinburgh University involving Travellers. One participant inquired about tracing Traveller ancestry, to which Jess explained that Travellers typically stayed within their local areas, making genealogical research challenging but not impossible since they usually baptized the children in the same parish. They discussed the Johnstone clan's presence in Perthshire and the potential Egyptian origins of Jess's son's DNA results.

The discussion also touched on the tradition of Travellers creating ballads about news events and how Jess's 2g-grandfather, Richard Mackay, sold anonymous ballad sheets during the 1850s famine. The group discussed their connections to travelling people and their experiences with famous storytellers like Stanley Robertson and Jeannie Robertson. Jess shared her involvement in a 2012 Church of Scotland apology for removing Traveller children that led to healing efforts and reforms.

Jess still visits places like libraries, schools, prisons, clubs, universities and church groups to tell her family story and to create awareness and healing for the Traveller community. We certainly enjoyed her sunny personality and her vivid stories.

Our next meeting will be on Saturday, 28th February 2026, and we'll be joined by author and presenter Janet Few talking on the topic of "Marginalized Ancestors". This will include your poor, sick, illegitimate or criminal ancestors, in other words basically anyone who was different from mainstream society. We look forward to that presentation.

ontario@anesfhs.org.uk Susan Brouwer, co-organizing with Rod Coates and David Joiner

—oOo—

Australia and New Zealand Group

"The Stories We've Uncovered This Year"

6th December 2025

The meeting was held online with a relatively small attendance: six from Brisbane and Melbourne, and three from Scotland. There were apologies from Robin Price, Heather Mackay and Kate Brial. The purpose of the meeting was for members to present highlights from their recent research.

Ann and Tony Swain: Ann's ancestor George Ingram was mentioned at last December's Meeting, which was reported in Journal 173 (February 2025), pp. 11–12. This triggered interest from Bobbie Jeal, of Dalbeattie, who discovered that George was first cousin to her great-grandfather and she wrote a letter, published in Journal 176, November 2025, pp. 41–42, with additional information about George. It always pays to name-drop in family history and it was wonderful to find a new Scottish relative via an ANZ Group Report!

Peter Thompson: Peter recently took a big-Y DNA test but has seen no matches sharing a similar surname (a situation matching the experiences of others in the group). He plans to pick some closer matches and work on extending their trees to look for possible intersections.

Bill Lemmon (Inverurie): Bill spoke about life around Inverurie for him and his family, including living on a croft in neighbouring Keith Hall. The quality of the well water for drinking was an important consideration, and there was much consternation when the level started dropping dramatically; it seemed that when the circus came to town, the number of animals had a strong effect on the water table!

Bill was quizzed on local standing stones and guided us antipodeans on some of the more eccentric local pronunciations, which bear only passing resemblance to their spelling.

Cameron Davidson: Cameron reported that earlier this year another ANESFHS member sent some useful information on potential Meldrum ancestors, following his report from the meeting a year ago, reported in Journal 173 (February 2025), pp. 11–12. At this stage he is no closer to identifying his mystery 2g-grandfather although more distant DNA matches keep appearing to confirm there is a link there somewhere.

Helen Taylor (Inverurie): Helen gave a short talk on the new features of Ancestry's Thrulines for those with "Pro" subscriptions. Unfortunately, the new presentation mode was not accessible on the day, so Helen gamely illustrated her talk using the old interface.

Jocelyn Gould: Jocelyn has been extending her research into descendants of her great grandfather Thomas King (1852–98), who became a policeman in 1883 and was shot and killed by poacher six years later, as related in Journal 173 (February 2025), pp. 11–12.

She had known about twins born to him and Mary McGuinness (a domestic servant) in 1874, when he was an agricultural labourer. The couple never married and Thomas wed Jane Gordon in 1879, raised a family quite separately from Mary and the twins. As far as Jocelyn's family knew, there were no living descendants of the twins. A hundred years after Thomas's death in 1898, a memorial ceremony was arranged where a hitherto unknown descendent appeared. He descended from the line of one of the sons who had made money in diamond mining industry in South Africa. Sadly, contact was lost but this year Jocelyn came across contact details for him and they have been enjoying learning about the respective sides of their family.

australia@anesfhs.org.uk

Cameron Davidson, Australia

—oOo—

Memorial Inscriptions (MI) Group Report

The MI group reformed in early 2025 after several informative handover sessions with Gavin Bell (thank you, Gavin!). The group began work with around nine keen individuals and has now grown to over 20 volunteers who participate when they want and are able. We were very excited to start our first project and couldn't wait to get going. We have learnt more and more about the process as we have progressed. Each outing also brings its own adventures and foray into local history. We have learnt about Vikings, smugglers, heraldry, famous or not-so-famous locals, how difficult life must have been at times, and how different the stones are across each of the graveyards. We were very lucky with the weather and achieved way more than we thought we would. So what have we accomplished so far?

We began at the Parish Church of Monquhitter (pronounced Monwhitter or Monfitter). The church is located on the northern outskirts of the planned village of Cuminestown and is surrounded by an old graveyard, with a large 19th century cemetery alongside to the east. There have been up to five churches on this site, the earliest documented one being 1649. Monquhitter is fully mapped and indexed, including St Luke's (the Episcopal Church in Cuminestown). This booklet is currently being formatted for publication.

Cruden Old Parish Church, including the first extension, St James (the Episcopal Church at Cruden) and Slains have now been fully mapped and written up. They are almost ready for indexing – just waiting for a nice day to go out and finalise the last of our queries. We had a visit from a member of the Family History Society of Buchan who had previously published a CD of the MIs from Cruden Old Parish Church – this was a very helpful resource.

We then moved to Kincardine and have completed maps and first drafts for both Inverbervie and Garvock. A first reading has almost been completed at St Cyrus. What a busy year!

Looking forward in 2026, we are planning to finish our Kincardine visits and then head over to the Huntly area. Our aim is to complete publications for both graveyards and cemeteries which have previously been started and tackle those not yet begun. Whilst some of the stones have lasted many, many years, the weather and environment are taking their toll so we are trying to capture the older stones first. If anyone is interested in learning more or joining the group then please do get in touch with me at moira.lawrence@anesfhs.org.uk. The group is aiming to restart when the weather improves in March.

As well as our own projects, we were asked at the end of the year by Ali, from Cameron Archaeology Ltd, to help at a local community event at St Fittick's church and graveyard. ETZ (Energy Transition Zone) are carrying out repairs and conservation of the church structure to make it safe and pleasant for people to visit. St Fittick's is a scheduled ancient monument so any works must have proper approvals. It is thought that there has been a chapel or church on the site since the 1100s. The story is that St Fittick was an Irish monk who was thrown overboard by superstitious sailors when a storm blew up off the coast here. He came ashore at Nigg Bay and established his church to give thanks for his salvation. There's an alternative view that "St Fittick" is actually the result of a confusion between the stories of two other saints, St Fiacre and St Fotin – but no one really knows the true story. There were a few visitors over the course of the day but the freezing weather probably didn't encourage many to venture out. It is well worth a visit though.

moira.lawrence@anesfhs.org.uk

Moira Lawrence, Aberdeen

—oOo—

Research Group Report

There were a few changes to the Research Group in the course of 2025. Our long time co-ordinator, Joyce Irvine, stepped back and enthusiastic Centre volunteer, Fi Pisacreta, moved to Glasgow. They carried out great work in research for which we thank them and take this opportunity to wish them well for the future. I took over the role as Research Group Co-ordinator and work together with Helen Taylor respond to family history queries that come into the Centre. Helen is well known throughout the Society for her work on unravelling DNA and on how to get the best out of the tools for analysing DNA results on Ancestry. I have been researching my own family tree for over 20 years, but when I started in the Research Group, I realised that everyone's experience of genealogy research is totally different. Techniques you use for your own tree may not be applicable for other families and you widen your genealogy knowledge. Every day is a school day as they say!

The research requests we receive and the way we tackle them have changed a lot in recent years now there is so much information readily available online. We have updated the relevant page of the website to reflect this and hope this makes it easier to follow for those of you interested in the taking up the service. See it at <https://www.anesfhs.org.uk/services/research>.

We reviewed the charging arrangements and have maintained the research fee at £12 per hour plus any costs incurred in the research, such as for obtaining certificates. You can set a budget for how much you are willing to spend. Details of costs are on the Research page of the website.

We have helped many individuals start their family trees but during the second half of 2025, the enquiries have tended to relate more to a specific subject, for example looking for one individual or an organisation. Sometimes, we can deal with these quickly, without incurring a charge. However, we can also research a whole family name for you, if asked. We have lots of useful resources at our disposal in the Centre. These include:

- FamilySearch (Library Edition), the website run by the Church of the Latter Day Saints and one of the sources of records prior to 1855;
- Ancestry.com (Library edition);
- Findmypast, including the British Newspaper Archive;
- UK Census records;
- Pre-1855 OPR Burials Index for North-East Scotland;
- Society Library catalogue;
- Published and draft Monumental Inscriptions (MIs) for many North-East cemeteries.

We are currently looking to standardise some of our practices, so that in future it is easier to take on more researchers. The different knowledge and experience each individual brings to the team will assuredly enhance the Research service the Society can provide. Don't hesitate to get in touch with me via the research email address.

research@anesfhs.org.uk.

Gillian Marriner, Aberdeen

—oOo—

Library Report

Some new books which have recently been added to the library stock include:

Scottish Bastards: Perceptions of Illegitimacy in Scotland, by Alex Wood (Luath Press, 2025).

I imagine there are very few of us who haven't come across instances of illegitimacy in our family-history research. In the rural North-East in particular (in the former counties of Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Moray and Kincardineshire) illegitimacy rates between 1855 and 1954 were consistently higher than anywhere else in the country apart from the counties of Dumfries, Kirkcudbright and Wigtown. There were fewer illegitimate births in the towns, fewer still in the islands and, according to the Registrar General's report in 1861, almost no illegitimacy "among that peculiar race which inhabits our fishing villages". Alex Wood's research is detailed and meticulous and he explains clearly the historical, religious and cultural background behind these statistics, and the changing attitudes to illegitimacy over time. He also includes many fascinating case studies. Alex's background is in education, but he developed an interest in genealogy and now has a company carrying out family-history research.

The Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen: a History of Helping to Shape a City and its People, by Graeme Nicol, Alexander Sutherland and George Leslie Donaldson (Aberdeen University Press, 2025).

The Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen have been an integral part of Aberdeen's history for over 800 years, and this publication examines the lasting influence of these historic trade organisations (the Hammermen, Bakers, Wrights and Coopers, Tailors, Shoemakers, Weavers, Fleshers) on the city's identity, economy and community spirit. It demonstrates how these trades not only shaped Aberdeen's built environment and traditions, but also contributed to the wellbeing, resilience and civic pride of its people across the centuries.

Graeme Nicol became a member of the Weaver Incorporation in 1978 and served in several elected offices before becoming Deacon Convenor in 2009. He will be giving a talk

to the Society in March about the Incorporated Trades and their historical significance, and about the significance of their records for family historians.

Researching Ancestral Crisis in Ireland: a Guide for Family Historians, by Chris Paton (Pen & Sword, 2025).

Some of you will remember Gay Murton who was one of our early volunteers. Gay was of Liverpool-Irish descent and always used to emphasise that if you had Irish ancestors, you couldn't do your research properly unless you understood Irish history. She would have approved of Chris Paton's new book. Chris takes an in-depth look at some of the darkest episodes in Irish history over the last 400 years, as well as the everyday crises which affected everyone throughout their lives. He discusses the impact of many major events on our Irish ancestors, including colonisation, conquest and rebellion, as well as the various pressures which came from within the family, the church, and the state. And along the way he highlights the records, both online and in Ireland's various local and national archives, which can help to bring the lives of those ancestors to life.

In his introduction, Chris says, "In an age where genealogical research increasingly seems to be developing into a pursuit of database hits to provide instant dopamine rushes, with little thought as to what is actually being found and revealed, the purpose of this book is to help the researcher step back and to take a fresh look at the stories being uncovered, placing them in context."

Chris is a professional genealogist, tutor and researcher who has written many books on family history research in Scotland and in Ireland. He is based in Ayrshire in Scotland but is originally from Carrickfergus on the outskirts of Belfast. He'll be addressing our Edinburgh Group in March 2026 on research the history of your house.

Gaelic Place-Names of Moray (2nd ed.), by Iain Mac an Tàilleir (Moray Gaelic Group, 2025).

Moray is a beautiful part of Scotland with its breathtaking scenery, stunning coastline and historic towns, and, of course, its Speyside malts. In this book the author takes us on a series of journeys through Moray, but from a Gaelic perspective, highlighting the Gaelic element of Moray's rich culture and heritage. In a separate section there is a list of the placenames mentioned in the text with a full explanation of their meaning; there is also a useful list of further reading.

Iain Mc an Tàilleir taught Gaelic in South Uist and Perthshire before working in curriculum development. After a spell in television, he returned to education and a post as lecturer in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, based in Skye.

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Margie Mellis, Aberdeen

—oOo—

Graham Robertson's Mystery Object Quiz



Graham has provided us with a fearsome-looking object, albeit with rather gracefully-fashioned extremities.

Have you come across an implement like this and, more importantly, what is it for?

The only clue we'll give you is that it could easily have fitted into the collection of kitchen implements we featured in Journal 176 (November 2025).

The answer appears later in this issue.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Resurrection Soup

I had to smile at Tony Watson mentioning eating Resurrection Broth, that is Third Day Soup, in Journal 176. My mother would have gone mad: never, ever, were we allowed to eat Resurrection Soup! She considered it too dangerous. Second Day Soup is the finest, though, and to this day I always try and make my soup the night before and let it stand as the bacteria improves it overnight. But I would never chance a Resurrection plateful.

Graeme Barron Fraser, Nottinghamshire

—oOo—

We love Scottish Oats! Scottish Food Options in North America

I never ate oatmeal until I found out about my Scottish roots. I tried soaking the oats the night before but now I just add water and cook right away, stirring it with my spurtle for about three minutes! Not being a milk drinker, I salt mine, put on a glob of butter and a good shake of cinnamon and voila! I need a protein addition, so I eat a cheddar cheese stick. It is something different in the morning! I've been buying Alford oats for some time now. but I intend to try Hamlyn's now. I also bought some Stockan's oatcakes, both thick and thin. I think I like the thin better. I bought some Isle of Mull Cheddar recently as well.

Barbara Bodden, California

Ed: We are very impressed by your devotion to Scottish cuisine and glad you enjoyed the articles on food. Barbara told us she gets her Scottish supplies by mail order.

—oOo—

Resurrecting the Midlands Group

I live in England and am currently a member of the London Group. I see that there appears to be a Midlands Group in the Events Calendar although there are no events listed for it at the moment.

I would certainly join if one existed but at the moment I run a U3A Family History Group in Brackley, Northamptonshire, where I live. I have over 40 registered members with an average attendance of about 27 at our monthly meetings and it can take up a fair amount of my time some months so I wouldn't want to get involved with organising another family history group. I have too many other hobbies! However, I would definitely support one if it was within about an hour's drive.

Graham Irvine, Northamptonshire

Ed: Our Midlands Group has been in abeyance for some time but we'd certainly be interested to hear from you if, like Graham, you'd like to help it become active again. Our area groups all follow slightly different models (in person; online, and hybrid) so you could help shape the activities of a small gathering of like-minded individuals to suit your needs.

—oOo—

Write Your Own Story; Sing Your Own Song: a Call to Action

After Gary Allanach's talk to the Edinburgh group recently, I started to review, again, my written history of the family. By using the NLS's map "button" which allows you to see a side-by-side map of where your family had lived and the current map, I realised that every time I drove through Glasgow to Edinburgh, I was driving over my great-grandparents' now-demolished home. They had moved to Glasgow in 1875 to make a "better" life, but after their children had died in an epidemic of whooping cough, they moved back north in 1878.

It took several journeys for me to read the graffiti on the new tower blocks which stand where my great-grandparents had lived, but finally, due to lots of traffic going very slowly, I was able to make out the words: WRITE YOUR OWN STORY ... SING YOUR OWN SONG. I felt this was a stern message for me to get a move on with writing up the family history, but also offering some advice. We do concentrate on writing about ancestors, but what about writing about ourselves? In 50 years time, after I am dead and my grandsons, currently aged four and two, have taken on the responsibility for our genealogy, what will they remember about me? So, the reason for writing today, is to suggest that we all write our own stories, to make sure that when we are the great-grandparents, the story about us is correct!

Sally Low, Edinburgh

—oOo—

Curr's Coffee Essence and Other Fine Stories

I'm in the south of England, but have been fortunate enough to visit the Society's Research Centre two or three times. I believe my great grandfather, Thomas Curr of the celebrated Coffee Essence, began his career humbly in a grocer's shop immediately opposite where the FHS Centre is!

I attach a photo of a Curr's Coffee Essence bottle. A century ago, you'd often not invite someone around for a coffee, but for a "Curr's". This coffee essence, produced in Aberdeen, was that popular throughout Scotland. Sadly the business seems to have failed in the immediate post-war years.



I must send in an updated version of my family history, many times updated and expanded since the first edition in 1987!! And I really ought to do some articles for the Journal. I've been thinking about it for years: crofter's son to coffee magnate and an original elder of the Free Church after the Disruption; crofter's son to department store pioneer in America, elected Mayor of Colorado Springs; celebrated organist (my grandfather), who tutored the Vanderbilts' daughter in their model community in the Appalachians; bigamist who brought about a change in the law in Connecticut (he was related only by one of the marriages, actually)... I have all the topics, just need to get around to it!

Ian Curr

Ed: Yes please, Ian. This is such a tantalising list... Maybe the next item will help you get started.

—oOo—

Writing Your Family History One Story at a Time

We are all genealogists – people who collect data about our ancestors – but how many of us are family-historians – people who write stories or books about ourselves or extended family members and what life was like when they were alive?

I have never had the desire to write a book, but when I retired from full time work I became interested in joining a small group of folk, all members of our local Scottish Interest Group, who had formed a writers' group with the specific purpose of putting some flesh on the bones of their genealogical research. We have met monthly for over 14 years in each others' homes to share a story and a cuppa. In that time each of us have written well over a hundred stories about ourselves, and our ancestors, changing social conditions over time and our family treasures.

Although a few members have come and gone from the group, our membership is very stable. We have become a close-knit group of friends, shared many stories, chatted over a cuppa and have had lots of fun over the years.

Each month we decide on a broad topic for the next gathering, and it is our choice to write something related to the suggested topic or a story about something completely different. One member has written several stories about the history of Girl Guiding in the Waikato region and about the post WW2 transit camps, based on her research in both areas. Others have written about recent travels. Initially we wrote about our ancestors: grandparents, aunts, and uncles. We soon branched out to writing about some of our treasures, our own lives, family celebrations and customs, then and now stories, and choosing a letter from the alphabet to use as our topic for a story. These stories are usually somehow related to our Scottish roots and family history or our own lives, including overseas adventures, especially those about searching for our roots.

We have heard about members' ancestors' various occupations; our childhood toys, games and community activities; houses we have lived in; changes in our food, telephones, appliances; unusual relatives; war stories; those who bravely crossed the seas for a better life, and much more.

When we meet, we each read our story, usually between 800–1000 words long, sometimes enhancing our stories with photos and memorabilia. Discussion follows as we ask the reader questions and make connections between their story and our story or our life. Positive comments and critique are welcomed and just occasionally we discuss grammar and punctuation and tips on using Microsoft Word.

Several of our stories have been published in *The NZ Genealogist* (the newsletter of the NZ Genealogical Society) and two of us have won the Ted Gilbert Award for best family history story for the year in that journal. Others have had stories published in *Kiwi Kith & Kin* (A journal of the NZ Genealogical Scottish Interest Group) and, of course, the ANESFHS journal.

My thanks go to my writer friends for their friendship and encouragement; their comments and suggestions on how to improve or enhance my stories; and for sharing their stories, ideas, photos and heirlooms with the group. My writing and research skills have improved greatly and I am proud of how many stories I have written to leave for family researchers of the future.

You too can write your memoirs, one story at a time, but don't do it alone. Form a group and enjoy some fun and friendship while you are doing it. It is quite easy to set up a group. Ideally it needs a facilitator, a group of 4-8 interested people, and a home to meet in. Limit stories to 800–1000 words. It's a good idea for the facilitator to email members a topic and the meeting time each month and to keep a record of the topics and attendance. Writing on a computer is preferred but there is no reason why you cannot start by writing your stories by hand if you prefer.

I will leave you with three maxims: 1) There is never a right time to write; 2) Your research (finding photos, heirlooms etc.) will never be complete; 3) What you produce may never be perfect, but at least you will have told your story. As Maya Angelou says in her poem, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

Some suggested topics to start off with:

- family members; grandparents (4+ stories); great-grandparents (8+ stories);
- five generations of women or men;
- my favourite/least favourite ancestor;
- an unusual or elusive relative; a famous or infamous relative;
- a split in the family; family secrets, DNA or adoption mysteries;
- unexpected entries in Census returns – relatives, boarders.

Yvonne Milbank, New Zealand

NEWS AND INFORMATION

Marine Biologist Isabella Gordon



Catherine Booth on her research visit to our Centre in September 2025.

Photo: F. Lynch

“Isabella’s Footsteps” is a Science/Arts project celebrating Marine Biologist Isabella Gordon O.B.E. (1901–88). An illegitimate daughter of poor parents, she rose to become an internationally-renowned carcinologist (expert on crustaceans), consulted by eminent scientists, and who received an invitation for a high-profile meeting with the Japanese Emperor, Hirohito, a fellow marine biologist.

She was born in Keith, studied at Aberdeen University and worked as a principal Scientific Officer at the Natural History Museum, London which still holds her substantial archive. Her material legacy includes an extraordinary collection of crustacea, beautiful water colours

of specimens, iconic photographs from her long career and invaluable scientific papers which are still proving useful today for scientists fighting to save our oceans’ eco-systems.

Isabella Gordon’s marine illustrations, love of limericks and proud use of the Scots language were rooted in the cultural heritage of her hometown. Keith was made the First Scots Toun in recognition of the inhabitants’ preservation of the language. The project continues the Scottish tradition of storytelling in song through songwriting and performing traditional tunes and the music of her contemporaries, such as Marie Dare, Isobel Dunlop, Helen Hopekirk and Shena Fraser.

The project took its first footsteps in September 2025 in Keith; delivering a public event with talks and music about Gordon, and a workshop series at Keith and Newmill Primary Schools; and in Aberdeen where our science historian, Catherine Booth visited the ANESFHS Centre as part of a day of research and collaboration including cross-departmental meetings at the university and an event at Midsocket Men’s Group.

Work on the project is ongoing and very soon the schools will have their own pages on our women in science website, which will include the special songs they have written about Isabella and her work on crustaceans. In 2026 we are focused on creating a book about Isabella Gordon for children which will be given free to all primary schools and libraries in the Moray and Aberdeen districts. It will be presented to the children involved in the project at a public event in Keith for her birthday on 18th May.

Isabella’s Footsteps is an Electric Voice Theatre initiative in collaboration with Miranda Lowe C.B.E., Principal Crustacea Curator at the Natural History Museum and Gordon’s successor there. The project is made possible with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with special thanks to National Lottery players. Funding has also been provided by The Scottish Fisherman’s Trust.

Go to <https://minervascientifica.co.uk/isabella-gordon> for Isabella’s page to see examples of her work and details of her life story. You can also watch videos of songs about her life prepared for the project. The children’s work will also appear on this site.

If you would like to support Isabella’s Footsteps please go to our website for details of the many ways you can help (some without cost!). You will find information on the project as it



Catherine checks out the Journal

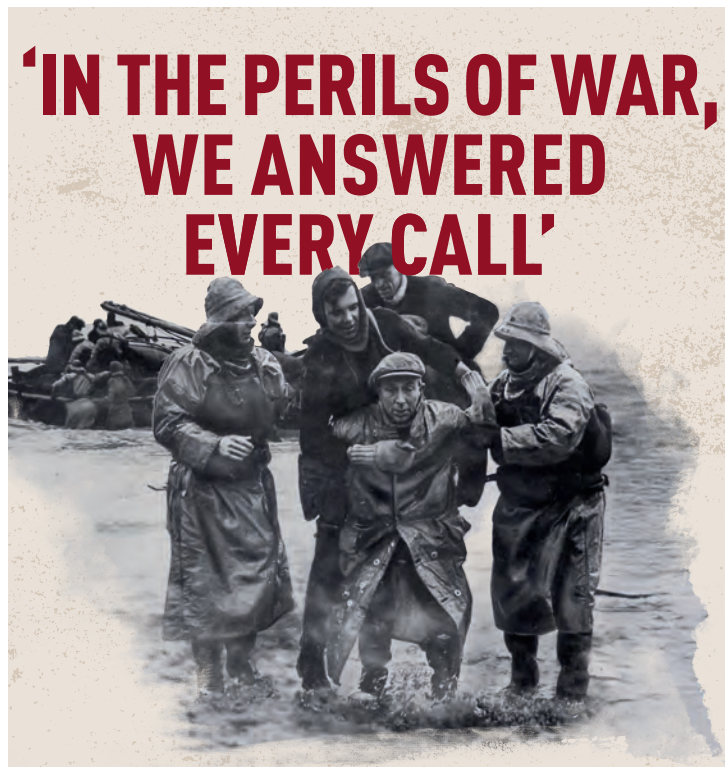
Photo: F. Lynch

develops at <https://www.electricvoicetheatre.co.uk> and more about about how to be involved at <https://www.electricvoicetheatre.co.uk/donate>.

Frances M Lynch, Artistic Director, Electric Voice Theatre

—oOo—

RNLI Stories of Courage



At the RNLI we're gathering stories of courage to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of WW2 and to make sure these incredible stories are preserved. As part of the Stories of Courage 1939–45 project, I am selecting a number of locations to be the focus of our regional projects. Each regional project will have a bespoke way of sharing the local stories from the station. I have been speaking to the crew at our Aberdeen station and we have very little knowledge of the second world war stories in the area, so it seems the initial focus of this project will be to source information.

I am keen to recruit a working group of volunteers to conduct research to see what can be discovered, and also to try and find anyone who has memories they can share. We don't have any surviving

crew but their memories hopefully live on in their families and loved ones. I am wondering if this opportunity can be shared with your volunteers, as it would be great to have experienced researchers on the project.

Go to <https://rnli.memorypage.org/storiesofcourage> to find the YourStories portal. That's where people can submit their stories. The project is kindly funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and will run over 2026. It would be much appreciated if you are able to share this to raise awareness and I would appreciate any support you can offer to help uncover our local history!

alison_hulme@rnli.org.uk

Alison Hulme

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

Research undertaken in North-East records, also at the
National Archives of Scotland and New Register House
All enquiries welcome

Mrs. Margaret Davidson, CSFHS, Grampian Ancestry Research
6 Bayview Road, Inverbervie, Montrose DD10 0SH
E-mail: grampian.ancestry@btinternet.com
Tel. 01561 361500

Mystery Object Answer

If your 18th or 19th century ancestor had a sweet tooth, they would use sugar nippers like these to break off pieces from a solid cone of sugar. Nippers became redundant with the advent of sugar in cube and granulated form.



RNLI
STORIES
OF **COURAGE**
— 1939–1945 —



COULD YOU HELP UNCOVER UNTOLD STORIES FROM ABERDEEN'S SECOND WORLD WAR HISTORY?

The RNLI is seeking volunteers to research, investigate and preserve this chapter of local history for future generations.

During the war, lifeboat volunteers in and around Aberdeen continued to save lives in extraordinary services. The Stories of Courage project aims to gather and tell their stories, the stories of those who supported them, and of those they rescued.

If you have an interest in heritage, research experience, computer literacy, and the ability to work independently and as part of a team, this role may be for you. This will be a challenging but satisfying role, requiring thinking outside the box to find different approaches to uncovering stories.

Contact alison_hulme@rnli.org.uk.



RNLI Stories of Courage 1939–45 is made possible with the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we can gather and preserve these special memories.

Centre News

Our Membership team reported in January that our numbers remain stable, with 299 new members in 2024 and 251 in 2025. Susan Freer has been doing an excellent job in posting out regular information through the All Member and Group Newsletters. We recently found that 12 newsletters bounced back from unrecognised email addresses. The Membership team followed this up with members to check that the email addresses were valid or to update contact information where details had changed. If you don't get notifications about meetings, do let us know.

The Society Facebook pages are an important portal for members and prospective members to engage with the Society. We recently added a third Admin to the group, Sally Low of Edinburgh, who is a familiar and friendly face from our Zoom meetings as well as a knowledgeable and entertaining speaker. Her talks on the implications of slavery for family-historians and ways of protecting your research legacy have been extremely well received. She joins Susan Freer and John Urie in keeping our Facebook posts up-to-date and dealing with your queries.

Our Trustees have been implementing a Team Working Action Plan, led by Chairman Bert Lawrie who has always stressed how important it is to keep pools of volunteers up to speed with different areas of the Society's work. We are keen to avoid situations where only one individual has sole responsibility for data, resources, or activities since illness or accident can result in information being irrevocably lost. On the plus side it is also a much more congenial and sociable way of working.

The planning group will review all our working procedures to ensure they operate effectively, comply with our agreed policies and procedures, and give volunteers appropriate levels of autonomy and decision-making while ensuring accountability and corporate decision-making. The initial actions related to rationalising email addresses, access to keys and passwords, and the purchasing policies and procedures. A notable success has been the response to our call for volunteers to help with the Centre Duty Rota. New volunteers have been inducted and the rota updated. If you were issued with keys in the past and are no longer part of the duty rota, we ask that you please return those keys to Barbara Lamb, Centre Manager. In a related initiative linked to our Health and Safety procedures, we will be issuing lanyards to Centre users for the duration of their visit.

Alas, even with all the seasonal goodwill that abounded at the start of the year, we can't beat the elements and the Centre remained closed during the first week of January due to the heavy snow experienced in Aberdeen. Even when the roads were clear, the pavements were a lethal combination of ice and slush and we did not wish to put visitors or volunteers at risk trying to reach the Centre. We did post the closure information on our website and Facebook pages but alas one brave individual made a special effort to struggle into Aberdeen only to find the doors locked. We apologise for the inconvenience the unscheduled closure caused and remind members that, if the weather looks bad, it's a good idea to phone in advance to check that the Centre will be open.

Sadly, another consequence of the bad weather and the ensuing thaw is that once again we are experiencing leaks and water damage from the upstairs flats. Our heroic Property team (Bert Lawrie and Bob Strowger) are on top of the situation and liaising with property owners over repairs.

Our bank of research tools available to members continues to grow. We have renewed our Society membership with the Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) which means that ANESFHS members interested in following up Canadian connections can sign into the OGS site at our King Street Centre. We appreciate this free subscription and have reciprocated by giving OGS a complimentary membership of ANESFHS. We also made a donation to their Scottish Interest Group.

Our subscriptions to Ancestry worldwide, Findmypast and the British Newspaper Archive have all been renewed and, since the furniture and computers were upgraded in the summer,

we can offer you a very congenial place to come and do your research, with friendly help and advice on hand. If you plan to take out a subscription to Findmypast, there is a discount code available to ANESFHS members. To check availability, please contact Susan Freer (susan.freer@anesfhs.org.uk).

Notice of Society AGM, Saturday 16th May 2026

And finally, just an early reminder that the Annual General Meeting of the Society will take place on Saturday 16th May 2026 in the Fountainhall Church Centre, Beaconsfield Place, Aberdeen. The meeting will follow the usual format and an Agenda and supporting documents will be made available on the Society website in April. If you plan to attend and do not have computer access, you may email secretary@anesfhs.org.uk to request that the papers mailed to be mailed to you. The AGM will be followed by a talk from Hugh Falconer on "Music-Making in Aberdeenshire in 1960s–70s". We expect it will provide a cheery conclusion to our season of presentations.

If there are topics you would like to see on the AGM agenda, please message us via chairman@anesfhs.org.uk. We hope you agree there are a lot of good things going on and, if you would like to play an active role in taking the Society forward, please consider nominating yourself or a colleague as a Trustee. We are especially looking for individuals with experience of working in HR, IT, accountancy or publishing but the most important factor is your enthusiasm and commitment to working collaboratively to develop the Society and meet the needs of our membership. The Board of Trustees meets approximately monthly, with breaks in the summer and over the winter. The meetings take place simultaneously in the Centre and on Zoom, so it is not absolutely essential to live in the North-East. We are conscious that a significant part of our membership is in Canada, America, Australia and New Zealand as well as other parts of the UK. The Board will consider all applications and is empowered to make co-options prior to the AGM. If you are interested, please email chairman@anesfhs.org.uk.

Journal team

KEY CONTACTS

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

<i>Chair:</i>	Bert Lawrie	<i>Ordinary members:</i>	
<i>Vice-Chair:</i>	Elaine Petrie	Susan Freer	Ivor Normand
<i>Secretary:</i>	Ronald Leith	Barbara Lamb	Helen Strachan
<i>Finance Reporting/Membership:</i>	Sheila Symons		

Key Contacts

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Secretary	Ronald Leith	secretary@anesfhs.org.uk
Social media	Susan Freer	Susan.Freer@anesfhs.org.uk
UKGDPR compliance officer	Helen Strachan	Helen.Strachan@anesfhs.org.uk
Website / IT	Dave Anderson	webmaster@anesfhs.org.uk

Journal Submissions

Submissions to the Journal are always welcome. Please do not embed images in your text document), but email them as separate attachments to journal@anesfhs.org.uk.

Submissions should ideally have genealogical *and* preferably North-East Scotland content. Articles, extracts or images may also be published on the Society's website or may be re-used in subsequent ANESFHS Journal editions. All submissions will be acknowledged by e-mail.

The next Journal will be published in **May 2026**. Last date for submissions is **10th April 2026**.

Format – Please type your article on a computer and send it as an e-mail attachment. Sorry, we no longer accept handwritten submissions. Source/reference lists are fine, but we prefer **no** footnotes/endnotes.

Illustrations – For best reprographic results in the Journal, please send images at the **highest** possible resolution. We have limited space, and the A5 size format means that the quality may be somewhat less than you expect. If you wish to send any originals, then please contact the Editor (**not** the Centre at King Street). If you require originals to be returned, then please state this clearly and include return postage.

Permissions and credits – We can only publish copyright material if due permission has been obtained and is included. For copyright material, and for all photographs and other images, please always state the source (publication, website, photographer and so on).

Length – Keep it reasonably short, please. We have limited space, so long articles may be edited. If you have a really long tale to tell, then why not write it as two (or more) parts?

Computer details – Please use a format that can be read by a PC running Microsoft Word. Any font or size of text is acceptable. If in doubt, send plain text. If sending **illustrations**, any standard format is acceptable (png, jpg or tif).

Advertisements

Electronic copy is preferred. Note that the original size of the Journal is A4 before photo-reduction to A5, and so a quarter-page advert should be prepared as 175mm (w) x 60mm (h).

The rates for advertisements, per Journal issue, are:

- £30.00 (black and white) or £45.00 (colour) per quarter-page (doubled for a half-page)
- £45.00 b/w or £60.00 colour for one third of a page (175 x 90mm)
- £90.00 b/w or £120.00 colour for a full page (175 x 270mm).

Writing to the Society

Please send all correspondence to The Family-History Research Centre (address on back cover). To help us be more efficient, please detail your requirements on separate sheets (with your name and membership number) according to which service you wish to call upon or which office-bearer you wish to write to – or use the appropriate e-mail address (see opposite page) to minimise delays.

Change of address

If you have access to the Internet, then **PLEASE** use the special form on our website to notify address or e-mail address changes. This form is processed automatically on receipt, ensuring fast service. If you write to the Membership Department, *please quote your membership number*.

Publications Sales

We stock a wide range of titles with emphasis on Scottish genealogy. Individuals who are prepared to place a standing order for all Society publications qualify for a 33% discount. A searchable, filterable list of all our publications is available on our website.

For all information on publications and how to order, see <https://anesfhs.org.uk>, “Publications” tab.

Disclaimer

The Society cannot vouch for the accuracy of offers of services or goods that are advertised in the Journal, or be responsible for the outcome of any contract that a reader may make with an advertiser. Views expressed in contributions are the author's and not necessarily the Society's.

The Editor reserves the right to amend any copy. The Society Library does not necessarily hold copies of books quoted or referenced in this Journal



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Scotland

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E-mail: chairman@anesfhs.org.uk

Website: <https://anesfhs.org.uk>

Centre opening hours

Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm

Saturday morning by appointment: please telephone

ANESFHS Family-History Centre closures, 2026

Closed on local holidays: 20th April, 4th May, 13th July and 28th September 2026.

Closing at 4:00pm Friday 18th Dec. 2026; re-opening at 10:00am Tuesday, 5th Jan. 2027.

See website for further details

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