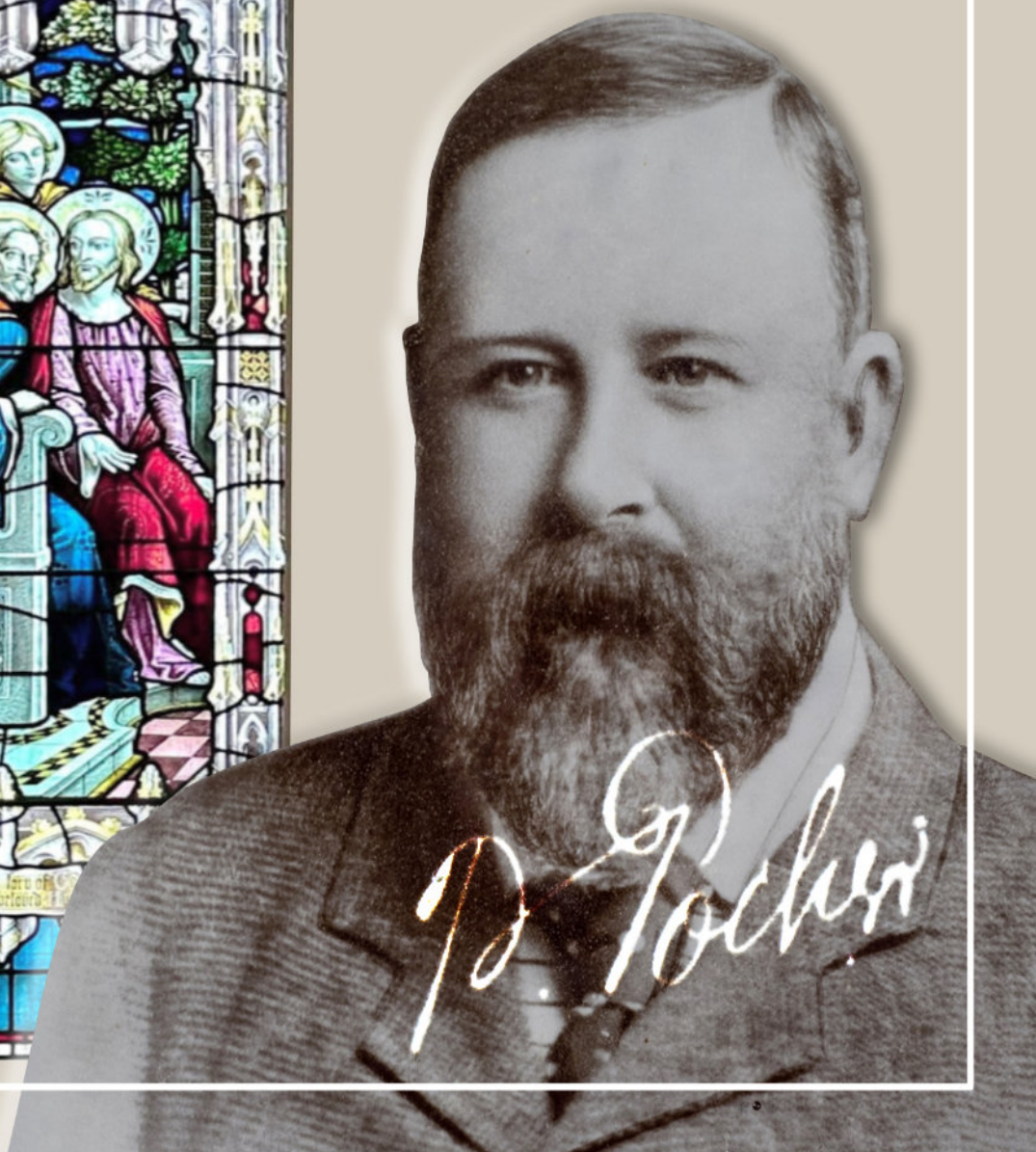


J Aberdeen & North-East Scotland Family History Society **Journal**



Number 174 : May 2025

*Auchterless Kirk
memorial windows
and their donor*



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- All our Journals from 1979 onwards
- 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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CONTENTS

SOCIETY REPORTS, NEWS AND INFORMATION

EDITORIAL	2
LIBRARY REPORT	3
UKGDPR: AN UPDATE	4
ANCESTOR CHARTS: AN UPDATE ON INDEXING.....	4
MEMBERS' MEETINGS	5
<i>Gavin Bell, "Monumental Inscriptions in Retrospect"</i>	5
<i>Joe McLeod, "SS Norwood; Strathisla; Princess Royal: Hall Russell Ships"</i>	6
<i>Rod Coates, David Joiner, Susan Brouwer, "Tracing the Maple Trail"</i>	7
MORAY/BANFF GROUP REPORT	8
EDINBURGH GROUP REPORTS	9
<i>Ken Nisbet, "Commemoration and Remembrance"</i>	9
<i>Louise Williams, "Tracing Family History through Health Archives"</i>	11
GLASGOW GROUP REPORT.....	13
<i>Madeline Hibbings-Cline and others, "Conserving Your Textiles for Posterity"</i>	13
SOUTHERN ONTARIO GROUP REPORT	13
<i>Sally Low, "Slavery and its Impact on Family History"</i>	13
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND GROUP REPORT.....	16
GRAHAM ROBERTSON'S MYSTERY OBJECT QUIZ	17

EVENTS AND NOTICES

<i>The Ontario Genealogical Society: an exciting offer</i>	17
<i>Graham Robertson's Mystery Object Quiz: Answer</i>	18

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

<i>Port Erroll Fisher Families – Further Identifications</i>	19
<i>Allanachs and Browns of Craigengower, Glenbuchat</i>	20
<i>Alexander Mitchell Kellas</i>	20

ARTICLES

TRAVELLING ON THE SS NORWOOD	21
CHARLES MASSIE (SS NORWOOD) AND JOHN MASSIE (SS BALLOCHBUIE)	24
PETER TOCHER AND THE AUCHTERLESS CHURCH MEMORIAL WINDOWS.....	24
FENCIBLE REGIMENTS: THE 18TH-CENTURY HOME GUARD.....	28
A LIFE OF LIES? PETER LAING, THE ELGIN CENTENARIAN.....	30
SEARCHING FOR THE FAMILY OF BARBARA WATT, AROUND 1795	32
JEAN THOM'S SAMPLER: FROM KITTYBREWSTER TO AUSTRALIA.....	34
NIGERIAN DNA IN SCOTLAND	36
THE FORBES FAMILY OF RETTIE AND COWHYTHE BUT NOT BLAIRSHINNOCH.....	38
FINDING AND USING RECORDS OF INHERITANCE.....	40
ABERDEEN CITY AND ABERDEENSHIRE ARCHIVES: UPDATE ON MOVE	41

SOCIETY REPORTS, NEWS AND INFORMATION

Editorial

Welcome to our May issue. At the time of writing, we are busy collecting the paperwork for the Society AGM on Saturday 17th May. Once again, we will be making use of online voting in advance of the meeting to collect votes in respect of some modest changes to the Constitution. One change is required to keep our practices in line with UK data protection and privacy arrangements (UKGDPR); two changes relate to the deletion of clauses which only applied to the first AGM after our incorporation as a charity; the remaining change reflects a change in the composition of the Board of Trustees. We believe that the online voting system is the fairest way of consulting members as it allows every member the opportunity to register their view, regardless of whether they can attend the meeting or not. And when so many folk attend by Zoom it makes it a lot simpler to tot up the votes. You should already have received details of how to vote in a recent all-member email Newsletter, along with the other papers for the AGM. If you are an Aberdeen member who can't access your Society account online, come into the Research Centre and you will be able to log into your account on one of our computers. Remember, voting will close at midnight on Friday 16th May.

UKGDPR has had some implications for the Journal itself. You will notice a change in the current issue. Where previously we showed the author's name, email address and Society membership number after articles, we will now only show the author's name. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), who provide guidance on how data and privacy regulations operate, particularly counsel against showing names and membership numbers together where the information is being circulated beyond the organisation. This is the case for us, since the Journal goes out to libraries and other societies and the information it contains is therefore outwith our control. Where members are sharing personal information about living people, as sometimes occurs in the Ancestor Chart, we require their consent for the information to be shared and you will see that the Ancestor Chart pages contain a disclaimer, stating that the member has explicitly given consent for the information to appear. When a member reads an item of interest and wants to contact the author, they can simply send a message to the Journal team at journal@anesfhs.org.uk and we will arrange for it to be forwarded.

Our new MI group is really busy these days. They have made a couple of trips to the old graveyard at Monquhitter to begin the process of mapping the stones there. They have had excellent assistance from Aberdeen-based archaeologist, Ali Cameron, whose team has also got involved. Gavin Bell has conducted training sessions with the new team and Bob Strowger has now taken over the role of MI Co-ordinator. We wish him every success in this new role and look forward to the team finding their feet and producing their first publication.

Our Journal team has also been growing. For many years Ivor Normand (Edinburgh) produced it single-handedly, and was joined more recently by Elaine Petrie (Falkirk) and Matthew Davidson (Aberdeen). Our team now includes Alex McKenzie (Florida), Bobbie Jeal (Dalbeattie) and Barbara Bodden (Los Angeles). We are also indebted to Steve Edwards (Aberdeen) for help with covers and graphics. Our new recruits have brought lots of enthusiasm as well as their technical expertise to the business of producing your Journal. You'll read some of their own articles in future issues. You can see from our various locations that interest in the North-East stretches across the globe and that you don't have to be based in Aberdeen to contribute to the work of the Society.

We do have a plea to make to our overseas members. Postage costs and the increasingly complicated regulations around mailing the Journal abroad, mail strikes in Canada and elsewhere and the fact that after each issue has been posted, a few copies are always returned undelivered to our centre in Aberdeen, have all led us to conclude that it would be preferable

for overseas members to opt for digital membership, wherever possible. On the plus side for you, it is cheaper and you'll get access to each Journal online as soon as it is ready, usually about the same time as it is sent to the printers. We do understand, however, that many members still enjoy having an actual paper copy to browse and return to at leisure – but please be patient with us if your Journal is delayed or goes missing in the delivery stages. It is literally out of our hands.

journal@anesfhs.org.uk

The burgeoning Journal team

—oOo—

Library Report

Did you see the video posted on our Facebook page on 23rd March 2025? It was taken about 40 years ago in the Society's premises at 152 King Street and features, among others, our very own Ronald Leith, a founder member and present-day secretary of the Society. Although the Society was established in 1978, it wasn't until 1986 that the momentous decision was taken to buy a "walk-in Member Centre" and no. 152 was purchased. When you look at the video, you can't fail to be struck by how cramped the surroundings were and how much information, in the form of microfiche, microfilm and paper, was crammed into that first Research Centre. It makes our present search rooms and the library look very tidy and spacious by comparison. But it was a milestone in the history of the Society and greatly increased the number of our members.

Several of the volunteers who appear in the film have since died – Violet Murray and Eleanor Paterson, as well as Archie Strath Maxwell. Archie was a professional family historian and genealogist who, over many years, transcribed and published many of the pre-1855 births and marriages of the Scottish Episcopal Church in north-east Scotland. Copies of these transcriptions are available in our library and are a very valuable resource since these registers are not as easily accessible as the Church of Scotland registers.



Ronald Leith, 40 years ago in our premises in 152 King Street

The Church of Scotland records are accessible because of the 1854 Act of Parliament which instructed that all registers of births, marriages and deaths, for every parish prior to 1855, be delivered to the Registrar General for Scotland for preservation in the General Register Office in Edinburgh. As a result, they are now all in one place and can be searched in person there, or they can be accessed online at Scotland's People. But this Act applied only to Church of Scotland records; Episcopalian records were generally retained by the individual churches, although many are now in the National Records of Scotland and can be viewed there. Our copies of these transcriptions were



bound, but over the years the bindings have deteriorated, and pages are loose. Although we're scanning them, it's good to have a hard copy on the shelves, and one of our on-going tasks in the library is to re-bind these transcriptions, using our recently acquired thermal binder.

When I watched the video, one thing that struck me was how much our library has grown in the past 40 years. In fact, it's grown to such an extent that it can perhaps be a bit overwhelming until you become

familiar with it. If you do want to get to know it better, why not join Sheona MacDonald, one of our library team members, in a tour of the library. The tours are aimed at volunteers and members of the Society – just add your name to the notice in the kitchen, or email library@anesfhs.org.uk and we'll get back to you. It's a good way to find out more about our resources as well as finding out how to use the catalogue.

You can find the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8JJv4XBYIw>.

library@anesfhs.org.uk

Margie Mellis

—oOo—

UKGDPR: An Update

We have recently begun a review of data protection requirements for members living overseas, starting with Canada. Members who participated in the Southern Ontario Group's presentation "Tracing the Maple Trail" (15th March 2025) might have picked up a reference to there being different sets of data privacy regulations in three separate provinces: Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec. Fortunately, the key principles of Canadian GDPR appear to be much the same as those applied in UKGDPR, but further work is required to compare each of the provinces and identify any differences that might exist and what, if any, actions the Society might need to take to ensure compliance. The reference provided welcome confirmation that our work is on track, and I am grateful to the team in Canada for providing it.

As always, we will keep members informed on progress, via Journal articles or by Newsletter, as required. Meantime, if you have any questions or would like further information relative to this review, or any other Data Protection matters, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address below.

helen.strachan@anesfhs.org.uk

Helen Strachan

—oOo—

Ancestor Charts: An Update on Indexing

The invitation extended to members in the last issue (Journal 173) to share your thoughts, advice and experience of using a GEDCOM format to create family-tree files was well received. Thank you very much to those members who responded. Your feedback was greatly appreciated and has been shared with the Indexing Team who are still evaluating software packages. Indexing Ancestor Charts is currently done manually and we hope to be able to do this digitally in the future, by using the same three key data fields (Membership Number, Surnames and Locations) to generate an index. We are not proposing at this stage, or for the foreseeable future, to use commercial packages to store whole charts and their data.

I am especially pleased to report that two new members joined the Indexing Team recently. Robert (Robb) Gibb, who lives in the Nottingham area, is already actively involved in indexing Ancestor Charts after just a few short weeks of volunteering. Gina Innes recently accepted a work placement opportunity with the Society and, having completed around 40 hours with us, has decided that she wishes to continue as a volunteer with the Indexing Team. A warm welcome is extended to both Robb and Gina.

Please continue to send your requests for copies of charts and your new or updated charts to charts@anesfhs.org.uk or send them to the Centre at King Street, Aberdeen, marked for the attention of the Indexing Team. Also, we really appreciate your queries and family-history stories. Keep them coming.

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Helen Strachan

Members' Meetings

Gavin Bell, "Monumental Inscriptions in Retrospect"

18th January 2025

Gavin Bell always delights us with his erudition and thoughtful approach to recording monumental inscriptions on behalf of the Society. His talk on this occasion was no exception but it had a special resonance as this was, in a sense, Gavin's swansong as he prepares to hand the mantle of MI co-ordination to a new team.

This talk provided an overview of the Society's MI work. The first of our MI booklets, a survey of King Edward kirkyard, appeared in 1982. We now have 130 booklets, covering around 50,000 stones and 200,000 people. It is a fabulous resource, made all the more useful because of the searchable Index on the Society's website.

Gavin talked us through the process for creating one of these publications. The first step is to create a plan of the kirkyard. But that's not always as easy as it sounds. Not all stones stand in neat rows, or even in straight lines. Then comes the challenge of reading the stones. Our North-East climate is not kind to these memorials. Stones in soft sandstone easily get worn by the elements. Moss can grow on the inscription, obscuring it. Worse still, lichen can take hold, forming a chemical bond with the stone itself, meaning that it cannot be removed without damaging the stone. Some stones are prone to flaking, rendering their message lost for ever. Modern inscription methods, far from improving the situation, created new challenges. Many inscriptions are formed, not by inscribing the letters into the stone but by pegging individual letters into holes drilled in the stone. Once a letter falls out, there is no way of knowing what it was. ROSS and ROBB might well have used similar peg holes.



Further challenges are provided by the working conditions. Some stones have disappeared underground, although that sometimes means the inscription is better preserved when the turf over it is temporarily removed. Even taking photographs is not always as helpful as you might imagine. The light may be coming from the wrong direction, making the image hard to read. And then, once you have amassed all the images, you still have the job of trying to transcribe and check them all ... a huge task. It may take several visits to acquire, collate and check all the information.

Burial records can be helpful but few are available for the older graveyards. An honourable exception is St Nicholas, Aberdeen, whose records of burials 1666–1793 appear on the Society's website. Nowadays, Deceased Online has the burial records for graveyards in Aberdeenshire, and for some historic burial grounds in the city. But be wary, there are often mistakes in the indexes. And remember that gravestones can record more – or fewer – individuals than appear in any burial records. Gavin directed us to some interesting anomalies – and more can be found in a series of articles he produced for Journals 160–2. The titles are listed below.

The Society has awarded Gavin Honorary Life Membership in recognition of his many years of service to this important area of the Society's work. We add our thanks for his efforts and wish him a happy "retirement" as he steps back from the role of MI Co-ordinator.

"More Monumental Mistakes, or the Mystery of the Moving Memorials" and "More Monumental Mistakes: Mystery Solved", Journal 160 (August 2021), pp. 15 and 17;

"Why Can't I Find Great-Grandfather's Burial Records?", Journal 160 (August 2021), pp. 19–21;

“Why are there 44 Other People in Great-Grandfather’s Grave?”, Journal 161 (November 2021), pp. 22–23;

“Why is Great-Grandfather in the Wrong Graveyard?”, Journal 162 (February 2022), pp. 18–19.

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Journal Team

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Joe McLeod, “SS *Norwood*; *Strathisla*; *Princess Royal*: Hall Russell Ships”

15th February 2025

Joe McLeod made a welcome return to the Aberdeen talk schedule. Having whetted our appetite previously with the tragic story of SS *Norwood* during his previous talk on Burnbanks village, he promised he would bring us up to date with his endeavours to track down photographs of its crewmen.

The timing was perfect, as our previous issue (Journal 173, February 2025, pp. 22–23) carried an article by Avril MacGlashan in which she shared a beautiful photograph of the *Norwood*’s Chief Engineer Alexander Gibb Troup, her great-uncle by marriage. Joe was delighted to see this, as it brought his tally up to 11 photographs of the 18 crew members.

Along the way, Joe pointed out some of the helpful resources that have enabled him to track down vital records. In particular, he recommended the archives of Aberdeen Journals and the resources of Aberdeen City and Shire Archives. He also heartily recommends a wander around a graveyard – a fine outing for all the family!

Joe’s interest was originally inspired by trying to find out more about the life and family of James Shepherd Coutts, the ship’s cook, who lived in Burnbanks, the village where Joe now lives. Gradually he has put together stories and documents relating not only to the crew of the *Norwood*, but now also the captain and crew of the U-boat, UC-29, that sank it. The German vessel was itself sunk off the coast of Ireland, around a month after destroying the *Norwood*, in February 1917.



Joe McLeod

UC-29 was sunk by Captain Gordon Campbell, who won two Victoria Crosses during the war. He wrote a memoir of his wartime experiences and, as a celebrated war veteran, his exploits were still being written up in the children’s comic, *Victor*, as late as 1981. We know this because one of Joe’s adventures on eBay led to his acquiring a copy of this issue in which the destruction of UC-29 is described in great detail. All but two of the crew died, and Joe has been able to consult transcripts of the interrogations carried out with these survivors. Joe explains that his interest in the German crew grew because, as someone who still works offshore, he recognises that when any mariner is in distress, it is their shared humanity that is important.

Joe’s account of his discoveries is fascinating because of his delight in the many coincidences and serendipitous discoveries that come his way. He has built up a fund of interesting stories about the various crew members, such as the stories about Alexander Paterson who was born on water (on the Kessock Ferry) and died on water (on the *Norwood*). But even more intriguing was the story of the Kessock Mermaid, captured then released by a Paterson antecedent. In gratitude, she promised that no Paterson would ever die at sea, but alas, the prophecy did not hold good for Alexander, who was only 30 when he died. Joe’s talks frequently do turn up other links so, if you hear of someone with a connection to SS *Norwood*, please do get in touch with us at the Journal and we’ll pass the details onwards to Joe. The remainder of the talk was about the vessel which began life as the *Strathisla*, in 1905, but was renamed *Burnbanks* in 1926. Joe



successfully bought a fine model of the boat at auction and brought it along for us to admire. The boat saw service during both World Wars and was scrapped in 1948, after concluding its career with Burnbanks Fishing Company, run by George Wood of Torry.

The *Princess Royal* was built in 1960 and also went through various name changes, working as both the *Admiral Nelson* and the *Grampian Admiral*. Joe showed us the original brass builder's plate, which commemorates the boat's founding. He then shared a hilarious account of his travails with the harbour authorities as he tried to photograph the boat, which is currently impounded in northern Spain. The fact that it is tied up beside a boat that had been used for smuggling drugs explained the wariness of the Spanish maritime police.

It was a fascinating account of the many diverse and unexpected paths that family-history research can lead us down. Don't forget, if you have stories about the men of the *Norwood*, Joe will be delighted to hear from you.



Photo: J. McLeod

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Journal Team

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Rod Coates, David Joiner, Susan Brouwer, “Tracing the Maple Trail”

15th March 2025

We decided to switch the tables on our Southern Ontario Group for our March meeting in Aberdeen. The Canadians have been especially good at finding Society speakers to talk about the Scottish roots of their emigrant ancestry and have featured both Anne Park (Aberdeen) and Sally Low (Edinburgh) in recent months. We decided it was time to get them to speak to us about the resources they use to track their ancestors once they arrived in Canada. Now, you might ask why a genealogist living in Scotland would be tracing folk in Canada. If your ancestors moved to Canada, then you are likely to be living in Canada yourself. However, many of us have moved beyond tracing direct maternal and paternal lines and are progressively interested in collateral connections. You may have found some unexpected DNA matches across the pond and, as a result, may want to know more about cousins, aunts and uncles of your direct ancestors who decided to take the plunge and venture overseas.

The talk explained the difference between Federal, Provincial and Municipal archives, and then Rod kicked off with an introduction to Library and Archives Canada. Their acronym is LAC, but Rod (who cannot resist a humorous pun) pointed out that they have no “lack” of wonderful resources for a family historian. As well as birth, marriage, death and census records, the archive is an excellent source of information on immigration and naturalisation, as well as Canada's fine military records. The section on the so-called Home Children (1869–1932) was extremely moving. These children, sometimes orphans or illegitimate, were sent to Canada (and Australia) and placed mainly with families in rural areas, sometimes receiving very poor treatment and with no further contact with their birth families. Rod recounted the experiences of his grandfather as just such a Home Child.

David Joiner picked up the baton to give us information about Passenger Lists, a very important tool in tracking the arrival of Scots into their new homeland. Records of the Quarantine stations are helpful but often overlooked. Other unusual records included published transcriptions of lists of those who died at sea (at Gross Île) in 1847. Links to these resources can be found on the LAC site. David was able to use these to trace the arrival of grandparents in Canada.





Susan Brouwer then picked up the task of introducing us to regional and municipal records, some of which can be accessed through Ancestry. However, it is also worth making contact with museums and libraries in the areas you think your relatives settled. Facebook pages of local heritage and family-history groups can also lead to discovering useful information and photographs. Local libraries may well be the best source for post office directories, which list names and addresses of residents and businesses. Alternatively, Vernon's city directories are available online: you just have to do a search. The Canadian County Atlas Digital Project (supported by McGill University) is especially helpful in providing old maps, and Susan traced some McPherson relatives this way, finding information about the land they settled and their neighbours.

The presentation slides were exceptionally well designed, thanks to David Joiner's IT gifts, with a particularly elegant maple motif and beautiful family photographs from the presenters' own collections. The presenters also generously compiled and circulated lists of the resources they described, as well as the slide set (links provided below). In addition, they agreed to be recorded, and the video was posted on YouTube and enjoyed more than 160 views within a few days.

Rod Coates commented ruefully afterwards that if they did too good a job, they would be asked to come back again with another topic ... You said it, Rod! Get your diary out now, please.

Slide set: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15LOrRby5FqKeb7LQUseYk56IU9RCeiDG/view?usp=sharing>

Resource list: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qu6yNvv77ucpFeEufSS38oWDj8ex2646/edit?usp=sharing&oid=107627556252412551692&rtpof=true&sd=true>

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Journal Team

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Moray/Banff Group Report

For our February Zoom meeting, Ken Nisbet gave us a guided tour of Scotland's People under the title "Making the Best Use of the Updated Scotland's People Website". In addition to taking us step by step through the various sections, he provided many hints and tips on how to get the most out of our searches, using, for example, a woman's maiden name to help identify her death. With almost 90 participants, it was clearly a very popular topic, and the very appreciative comments in the Chat reflected how much the session had been enjoyed and how much had been learnt.

As February would usually have been a face-to-face meeting in Elgin Library, we had organised lunch in Threaplands Garden Centre restaurant, and 17 of us met there on the following Saturday. It was lovely to see so many local faces again after missing our usual Christmas gathering there.

When we are busy with our family-history research we are inevitably looking for basic details through Statutory Registrations, Parish Registers and Censuses but it is important to remember that our ancestors were real people with real lives. With this in mind, we used our March and April Zoom meetings to "Find Out More".

In March we looked at newspapers, using local archives and the wider selection of papers available on the British Newspaper Archive and FindMyPast websites. You might know that

your great-grandfather was a farmer and also know the name of the farm, but a newspaper report could tell you that he won first prize in the local show with his cattle or that your great-grandmother's flower arrangement won the top prize. You might also find a less complimentary family insight in the shape of a report about an ancestor up in court for some misdemeanour.

In April we tackled the Kirk Session Records, many of which are now available on the Scotland's People website. These require patience as they are not transcribed or indexed, but they are well worth the time and effort involved. They give you a picture of events in the local parish and can include lists of mortcloth dues, payments to the poor and details of illegitimacy as well as various other sources of names to help break down those inevitable brick walls.

All these resources can give you fascinating glimpses into your ancestors' lives and unexpected information that can't be found elsewhere. With numbers in the high eighties for both meetings, "Finding Out More" is clearly an aspect of family history that we are keen to pursue.

The Elgin library renovations are running late with no definite date, as yet, as to when we will be able to book our room again but we have our sights set at the moment on another visit to Threaplands – for Afternoon Tea this time!

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Mary Evans

—oOo—

Edinburgh Group Reports

Ken Nisbet, "Commemoration and Remembrance"

25th January 2025

Commemorating service personnel and civilians killed during warfare has changed over time. There are currently many memorials dedicated to individuals, units, or specific communities who lost their lives during conflicts. This is very much a creation of the 20th and 21st centuries. In his talk, Ken Nisbet concentrated on how the commemoration of service personnel has changed.

A stroll round many of our municipal or country cemeteries will find you looking at 19th and 20th-century monuments celebrating war veterans, an example being "Sacred to the memory of James R. McMillan Late Sergeant Major R.H.A. Indian Mutiny Veteran who died 19th May 1922" which is to be found in Rosebank Cemetery, Edinburgh.

The soldiers killed during the Mutiny from the 72nd, 78th and 92nd Foot regiments do not have individual memorials. This is also the case with personnel who died during the colonial wars of the 18th century and Napoleonic wars of 1792 to 1816. The Clan graves located at Culloden battlefield can be considered an early example of a unit memorial. Many more are also to be found on American Civil War battlefields. This tradition has continued to the present day, with the Newfoundland Regimental Caribou memorials on the Western Front, and numerous unit memorials in Ypres Salient and on the Somme battlefield.

During the 19th century, in addition to the creation of unit memorials, there was a move to create both military cemeteries and memorials on the site of, or near to, specific battlefields and to publish lists of the fallen and newspapers containing casualty lists.



Echt War Memorial

Photo: E. Petrie

After the Crimean War, there were over 100 military cemeteries to be found, of which only two to three are still in existence. A printed casualty roll was also created. After the disastrous engagement at Majuba during the 1st Boer War, the 92nd Foot (which became 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders in 1881) created a regimental burial ground, which still exists today, with a regimental memorial listing the names of those killed. Soldiers of all ranks had their own individually named graves. This development continued during the 2nd Boer War of 1899–1902 with the introduction of military cemeteries and individually named graves.

In the UK, regiments erected memorials listing their war dead in public spaces, two examples being that of the Royal Scots Greys on Princes Street, Edinburgh and the Black Watch Memorial at the top of the Mound in Edinburgh. The latter commemorated not only those who were killed but also those who died of wounds or of disease, since these caused the greatest number of fatal casualties during warfare up to the Great War.

The Great War brought the greatest change in commemoration and remembrance and, in many ways, this was due to the foresight of one individual, Fabian Ware, who was later to be knighted. Too old to serve on the front line, he nevertheless went to Belgium and France in 1914, to serve with the Red Cross in transporting the wounded. In carrying out his duties, he came across individual graves, not always named, where local communities had buried British soldiers. He recognised that families would ask questions about where their father, son, brother or uncle was buried and that the army should be able to answer that question. His efforts resulted in the army creating Graves Registration Units and an enquiry service to respond to questions regarding burial and location of individuals.

He also recognised that officers and “other rank” casualties should not be treated differently; just because a family had the financial means and resources for a body to be repatriated to the UK did not mean it was acceptable. In 1917, the Imperial War Graves Commission came into being, renamed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in the 1960s. The Commission commemorates those who died between 4th August 1914 – 31st August 1921 and 3rd September 1939 – 31st December 1947. And it records all those who died, irrespective of the cause of death: killed in action, died of wounds (both overseas and at home in Great Britain), died of illness or disease, and those who were shot by their own side.

CWGC headstones should not distinguish between those who were gallant and good soldiers and those who were indifferent or downright mutinous. Uniformity in design of headstones and the information on them was one of the founding principles of the Commission. Another principle is that all the fallen should be commemorated – if an individual’s body was identifiable, then their name would go on the gravestone; if not, then that person would still be buried in an identifiable plot and the gravestone would state that their names were unknown.



*The War Memorial at
Dunnottar, Stonehaven.
Photo: E. Petrie*

Individuals who are unrecovered and unidentified are honoured on memorials dedicated to the missing. These include memorials at the Menin Gate, Thiepval, Helles and the Plymouth and Portsmouth memorials for those lost at sea. It can be argued that the greatest memorial to the war dead is the Cenotaph, which has no names of individuals, units or battles and, equally important, the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey (an idea which has been copied by many other countries).

The Great War also led to the idea of using a symbol in the form of a red poppy and the creation of a time and date when those who died during all conflicts are remembered. The CWGC still continues its work today in commemorating and remembering those who died

during the period of conflict it is responsible for. It is perhaps apt to end this article with the words of Laurence Binyon, written in 1914.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

edinburgh@anesfhs.org.uk

Edinburgh Group

Louise Williams, “Tracing Family History through Health Archives”

22nd March 2025

Louise Williams, Archivist for Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA), gave us a clear, beautifully illustrated talk, with lots of tips about resources of interest to family historians. LHSA is based in Edinburgh University, and Louise used examples from this archive to illustrate what ANESFHS members might find



*An early plan for
the Royal Infirmary
of Edinburgh*

useful for their own research there or in other regional National Health Service (NHS) archives. Also known as Scottish Territorial Board Archives, these regional repositories hold information about their local hospitals and their erstwhile patients.

LHSA records

The LHSA, one of the biggest such archives in the UK, collects health records from existing NHS hospitals and their predecessors going back to 1729, as well as general information about health care relative to the local area. Their earliest record dates from 1594 and is a land indenture for an early hospital. If you want to search for an ancestor who was a patient or a member of staff and you have their name, and the time of their stay in a particular Lothian hospital, then you have a good chance of finding relevant records.

Patient records

The most numerous records are about patients. They include Case Notes, images (40,000 and counting), scans, even artwork done by patients. Before the NHS was set up in 1948, medical care was available in free Voluntary or Charitable hospitals. The doctors gave their services for free and made their income from their private patients. Louise set out what sort of records are available from the three main types of hospitals: general/medical, psychiatric institutions and maternity hospitals. LHSA has a wide range of local and specialist hospital records which were inherited from areas beyond Edinburgh, such as East and West Lothian, and from the various hospitals that merged into the NHS in 1948, such as Astley Ainslie, the Western General Hospital and the Sick Kids.

She explained how the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh was founded in 1729 in central Edinburgh, as a free Voluntary or Charitable hospital before the NHS, and the changes it went through before relocating to its present home in Little France (on the south side of Edinburgh).

The Royal's older admission registers (the General Register of Patients) were handwritten in large ledgers and provide dates, names, age, marital status, occupation, address, place born, diseases, outcome of treatment, length of stay in hospital. They include every patient admitted from 1762 to 1963 – with no gaps. This hospital's registers are unusually well detailed, and this information could be extremely interesting to genealogists. However, not all modern records are retained, and there is a sampling process governing which are kept.

Death Registers also exist from the Royal. If you find a death record (for example, in Scotland's People) saying that your ancestor died there, the hospital Registers will give the date of death and who claimed the body, but not the burial place. They may contain information on the undertaker's firm involved, whose own records could then be followed up.

Case Notes: Case notes may provide further details on a relative. Ward Books were used for these throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the Ward Books may be less informative, as they vary in detail from ward to ward and from doctor to doctor. From the 1920s onwards more detail was recorded – in folders, as today – but the notes may include a lot of technical abbreviations, as well as diagrams.

Psychiatric Asylum records: Louise used the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, founded in 1813, as her example. She warned us to be prepared for the different terms and attitudes used in discussing and treating mental illness in the past. However, these records are often much fuller than the other types, since stays in such institutions were often quite long. Records from the Royal Edinburgh date from 1816. Certification Papers (or Admission Papers) may contain the most detail, recording the patient's prior life and symptoms to explain why the patient was being admitted. Reasons for Voluntary admissions are recorded separately from Compulsory admissions. Well-indexed Case Books, from the period between 1840 and 1932, tend to have considerable biographical detail, with occasional photographs, and even patients' drawings and letters. Remember you can also consult the Mental Welfare Commission records in the National Records of Scotland, digitised by Scottish Indexes, and covering all patients admitted to psychiatric hospitals or asylums in Scotland.



Drawings by Flora Manson, a psychiatric patient 1855–68

Birth records: LHASA has birth records from 1825 onwards. Registers of births from the 19th-century Edinburgh Royal Maternity Hospital contain much valuable genealogical information, concentrating on the mother, but also including the father: mother's name, her age, place of residence, place of birth, the name and occupation of the mother's parents, whether mother is married or unmarried, the child's father's name, his occupation, and where he lived. Poorer mothers tend to predominate in the records, as they were the ones without support during pregnancy.

Indoor (i.e. hospital-based) Case Books are available from the 19th century and give mother's name and age, but also the status of the pregnancy, how the baby was born, its length and weight and the mother's blood type. Records for Outdoor Cases and Visiting Books also exist for home births, attended by a midwife attached to a hospital. A Notification of Births Register, covering the City of Edinburgh from 1916 to 1962, gives basic information. The Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion, created in 1939, became Edinburgh Royal Maternity Hospital, the main maternity centre.

Staff records

There are fewer records for hospital staff than for patients. If you are looking for information on a doctor's career, Louise recommended going first to the General Medical Council's Medical Registers and Directories (many of which can be found on Ancestry). Hospital records may contain group photos, for example of each new cohort of Residents (Junior Doctors) or of nurses. The Matron's reports on the progress of an individual nurse during her training may help trace her different work locations. Other employees may be traceable from wage records.

Access to records: in-person and remotely



*Joseph Lister (centre front)
as a Resident at Edinburgh*

The easiest way to access the Archive and learn about LHSA's holding is to go to their website: <http://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk>.

It is possible to visit the LHSA Reading Room, based in Edinburgh University in the Main Library, at 30 George Square. To make an appointment, visitors must contact the LHSA team at least a week in advance, at lhsa@ed.ac.uk or 0131 650 3392.

LHSA has no online database for searches, but a *free remote enquiry service* exists for appropriate queries, but not speculative searches. See <https://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk/services/index.html>.

LHSA *Outreach activities* including Facebook, a blog and archiving workshops may be useful for some enquirers.

For legislation and restrictions covering access to health records, see: <https://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk/services/restrictions.htm>.

Geoff Hare, Edinburgh Group

—oOo—

Glasgow Group Report

Madeline Hibbings-Cline; Catriona Rigby; Eleanor Simcoe; Joanne Hackett, “Conserving Your Textiles for Posterity”

22nd February 2025

Members welcomed four second-year students from the Glasgow University M.Phil. course in Textile Conservation to our first meeting of the year. They explained how decisions were made on the correct approach to each item and took us through the painstaking and meticulous work they had done on a range of textiles. Examples included Coptic wrappings from Egypt, a pair of tartan trews from the 1820s and a jacket that had belonged to Skene of Rubislaw. We were shown how they dealt with staining, creasing and the ravages of the moth. There were also practical demonstrations on the care and storage of textiles. Several members had brought along heirloom pieces and were given advice on how to preserve them for future generations.

You can find an accredited conservator (for textiles, paper, and lots more) by contacting the register of The Institute of Conservation (ICON) at www.conservationregister.com.

Graham Robertson, Glasgow Group

An editorial postscript: Happily, our speakers enjoyed the visit as much as we did and were delighted by some of the treasures that members had brought along. One of the students is doing project work on pleats and was delighted to talk with members about their experience of looking after pleated garments ... and they weren't even talking about kilts! She got in touch to say: “I have told my tutor about all the wonderful insights I gained into historic pleat care and would love to pursue future correspondence or even interviews with the individuals I spoke to”. If you would like to help with this research, please email journal@anesfhs.org.uk and we'll let the student know.

—oOo—

Southern Ontario Group Report

Sally Low, “Slavery and its Impact on Family History”

22nd February 2025

Sally Low's talk was one of our most engaging presentations, with participant comments and questions reflecting the thoroughness and impact of our presenter. She challenged our

views of personal family history by spotlighting those who indirectly derived benefits from the ancient evil of slavery.

The relationship between slavery and family history is complex, and the historical implications of slavery have lingering effects on modern perceptions and family narratives. Sally expressed her personal views on the subject, and acknowledged the emotional weight this topic carries in contemporary discussions, especially among younger generations who are more sensitive to historical injustices.

Different forms of slavery have existed for thousands of years. The Portuguese began trading enslaved people in the 15th century, with the transatlantic slave trade transporting approximately 5.8 million Africans, mainly to Brazil. Britain, its colonies, and all other European nations trafficked over 10 million people, marking the largest forced migration in history.

British anti-slavery campaigns began in the late 1700s. Despite multiple abolition bills, it wasn't until 1807 that legislation banned the slave trade. But banning the trade did not free existing slaves, and full emancipation in all British colonies was only achieved in 1838. Unlike their owners, ex-slaves received no compensation and many continued working as "apprentices".

Sally emphasized the idea of "degrees of involvement", suggesting that not all ancestors were directly complicit in slavery but may have benefited from the economic systems it created. We were encouraged to consider the broader context of our family histories, recognizing that many may have unknowingly participated in industries that supported slavery, such as fishing and textile manufacturing.

Having researched for over 50 years, Sally is now writing a "sensible, measured" story for her children. During this process, she noted a lack of information on two minor family surnames, Bissett and Logan, from the small parish of Knockbain in Ross & Cromarty. In the Kirk Session records for Knockbain, she identified an ancestor named Isabella Bissett, who was noted on the "Extraordinary Poor" list. One Christmas, the Kirk Session recorded a gift of £10 for the parish poor, including Isabella. This annual Christmas bonus even made the newspapers, with the donor identified as Robert Logan of Jamaica. Further research disclosed that Robert owned three plantations and 144 slaves at the time of abolition. Sally conducted extensive research to establish that Robert was not directly on her Logan family tree, although there might have been a shared antecedent sometime before 1800.

Sally posed the question as to whether we have indirect links to slavery even though our ancestors did not own slaves themselves. There were many connections between Scotland and the slave plantations. Slaves were fed Scottish herring: nearly two thirds of all salted herring barrels shipped to the West Indies went from Greenock. It was a thriving industry in Scotland from about 1750 until the market collapsed on the emancipation of slaves. At its height, 50,000–80,000 barrels were sent annually to the Caribbean. Ancestors in the fishing industry, whether working in the ports or making barrels, benefited directly.

There was a very clear connection between the agricultural, industrial and social revolutions in Scotland and the slave plantations of the Caribbean, and this affected many Scottish families – rich and poor. During the 18th century, the second-largest industry in Scotland was spinning and weaving. Any ancestor weaving linen likely supplied the slave trade whether they knew it or not. Weavers made hemp cloth for the bags in which goods were packed for shipping from the plantations of the West Indies; this was known as "Inverness bagging". Mills all over Scotland wove Osnaburg, a coarse type of linen used for clothing; its other name was "slave cloth". The British Government introduced grants for each yard



Sally Low, immersed in family records

of linen exported and by 1790, 90% of all linen exported from Scotland was bound for the plantations. Money made in the Caribbean was also used to buy and improve farms and land in Scotland.

It was enlightening to understand why many young men from Scotland were attracted to the West Indies. Younger sons, unable to sustain themselves on the family farm, often sought better opportunities abroad. The cost of living was low and wages comparatively high. Robert Logan had gone to Jamaica in 1773, where he initially worked as a clerk, and after some time bought a couple of slaves, whom he rented out to a plantation owner before eventually purchasing land. This was a common practice. Given the high sugar profits, it was possible to repay the price of a plantation within five to ten years.

Sally recommended David Alston's book *Slaves and Highlanders: Silenced Histories of Scotland and the Caribbean*, in which his research shows that, while the Abolition Acts were going through Parliament in the late 1830s, petitions were presented to Parliament from the merchants and the fish-curers of Wick, in Caithness, and from similar groups in the town of Cromarty on the Black Isle. They complained of the loss of their former market for fish in the "West India Islands", and of the great challenges in opening new markets on the European continent. The trade between Britain and the Caribbean was part of what was called the Triangular Trade. Goods went to Africa to be exchanged for slaves. Ships full of slaves then went from Africa to the Caribbean. Finally, plantation goods were shipped back to Britain.

Searching for slave-owners is easily done on the University College London (UCL) website dedicated to documenting British slave ownership (www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/). The website's easy-access database contains names of those who received British

Government compensation on the emancipation of slaves. Sally congratulated Mary Evans from our Moray/Banff group, as her daughter (Rachel Lang) was part of the team which created the University College of London's database.



The next place to search is the online British Newspaper Archive (BNA). Articles from the *Royal Gazette of Jamaica* detail those arriving or leaving the island, which gives clues as to visits to and from the UK; many of the wives were sent "home" to have their babies. Sally was able to track Robert Logan both coming and going, and to trace his progressing career through notices of meetings he placed first as "R. Logan, Clerk", eventually becoming "Robert Logan, Esq.", then finally as a member of the various committees rather than just the secretary. However, sadly, Sally also discovered the dreadful truth that he had his own brand mark with which his slaves were branded.

Sally wrapped up by posing the question: How am I going to record slavery in the family history? She concluded that she might tell her children about Isabella Logan receiving 4 shillings and 6 pence a few times in the early 1800s, but not Robert Logan as she's now proved that he was NOT on her family tree and not a direct ancestor. Each of us is now left to address that same dilemma when we document our own family histories.

Future dates

Our presentation on 20th September will be Jamie Lees giving her talk called "Left at the Wellgate".

She recently had a museum exhibit in Dundee on this and is also publishing a book about it. It's the story of her abandoned ancestor and how she traced a family tree for her. It should be good!

ontario@anesfhs.org.uk Rod Coates (Co-organizer with Susan Brouwer and David Joiner)

Australia and New Zealand Group Report

1st March 2025

We had 21 participants from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Scotland. The topic for our meeting was sharing our favourite Scottish research resources.

Anne showed us LIBINDEX, the Moray Council site where she has obtained so much information on soldiers. The data are not limited to Moray. She also suggested that we search school records on Ancestry and look for siblings attending education. She highlighted how the soldier records often flagged children needing to be provided for after their father had died. Peter, John and Jocelyn talked about Scotland's People and the gems found within the Kirk Session records, which are now searchable. Dale talked about illegitimacy and again drew on the Kirk Session records.

A number of us, including David and Di, love the National Library of Scotland's map pages and in particular the opportunity to match topographic and general maps and to trace farms from the mid-1800s by using overlays. Ross highlighted the wide variety of written and pictorial resources available on Electric Scotland. Jen talked about the value of Liz Hore's Seamen's crewlists 1851. It lists men on vessels registered in the ports of Scotland South-West, Highlands & Islands, and is available on CD in many Family History Society centres.

We discussed newspapers. Di likes FindMyPast newspapers, while Anne provided hints on accessing Fold 3 information in Ancestry, even if you're not a paid subscriber. We also discussed accessing newspapers via the National Library of Australia, but you will need to register and obtain a library card.

Pam, our New Zealand attendee, extolled the value gained from joining local history societies in the regions you're researching. Sharon suggested that those who have ancestors with the Mutch surname search <https://mutches.com/>. The Guild of One-Name Studies has details of other sites focusing on single surnames. Mary Jo suggested searching Ellis Island database (for those Scots who went to the United States) and also finds the German Genealogy group website a valuable resource for those who emigrated to the USA.

Robin explained how the Internet Archive is a collection of old books no longer under copyright and thus available to use freely. The books have been digitised, including hundreds on Aberdeenshire. Another great source is the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives where you might find reference to your ancestor taking on an apprentice or applying for an educational bursary.

Jocelyn talked about the valuable work done by Scottish Indexes. Their website has lots of indexes, information, and information on their conferences. Check their website for dates of future events. Several people thought these conferences were well worth attending. They are accessible via Zoom or Facebook. Rod had good success by just doing a general Google search for the names of the ships his ancestors travelled on and struck lucky by finding diaries from those on board.

John Urie, a font of Society information, provided an extensive list of sources and suggestions, listed below. These included the records of Marischal College which are available in the University of Aberdeen's Special Collections. The records include rolls, correspondence, and other documents. John suggested using a free week with FindMyPast or the British Newspaper Archive (same database, different search engine) to search newspapers for your ancestors.

You can also contact ANESFHS direct by posting queries on the Members' Forum page of the Society website <https://www.anesfhs.org.uk/members-forum>. The website has a fabulous collection of records under the DataBank tab; and the Information tab has links to a huge number of useful sites, including many of the ones listed below. You can also ask

questions on the Society's Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/anesfhs>. All in all, it was a very informative session.

australia@anesfhs.org.uk

Robin Price

Resource list

LIBINDEX: <https://libindx.moray.gov.uk/mainmenu.asp>

Scotland's People: <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>

Electric Scotland: <https://electricScotland.com/>

National Library of Scotland Maps: <https://maps.nls.uk/>

The Guild of One-Name Studies: <https://one-name.org/>

Ellis Island database: <https://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/passenger-ship-search/>

Scottish Indexes: <https://www.scottishindexes.com/>

German genealogy: <https://germangenealogygroup.com/>

Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/>

Aberdeen City and Shire Archives: <https://archives.aberdeencity.gov.uk/CalmView>

Ministers of religion: <https://archive.org/details/fastiecclesiaesc07scot>

Glass parish: <https://glasscommunityassociation.org/glass-remembered-glass-baptisms/>

Kinnethmont families: <http://www.kinnethmont.co.uk/>

Men aged 16 or above in Aberdeen, 1759: <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-12/1759-List-of-men-aged-16-or-above-in-Aberdeen.pdf>

Marischal College archive:

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/museums/exhibitions/marischal-museum.php>

Next meeting: "The Tragedies and Triumphs of the South Pacific Seafarers", 7th June at 4:00 pm AEST. Vernon Knight will speak on his fascinating Aberdonian ancestors who were seafarers in the South Pacific.

—oOo—

Graham Robertson's Mystery Object Quiz

Do you know what this curious object might be for? Some of your North-East ancestors may have used it daily ... but what was it for?

The answer appears overleaf.



—oOo—

EVENTS AND NOTICES

The Ontario Genealogical Society: an exciting offer

Late in 2024, we received a generous offer from Christine Woodcock and The Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) for ANESFHS to become an honorary life member of OGS. We were delighted to take up the invitation, which means that members and visitors to our King Street Family History Research Centre can log into the member area of the OGS website to access resources and links stored there. OGS is the main genealogy society for Ontario and acts as a portal providing entry to many local societies.

They have also offered discounted membership rates to any of our Society members who might be interested. They have provided a code for a discount of \$9 CAD (£5) on their standard membership, which normally costs \$63 CAD (equivalent to around £35 at current rates), bringing the subscription to approximately £30. We trust that our digital subscription of only £18 (approximately \$33 CAD) will prove attractive to OGS members.

Coral Harkies, OGS Administrative Coordinator, has provided further information about the Society.

The Ontario Genealogical Society

The Ontario Genealogical Society was founded in 1961 with the mission to encourage, bring together and assist those interested in the pursuit of family history and to preserve our Ontario genealogical heritage. We are Canada's largest member-supported genealogical organisation, an Ontario-registered non-profit corporation and a registered Canadian charity.



We have 30 Branches representing different counties and districts across Ontario and six Special Interest Groups (SIGs): British Home Children, Eastern European, Scottish, Irish, Irish-Palatine and Genetic Genealogy. Our Branches and SIGs are managed by dedicated groups of volunteers who can provide local knowledge and understanding about the genealogical resources in their area. Most have members-only sections on their websites, with access to local records; many also send out newsletters with local content, and host in-person and online educational sessions on a variety of topics.

The society also hosts monthly webinars and topic-based series through the year. We have a growing list of family histories, indexes and documents to assist researchers. Our marketplace has a large selection of items for sale, including digital downloads of reference books, cemetery transcriptions, and local indexes. The Ontario Name Index (TONI) is an ever-growing index to help you locate local records from across the province. Our quarterly journal, *Families*, includes articles relating to family-history research submitted by members and non-members. We advocate for the preservation of Ontario heritage, most recently dealing with closure of local land-registry offices.

Our members-only resources include webinars, Families Archive, and other records, which allow members to access them at their leisure from anywhere in the world. Many of our branches also post their events in their members-only section. All of these can help you learn about and explore your families' connections to Ontario and Canada. Please visit our website <https://ogs.on.ca/> or email us at info@ogs.on.ca for more information.

—oOo—

Graham Robertson's Mystery Object Quiz: Answer

Goose-Wing Knitting Sheath

If your 19th-century ancestor was very industrious, they could knit as they stood or walked about, using a goose-wing sheath like this. The “wing” was tucked under a belt and the knitting needle receiving the stitches was inserted into the end of the shaft. According to some sources, these items were first used in the early 17th century and they were sometimes made as a gift by a would-be suitor for the young lady of his choice.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Port Erroll Fisher Families – Further Identifications

We received an update from Mike Shepherd about the photo of the fisher family at Port Erroll that generated so much interest. See Journal 173 (February 2025), pp. 19–22.

I finally talked to Ann Findlay about the Cruden Bay photo, and I've annotated it with her comments about who's who. Knowing that her grandmother was born in 1891, and that she looks about 6 or 7 in the photo, dates the photo to around 1897 or 1898 (1897 the year *Dracula* was published!). She thinks that the pump in the photo may still be in its original place in Harbour Street.

Ann has had a detailed family tree done and she has lent it to me for copying. I'll have a look through it for more details that might help Carol Korn. Interestingly, she is related to the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg, whose ancestors came from Buchan.



HARBOUR STREET, PORT ERROLL (opposite Ward Street)

1897 or 1898

Mike Shepherd



Charles

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Allanachs and Browns of Craigengower, Glenbuchat

The name Craigengower used by Alan Johnston to describe where Jean Gauld married Alexander Brown in 1820 (Journal 170, May 2024, pp. 38–41) made me sit up, as my family lived there a little later. I have walked among the ruins there and it is high up on Glenkindie Hill, a windswept, fairly desolate place, although sheltered from the worst of the westerlies. It was always the poorest part of the Glenkindie estate. The only thing in its favour was that it was well connected by four tracks going to different parts of the area.

As far as I can make out, my ancestor James Allanach was ousted from the well-sited Delrossac farmtoun in Strathdon when it was probably re-organised in the mid-1820s and he was re-settled in Craigengower. Craigengower supported several families, as there were at least two buildings to the south and another a little further to the north which was a single building of three rooms, one of which was probably for the animals. My family lived in one of the south buildings and rented six acres.



A Glenbuchat cottage

Photo: A. Johnston

Jean Gauld Brown and her husband will have done much better at Beltimb, being close to the valley bottom and its road.

David Allanach

Alexander Mitchell Kellas

After researching our family for many years, my sister and I are finally planning a visit to Scotland later this year. While researching, we came across a relative whose achievements astonished us – the mountaineer Alexander Mitchell Kellas. In fact, my first Journal contribution in 2004 (“Alexander Mitchell Kellas”, Journal 93, November 2004, pp. 22–24) was about his life. His biography *Prelude to Everest* was published in 2011 and we have found his story documented more widely on the internet since then.

He is really just an interesting side line of our tree, but is related to us through both his parents. His parents were James Fowler Kellas and Mary Mitchell (daughter of Jane Findlay). James’s cousin Alexander Kellas was married to Mary’s aunt, Ann Findlay – this couple were our great-great-grandparents. In fact, there were four Kellas/Findlay marriages over three generations.

We will be visiting the places where our direct ancestors lived – Strathdon, Persley, Woodside and Bucksburn – and will definitely take the opportunity to visit you in King Street as well. However, we were wondering if any member knows whether there is a plaque or memorial of any kind, somewhere in Aberdeen, celebrating Alexander Mitchell Kellas – if so, we would like to visit there as well. He was buried in Tibet on an Everest expedition, so there will not be a gravestone in Aberdeen.

We may have to satisfy ourselves with walking down Regent Quay, where he was born. According to his biography, he was born at No. 28, but the street has been renumbered and it is now No. 49 (luckily the author put that in, or we would have been looking for the wrong building!). It appears that the historic harbour area would be good to visit in any case. His father was the superintendent of the Mercantile Marine Board, and they lived above his offices.

Jeanette Dall

ARTICLES

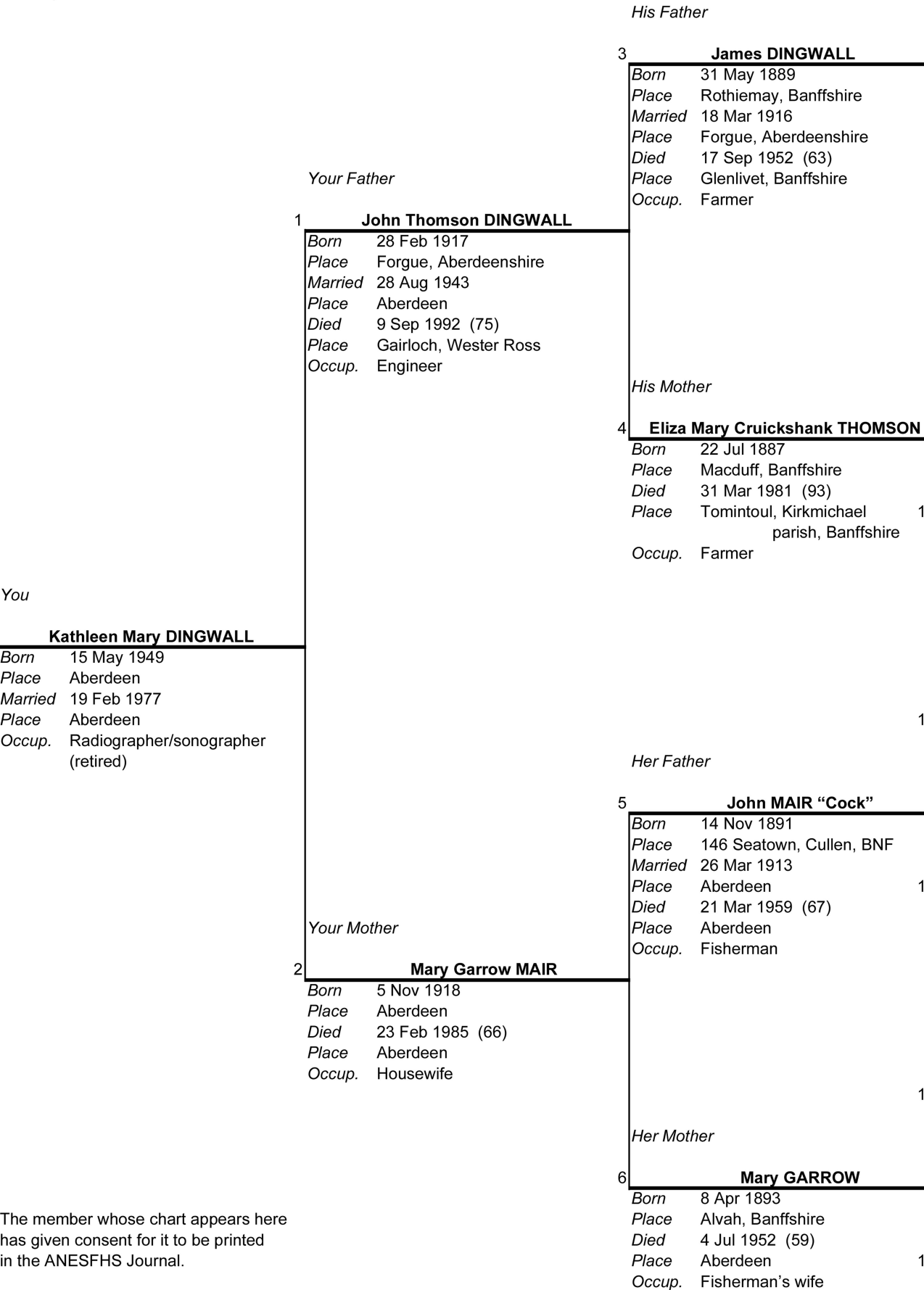
Travelling on the SS *Norwood*

In his talk on 15th February, Joe McLeod mentioned that travelling by boat was very common and, in his view, much the most comfortable way for our ancestors to get about. Edinburgh member, Sally Low, picked up this point: “Joe did mention, right at the start, that people took a boat to travel round Scotland, rather than a bus. Are there any records to show the various costs of travel in the late 1800s and through to 1920?” Joe rose to the challenge, providing a selection of adverts for the SS *Norwood*, the main focus of his talk. The *Norwood* was operated by the Aberdeen, Newcastle and Hull Steam Company and offered weekly trips north, great play being made of the fact the vessel was lit by electricity and offered “splendid passenger accommodation”. One advert noted the sea and river trip from Hull to Aberdeen would take 20 hours but only 12 hours from Newcastle to Aberdeen. A first-class cabin from Newcastle to Aberdeen cost 15 shillings, while the second-class option cost 9 shillings. One 1895 passenger wrote an enthusiastic account of their trip.

Having heard such glowing accounts of this new steamer, I determined to take a trip by her and see for myself if reports were true, and accordingly booked my passage to leave Prince's Dock [Hull] Saturday last, 10 p.m. Owing to the general exodus of traffic from the Town Docks on a Saturday night, it was 11.30 before we steamed clear of Humber Dock Basin. We were soon passing Paull light, and the passengers, of whom there was a good number, retired to their respective berths, which are fitted up with every comfort and convenience. The following morning some of the passengers were astir by 3 a.m. to see the sun rise, and a beautiful sight it was. At 6 a.m. the steward served coffee, and at 8 o'clock the breakfast bell rang a welcome sound to all, and the good things provided soon disappeared. During the morning, the weather being beautifully fine, the passengers were all on deck, whilst Captain Michie (who lost no opportunity to add to the comfort of his passengers), with his officers, tried to make the voyage as interesting as possible, pointing out everything likely to make the time pass pleasantly. One o'clock the bell again rang, summoning all to dinner, which was served up in good style, leaving nothing to be desired. After this important duty was attended to, some had a “nap”, others again resorted to the pleasant saloon deck, to get all the benefit that could be obtained from the sea breezes. Five o'clock arrived which brought that soothing beverage – tea. Before this meal was over Girdlestone [Girdleness] Lighthouse tower was reported seen ahead, and shortly after 6 p.m. we steamed into the

Record of Ancestors

Member No.: 5023
Chart updated: 6 Nov 2024



7	James DINGWALL	<i>Born</i>	29 Nov 1846	15	Alexander DINGWALL		James D. / Margaret PIRIE	
		<i>Place</i>	Cairnhill, Rothiemay, BNF		<i>Born</i>	29 Aug 1809	<i>Place</i>	Marnoch, Banffshire
		<i>Married</i>	13 Dec 1888		<i>Married</i>	8 Mar 1840	<i>Place</i>	Marnoch, Banffshire
		<i>Place</i>	Rothiemay, Banffshire		<i>Died</i>	2 Apr 1870 (60)	<i>Place</i>	Rothiemay, Banffshire
8	Helen RIDDOCH	<i>Died</i>	26 Apr 1935 (88)	16	Janet (Jessie) McWILLIAM		John M./Isobel ROBERTSON	
		<i>Place</i>	Cairnhill, Rothiemay, BNF		<i>Born</i>	16 Sep 1815	<i>Place</i>	Huntly, Aberdeenshire
		<i>Occup.</i>	Farmer		<i>Died</i>	28 Dec 1868 (53)	<i>Place</i>	Rothiemay, Banffshire
							<i>Occup.</i>	Farmer's wife
9	James THOMSON	<i>Born</i>	6 May 1862	17	Alexander RIDDOCH		Alexr R. / Jane/Jean TAYLOR	
		<i>Place</i>	Fowlwood, Grange, Banffshire		<i>Born</i>	29 Apr 1826	<i>Place</i>	Deskford, Banffshire
		<i>Died</i>	2 Oct 1937 (75)		<i>Married</i>	13 Mar 1856	<i>Place</i>	Grange, Banffshire
		<i>Place</i>	Cairnhill, Rothiemay, BNF		<i>Died</i>	12 Jan 1901 (74)	<i>Place</i>	Rothiemay, Banffshire
0	Ann MITCHELL	<i>Occup.</i>	Farmer's wife	18	Jane RIDDOCH		Joseph R./Helen SHEPHERD	
					<i>Born</i>	22 Feb 1837	<i>Place</i>	Grange, Banffshire
					<i>Died</i>	25 Apr 1928 (91)	<i>Place</i>	Aberdeen
							<i>Occup.</i>	
1	John MAIR "Cock"			19	William THOMSON			
					<i>Born</i>		<i>Place</i>	
					<i>Married</i>		<i>Place</i>	
					<i>Died</i>		<i>Place</i>	
2	Margaret GARDINER			20	Ann HORN		George H. / Helen SCOTT	
		<i>Born</i>	15 May 1866		<i>Born</i>	3 Oct 1830	<i>Place</i>	Kinnoir, Huntly, ABD
		<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire		<i>Died</i>	19 Sep 1882 (51)	<i>Place</i>	Aberchirder, Banffshire
		<i>Died</i>	20 Aug 1945 (79)				<i>Occup.</i>	
3	John Lindsay GARROW	<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire	21	James MITCHELL		Robt M. / Margt PATERSON	
		<i>Occup.</i>	Fisherman		<i>Born</i>	13 Feb 1811	<i>Place</i>	Macduff, Banffshire
					<i>Married</i>	7 Jan 1838	<i>Place</i>	Speymouth, Moray
					<i>Died</i>	1 Feb 1888 (76)	<i>Place</i>	New Byth, King Edward, ABD
4	Mary Anderson MARTIN or SCOTT			22	Jane BARRON		John B. / Jean CHAPMAN	
		<i>Born</i>	26 Nov 1869		<i>Born</i>	1818	<i>Place</i>	Speymouth, Moray
		<i>Place</i>	Forglen, Banffshire		<i>Died</i>	1 Dec 1858 (40)	<i>Place</i>	New Byth, King Edward, ABD
		<i>Died</i>	19 Jan 1934 (64)				<i>Occup.</i>	Blacksmith's wife
5	Mary Ann MARTIN	<i>Place</i>	Croesus, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa	23	James MAIR "Cok"		John M. "Cok"/Janet WOOD	
					<i>Born</i>	18 Jun 1825	<i>Place</i>	Portknockie, Rathven, BNF
					<i>Married</i>	3 Oct 1848	<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire
					<i>Died</i>	3 Dec 1894 (69)	<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire
6	Barbara DUNCAN			24	Ann FALCONER		George F. / Janet WILSON	
					<i>Born</i>	23 Feb 1830	<i>Place</i>	Portknockie, Rathven, BNF
					<i>Died</i>	26 Jan 1910 (79)	<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire
							<i>Occup.</i>	
7	Barbara DUNCAN			25	Alexander GARDINER		Alexr G. / Margaret PIRIE	
					<i>Born</i>	1 Nov 1840	<i>Place</i>	Seatown, Cullen, Banffshire
					<i>Married</i>	26 Feb 1865	<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire
					<i>Died</i>	4 Feb 1919 (78)	<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire
8	Barbara DUNCAN			26	Helen MAIR "Shavie"		Jas M. 'Sh.'/C. WOOD 'Doo'	
					<i>Born</i>	5 Sep 1843	<i>Place</i>	Portknockie, Rathven, BNF
					<i>Died</i>	30 Apr 1923 (79)	<i>Place</i>	Cullen, Banffshire
							<i>Occup.</i>	
9	Barbara DUNCAN			27	John GARROW		Wm G. / Jane KEITH	
					<i>Born</i>	13 Jan 1850	<i>Place</i>	Mortlach, Banffshire
					<i>Married</i>		<i>Place</i>	
					<i>Died</i>	29 Apr 1928 (78)	<i>Place</i>	Aberdeen
0	Barbara DUNCAN			28	Isabella LINDSAY		John L. / Margt COUTTS	
					<i>Born</i>	12 Feb 1855	<i>Place</i>	Ellon, Aberdeenshire
					<i>Died</i>	27 Oct 1901 (46)	<i>Place</i>	Aberdeen
							<i>Occup.</i>	
1	Barbara DUNCAN			29				
					<i>Born</i>		<i>Place</i>	
					<i>Married</i>		<i>Place</i>	
					<i>Died</i>		<i>Place</i>	
2	Barbara DUNCAN			30	Mary Ann MARTIN		Barbara DUNCAN	
					<i>Born</i>	abt 1850	<i>Place</i>	Fyvie, Aberdeenshire
					<i>Died</i>		<i>Place</i>	
							<i>Occup.</i>	

harbour of the granite city, after a most enjoyable passage of 19 hours. The *Norwood* fully bears out her reputation of being a splendid sea vessel, her owners having spared no expense in fitting her out in a most luxurious style, with every comfort for both steerage and saloon passengers. Tuesday evening 7 p.m., found us again upon the good ship *Norwood* and at 8.30 we left the harbour. At 11 a.m., Wednesday, we passed Flamborough Head, which in the sunshine looked grand; at 1.15 p.m. we passed in at Spurn, and at 2.50 we were off Victoria Pier, thus making the voyage from Aberdeen to Hull in just over 18 hours.

It definitely sounds more luxurious than a bus outing, Sally! Joe says he has “hundreds” of other such newspaper clippings for the *Norwood*, covering the period from its launch in 1895 till the 1910s, including adverts for golfing holidays to “Cruden Bay, the Golfer’s Paradise”, where a five-day trip, costing less than £3, included food, fares (both rail and sea), hotel accommodation and the use of the golf course. However, he has one account that may go down less well if he ever shares it in his talks: “It is a story that, during a very bad storm, some livestock were injured, so they chucked five horses overboard. Different days!”

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Journal Team

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Charles Massie (SS *Norwood*) and John Massie (SS *Ballochbuie*)

One of those listed as a crew member lost when the *SS Norwood* was sunk (Journal 173, February 2025, pp. 22–23) was Charles Massie, a donkeyman. He is commemorated on a gravestone in the Kirkyard of St Machar’s Cathedral; and the inscription is of interest, as it tells of another tragedy which was to follow just three months later. It reads:



“Erected by Mary Massie in memory of her dearly beloved husband Charles Massie who was lost at sea by the foundering of the *SS Norwood*, Aberdeen 11th Feb. 1917, aged 53 years. Also their dearly beloved family, John who was lost at sea by the foundering of the *SS Ballochbuie*, Aberdeen 20th April 1917 aged 22 years, Mary Ann died 18th March 1902, aged 3 years, and Hugh died 9th May 1906, aged 9 years.” The *Ballochbuie*, heading for Sunderland, was sunk off the Isle of May, by a single torpedo, fired from the German U-Boat UC-41 under the command of Kapitänleutnant Kurt Bernis. The torpedo caused catastrophic damage and the *Ballochbuie* sank almost immediately.

In August 1917, UC-41 was itself sunk with all hands, as a result of an onboard explosion while laying mines off the Firth of Tay. See www.scottishshipwrecks.com/ballochbuie/.

Charles Massie’s grave at St Machar’s Cathedral. Photo: S. Riddell

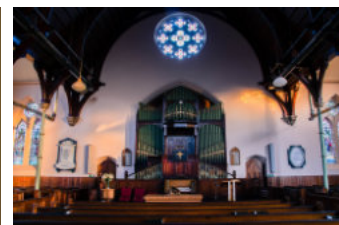
Sandy Riddell, Archivist, St Machar’s Cathedral

For more information on Kurt Bernis, see <https://uboa.net/wwi/men/commanders/25.html>.

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Peter Tocher and the Auchterless Church Memorial Windows

In 1904 and 1906, impressive stained-glass windows were erected on either side of the pulpit of Auchterless Church. The inscription in the first window on the left reads: “This window is placed here by Peter Tocher to the Glory of God in affectionate remembrance of his father & mother, Charles & Margaret Tocher, & his brothers, Alexander & William



*The interior of
Auchterless Church*

*The Tocher Memorial
Windows.*

Photos: J. Morris

Tocher. Nov 1904.” The inscription in the window on the right reads: “To the Glory of God this window is erected by Caroline Elizabeth Bletsoe in memory of her beloved Husband Peter Tocher, who died 31st January 1905 aged 60 years”. *The Aberdeen Journal* (17th July 1906, p. 6) reported that the first window represents “our Lord in the attitude of blessing little children, the foreground being occupied by a mother bringing her little ones to the Saviour”, while the second, “consisting of two lights illustrating ‘The Widow’s Mite’, depicts, in a striking manner, the well-known incident”. Both windows were erected by Messrs James Garvie and Sons, decorators, Aberdeen (British Newspaper Archive).

Peter Tocher (1845–1905) was the second child of Charles Tocher (1817–1902) and Margaret Simpson (1821–73) and was born and raised in the Kirktown of Auchterless, Aberdeenshire, where Charles was a master saddler. Charles lived his whole life in Auchterless – he was the sixth of 12 children of Alexander Tocher (1781–1864) and Jane Duffus (1784–1866) who farmed a croft directly behind the Kirkyard, across the ford, or crossing, of the River Ythan. Generally known as “Mill of Seggat”, the croft was variously named “Kirktownford” and “Chapel Croft”. The 1832 baptism of my 2g-grandfather William Tocher, youngest brother of Charles, reads: “Alex. Tocher at Kirktownford* had a son by his wife Jane Duffus ... named William”. Inserted at the bottom of the page was “*Mill of Seggat”.

According to his obituary, Charles Tocher was a well-known and respected harness-maker in the district:

He received little training to the business, and his start was a venture, but as time went on his meagre training proved no hindrance to his success. He soon acquired and maintained a reputation for harness-making that excelled all his compeers in the North. His reputation as a collar-maker in particular spread far and wide, and orders followed accordingly. His business grew rapidly, requiring hands to keep pace with orders. Himself a steady, determined and expeditious workman, orders were thrown off in quick succession. The principal parts of the collars were executed chiefly by his own hands. Seated near the door, his well-known figure was frequently to be seen in active operation at the heavy work of stuffing the collar rings and bodies, with beads of perspiration dropping from his face. Nothing was permitted to pass through his hands that was not thoroughly done, and he was a highly respected and trustworthy

tradesman. (*Banffshire Journal, Aberdeenshire Mail, Moray, Nairn & Inverness Review and Northern Farmer*, 28th January 1902, p. 6.)

In 1842, Charles married Margaret Simpson, the daughter of Peter Simpson and Elspet Fordyce, who farmed at Forgue; Margaret had been working as a servant at Newmill, Auchterless, before they married. They raised a family of ten, three sons and seven daughters, and lived on a small croft in the Kirktown by the saddlery. Margaret died from uterine cancer, aged 51 years in 1873, leaving one child still under ten.

Following a fire in the shop, Charles placed a notice in the *Banffshire Journal and General Advertiser* (25th March 1879, p. 1), expressing his gratitude to his insurance company and to locals who helped extinguish the fire. By this time, he was living next door, at a cottage he had built named “Rosemount”, financed by his son Peter who was by then living in London. It was much larger than their previous accommodation, having six rooms with one or more windows, compared to three in the croft cottage. Several years ago, members of the Shinie family, who purchased “Rosemount” in 1960, sent me a transcript of the deeds that commenced with the disposition, or transfer, of the “feu” plot of land, making it freehold, rather than leasehold: “On 18th September 1876: Feu disposition granted by Garden Alexander Duff of Hatton Castle to Peter Tocher – 57¾ poles thereby of land, to erect and complete a house of stone and lime and properly slated, by Whitsun, 1877.”

The saddlery was eventually passed on to Charles’s son-in-law George Thain, second husband of Charles and Margaret’s daughter Jessie; George ran the saddlery and shop until his death in 1896. Another daughter, Bathia, was widowed in 1892, with two young children to raise. She became Charles’s housekeeper, caring for him until his death at 84 on 23rd January 1902, the cause of death being ascribed to “old age”. Charles and Margaret are buried together at Auchterless Churchyard.



George Thain's saddlery, Auchterless

Photo: J. Morris



Rosemount Cottage, Auchterless

Photo: J. Morris

Peter Tocher was an ambitious young man and, after serving an apprenticeship with Aberdeen woollen manufacturers Messr Forbes (obituary, *Aberdeen Journal*, 4th February 1905, p. 4), he went to London where he decided the meat trade was more to his liking. After learning the trade with Messrs Frost & Co., of Newgate Street Meat Market, he established his own business selling meat by commission. My late great-uncle John Tocher of Turriff wrote, in a letter to my grandmother in the 1970s, that Peter was “a founder member of the Smithfield Meat Market in London”, and by this he probably meant that he was one of the first occupants of the new Smithfield Market buildings that opened in 1868, also known as the Metropolitan Meat Market and the London Central Meat Market. We know from Peter’s marriage record to Elizabeth McBain in Montrose, Angus, that he was already living in London and working as a meat salesman in 1868, so it’s quite feasible that he was one of the original 162 shop owners at the market. In 1871, he occupied no. 4, Avenue A, and in 1881, as he became more successful, he was able to purchase the more advantageously located

meat shop in the Central Avenue, at no. 45 (*Banffshire Journal, Aberdeenshire Mail, Moray, Nairn & Inverness Review and Northern Farmer*, 24th May 1881, p. 6).

Peter and Elizabeth had no children of their own, but took Peter's youngest sister Bella to raise in Lambeth after the death of their mother in 1873. Sadly, Elizabeth died, aged 31, in 1878, leaving Bella motherless again. Peter married Caroline Bletsoe in 1884 and, after Bella completed her schooling at a ladies' boarding school, she became a companion to Caroline until her marriage to Harley Street physician, John Harold, in 1893 (1889 will of Peter Tocher).

After working as a saddler like his father, initially near his home parish, then further afield in Nairn, Peter's elder brother Alexander Simpson Tocher (1843–88) took up work as a "commission agent" in Ythan Wells, before moving briefly to Milton, Lanark, where he worked as a railway clerk. However, by 1874, he and his wife and seven children had moved to Lewisham, Kent, before finally settling in Lambeth, and Alexander purchased the business at 49, Avenue B, Central Meat Market (*Post Office London Directory*, available through Ancestry). His wife, Isabel Archibald, died at the age of 37 in 1882 and he married again, just over a year later, to Sarah Hardstone. He suffered an untimely death in 1888, aged 45, from exhaustion, following a 14-hour operation to remove an abscess on his neck.

Their younger brother, William Tocher (1859–91), initially worked as a farm servant in Forgue, before he moved to London to work for Peter as a journeyman meat salesman for several years. Sadly, he developed the kidney disease nephritis, succumbing to the illness at the young age of 32 in 1891 at Peter's home; he never married and had no known children.

Following Alexander's death, Peter took over the ownership of no. 49, as well as continuing with his own shop nearby at no. 45. Financial prosperity had allowed him to move to a somewhat luxurious residence at 2 Cornwall Terrace, overlooking Regent's Park, employing four servants in the 1891 census. He also owned a cottage in Montrose (for the use of his first wife's family), "Rosemount" in Auchterless in which his father lived, and he shared the tenancy of "Hatton Manor", also known as "Manor Place of Hatton", Auchterless, with his brother-in-law, Gordon Moggach, husband of his sister Margaret (Maggie), who occupied the property.

Peter developed heart disease. His winter haven became St Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex, where he died on 31st January 1905, aged 60 years. According to an obituary in the *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review* (10th February 1905, p. 5), quoting a London notice, Peter Tocher "became known the kingdom over as the largest dealer in Scotch meat in the market, and amongst the graziers of his native Scotland, with whom he was ever a popular favourite, his death will be much deplored". *The Banffshire Journal, Aberdeenshire Mail, Moray, Nairn & Inverness Review and Northern Farmer*, 7th February 1905, p. 5, reported that:

He became a member of the Worshipful Company of Butchers in 1875. For many years he dealt entirely in cattle bred and fed in the North of Scotland, and thus his business had a high reputation. At the London Christmas Market, for instance, he was always an extensive purchaser, and for many years he was one of the principal dealers in the best class of Scots cattle, while his business relations all over the North were, as a consequence, very extensive. He took a keen interest in the agricultural welfare of his native district, giving, for instance, prizes at local cattle shows, while he was the donor



Peter Tocher, the Auchterless entrepreneur and benefactor

Photo: Tocher/Morris family

of a handsome piece of plate to the Royal Northern Agricultural Society for competitions at their summer shows ... At the conclusion of his discourse in the Parish Church, Auchterless, on Sunday last, Rev. Alex A. Duncan, B.D., referred in appropriate terms to the death of Mr Peter Tocher, London. Mr Tocher, he said, had manifested, even during his most trying and painful illness, a very genuine and affectionate interest in his native parish. The members of Auchterless Parish Church had, and would continue to possess, a very beautiful token of his filial devotion, and of his love for the sanctuary, in the memorial window which bears his name. Mr Tocher's desire to see it had not been fulfilled, but he was able to express his satisfaction at the completion of the work, and his joy at the pleasure it now afforded those who worshipped in that house, which was hallowed by the memory of many dear departed.

Peter was buried at Hampstead Cemetery in Camden, but his company Peter Tocher Ltd continued to trade after his death, and the "Peter Tocher" brand still exists today under the ownership of J. F. Edwards, Smithfield (<https://www.jfedwards.uk.com/about-us/peter-tocher/>).

The photograph of Peter Tocher is currently in the possession of my cousin Bruce Tocher, and his sister Liz kindly borrowed it to get it professionally copied for me. It was sent to my grandmother in New Zealand in the early 1970s from her brother-in-law, John Tocher in Turriff – we knew nothing about him! In all my years of Tocher research, I've never come across anyone else who has a copy, even within the line of descendants of Charles Tocher, so I'm pleased to send it back to Scotland and place it with his story.

Janice Morris, Whanganui, New Zealand

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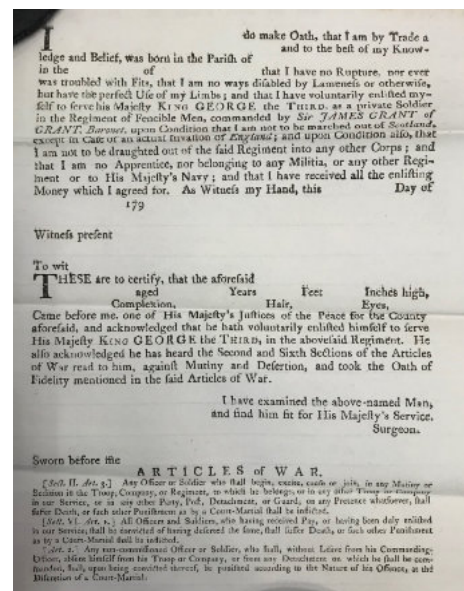
Fencible Regiments: the 18th-Century Home Guard

For a large part of the 18th century, Great Britain was tasked with defending itself, mainly from the French. Several times over the years, Regiments Fencible (derived from an older spelling of "defencible") were raised to protect Scotland against invasion: during the Seven Years War (1756–63), the American War of Independence (1775–83) and the French Revolution (1789–99). Fencibles also protected Scotland from internal discontent during the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745. Although treated in many ways like the line regiments, the Fencibles were only intended as short-service soldiers, confined to protecting Scotland. France declared war against Britain in 1793, after the execution of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. So, as invasion was a distinct possibility, Fencible Regiments were raised once again.

During the period 1793–94, Fencibles were formed by the Lord Lieutenants of each county, reporting to the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, and authorised by Prime Minister William Pitt. A Fencible unit consisted of volunteers aged between 15 and 60. These men were not conscripted and were usually untrained men of good character who benefited from gaining experience as short-term military men at a time when work was scarce. They were scouted and signed up by recruiters and, after a medical examination, they were each given a bounty of 3 guineas plus a wage. They had to purchase their own uniforms – some didn't realise this and drank away their bounty or deserted, but most were loyal to king and country. They drilled, marched and took part in military exercises with guns and bayonets two or three times a week but saw little real action. They were prepared to protect the coastlines, if and when necessary, and were formed to hold the fort at home, freeing up the line regiments to serve abroad. Some later went on to join regular regiments and found their experience to be an advantage. I have found two ancestors who served in the Fencibles.

The 1st Grant/Strathspey Fencibles was raised early in 1793 by Sir James Grant, the Chief of Clan Grant and Lord Lieutenant of Inverness. The following year, my 3g-uncle, William

Ogilvie, aged 24, joined as an Ensign (junior officer) through family connections to the Ogilvie and Grant families. Born in Gamrie parish in 1769, William had political aspirations and wrote a report on repelling an invasion of Britain. While the regiment was garrisoned at Dumfries in 1795, a mutiny broke out in response to rumours that the men were about to be sent over the border or abroad. This was not part of the Fencibles agreement they had signed (see image right). Events got out of hand and some men were imprisoned. An uprising followed. Five men were tried at Musselburgh and two, Charles Mackintosh and Alexander Fraser, were ordered to be shot at Gullane Links, where the entire Regiment was assembled to watch. While I have found mention of Uncle William in several records, it is unknown if he had any direct involvement in the unrest. There were no further acts of insubordination and the Regiment was disbanded in 1799. William had transferred out of the Fencibles to the 11th Regiment of foot in 1796, and two years later the whole battalion was imprisoned at Ostend, Belgium where they took part in an abortive raid on the port. They had been sent there to destroy gun boats destined for a planned invasion of Great Britain. That part of the mission was successful but, due to bad weather, the men were initially unable to disembark their ships and were later captured by the French. Soon after his release, William joined the 52nd Regiment as a Lieutenant before accepting a position at the War Office in London. He had a wife and children by then.



My 3g-grandfather, John Birnie, born about 1776 in Pitsligo parish, joined the Aberdeen (Princess of Wales) Fencibles in 1799. This group was deployed to assist in quelling an insurrection in Ireland after the Irish rebellion of 1798 against the British Crown. Records are limited but I know John left the Fencibles in 1803 to join the 93rd Highland Regiment of Foot under the command of General William Wemyss of the Sutherland family. John moved with the group to Enniskillen, Ireland, in 1804, before transferring to the Cape of Good Hope. Garrisoned there until about 1814, he returned to Ireland. By about 1818 he had met and married an Irish lady – my 3g-grandmother who came from Tipperary. They had two sons while in Ireland before John was discharged after 22 years, as being supernumerary to the Regiment. He received a pension for long service and his discharge documents were stamped by the Royal Kilmainham Hospital, Dublin. This was similar to being recorded as a Chelsea Pensioner. The Royal Kilmainham remains a grand building which is now the Irish Museum of Modern Art. John and his family returned to the Pitsligo area and had two more children. He worked as a crofter but he had likely died by 1841, as he is not recorded in the census with his wife, Eleanor, and their children.

I am grateful to Rory M. Butcher, PhD student, Leeds University, for his vast knowledge of Fencible Regiments and Georgian Armies, and to Seafeld Estates for permission to print the image, now held in NRS, Edinburgh.

Resources:

National Archives, Kew

National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh

British Newspaper Archive

Scotland's People

Fraser, G. M. (2003) *The Strathspey Mutineers: A History of the 1st Highland Fencible Regiment 1793–1799* (Librario Publishing)

Phillipson, A. (2003) "The Raid on Ostend 1798", *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 81, 31–46: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44230901>

Sonia Packer

A Life of Lies? Peter Laing, the Elgin Centenarian

Peter Laing worked as a carter around Elgin in Moray in the 1880s. He was a genial and shrewd old man who lodged in poor conditions in a lane off the High Street: a smoky room strewn with broken items, working gear, tattered clothes and sacks for blankets. His wife had died decades before, and two of his three children had left the area. As people believed he was over a century old, interest in him grew, leading to interviews and wider attention. His prospects began to change once he received offers of assistance, but he also found himself accused of fraud or, at best, being confused.

The first long interview appeared in the *Moray & Nairn Express* in 1885, covering Peter's early memories. *Evening Gazette* articles followed in March 1887, written by Mr A. G. Wilkes, and later republished in pamphlets. Wilkes was a credulous interviewer and failed to ask very challenging questions – but he did convey fascinating accounts of life in Moray at the turn of the century, including crime and punishment, and customs of the farming folk long past. Wilkes also advocated for assistance on Peter's behalf.



Peter Laing, as portrayed in the newspaper stories

A subscription fund reached £24 (about £1,600 today) by 1889. Money came in from all over the country, from persons low and high in status. Tailors outfitted him with new clothing, farmers offered free food, and music was written in his honour. His fireplace was repaired, and a banquet was held by Elgin town council. One year later, he received another new suit, a portrait of himself, another public banquet and a further £12.

Following the publication in 1889 of a brief biography in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Elgin Courant* expanded on it to claim “[he comes] of a family celebrated for longevity. His father died when 109 years of age, and his great-grandfather, who fought under the standard of the Duke of Cumberland at the Battle of Culloden, died at the remarkable age of 135”. The *Moray & Nairn Express* supported this. In January 1889, reporting on the presumed

“103rd” birthday, it said: “Peter Laing was born at Craigmill, Dallas, in 1785 ... There was no doubt, however, as to the genuineness of his age, for Peter had never varied one year in stating it.”

Wilkes asked the registrar at Edinburgh to search records in Dallas and adjoining parishes across the period 1765 to 1805 for evidence of Peter's birth but “no record was, however, found”. He did locate a 93-year-old woman, who had sat beside Peter at a wedding when she was young and had been sure that he was a decade older than her. When asked about this, Peter unsurprisingly claimed to remember every detail of the event. Believing this to be solid proof of the alleged age, Wilkes jubilantly challenged anyone to prove him wrong. Unfortunately for him, that proof soon came in the form of a dogged investigation by Cullen schoolmaster and antiquarian William Cramond, who opined that “Peter is an interesting old man, but he is not a centenarian”.

To back this up, Cramond personally looked over the parish registers of both Dallas and Rafford and found what the registrar years earlier had missed: the birth notice of Peter's father William, an illegitimate son of James Laing, miller at Craigmill of Dallas, by Jean Purse in 1777. James was already married to Margaret Lee. This meant that, at the time Peter alleged he was born, his father would have been only eight years old. Worse still, Cramond found a birth and baptism notice for Peter in 1801 in Forres, as well as the marriage of his parents William Laing and Elizabeth Murray in 1800, in nearby Kinloss. In other conversations, Peter had confirmed that these were his parents' names.

Cramond also found the births and baptisms of several siblings and corresponded with one of Peter's nieces (Elizabeth Bell, illegitimate daughter of his brother Alexander), who was certain Peter had been born in Kinloss. She said that during the time of his first marriage, Peter's father, William, worked for a Mr Mutterer before moving to Bognie in Rafford. Mr Mutterer was also named as William's employer on Alexander's baptism.

In response, Peter maintained that he was not the man born in 1801 – but even some of his most ardent supporters started to express doubt. The *Weekly Scotsman* reluctantly accepted Cramond's findings, writing “the Cullen sapper and miner has fulfilled his threat, as we more than feared he would. He has bored his way to the root of the Laing Myth, and its very fragments are blown into space.” By 1892, Cramond had become known as the man “who slew Peter Laing” according to the *Peterhead Sentinel*, and the man who “robbed Elgin of the notoriety of housing a centenarian” as the *National Observer* put it. When Peter died in 1890, the 10ft-high memorial obelisk, which was purchased with the subscription fund and erected at Elgin Cathedral, stated only that he died at a great age, not giving a birth year.

Not everyone had been swayed, however. Peter's son registered his father's age at death as 106. The *Elgin Courant* produced testimonials from several witnesses who were certain that Peter had at least reached his century, although these were second-hand accounts from old men who had died 20 to 30 years previously, sent in by an unidentified correspondent. The most detailed of these was attributed to David Cruickshank (1786–1871), once a neighbour at Granary, Rafford. It is tempting to consider that the submitter could have been Mr Wilkes himself.

The witnesses on Peter's 1801 baptism record were Peter Lee and Peter Murray. Then a servant in Burgie, Rafford, Peter Murray was my 5g-grandfather – born in 1775 in Dallas – and he also happened to be Peter Laing's maternal uncle. Peter Murray's daughter, Jean Murray (b.c. 1813), married Peter Laing, her cousin, in 1844.

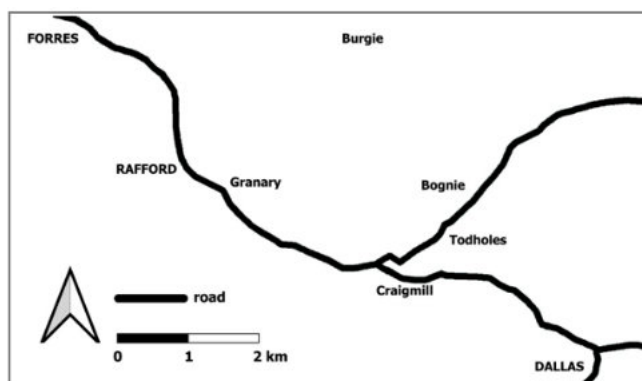
How can family links be proven when so many of the key people died before statutory registration? My 5g-grandmother Ann Fraser died in Elgin in 1849. She had been severely injured on 16th March. The *Elgin Courant* relates that “Ann Fraser or Murray, wife of Peter Murray, labourer, Bishopmill, was returning home after witnessing the death of her daughter in Elgin”. Ann's death is recorded in the Old Parish Register (OPR) on 18th March, and on the same page is Jean's entry: “Died here, aged 36 years, Jane Murray, spouse of Peter Laing, carrier in Elgin”. Elizabeth and her spouse William Laing were witnesses to Murray family baptisms, giving their residence as Forres. Their headstone has the wrong date of death for Elizabeth. The OPR burial record, giving her surnames as Murray and Laing, has the correct one (1832).

It's worthwhile to look further at Peter Laing's family. Starting from Craigmill of Dallas and neighbouring Todholes, places grandfather James Laing lived and worked, father William went on to work in Kinloss, while his wife and children were in Forres. They later moved to Rafford; and, after being widowed, William married Jane Masson there in 1833. Peter mentioned that he and his father stayed for some time at the farm of Bognewaich (or Bognavaich), “mair than seiventy years syne”. I have been unable to locate this precisely, but it appears to be associated with Bognie next to Todholes. William's youngest children by Jane Masson were born at Bognie in 1837 and Bognavaich in 1840. Elizabeth Bell believed Bognie “was the only farm [William] ever tenanted”. William and Jean moved into Forres town between 1840 and 1841.

Peter Laing's earliest memories seemed to be of Craigmill with his grandparents, and he may have lived there in infancy. He remembered that “my gran' father was killed when he wis 45 years aul' ... my father carriet on baith the mill and the fairm o' Todhole ... [until] he gied it up at the end o' the lease. Aifter this, baith my father an' mysel' fee'd as fairm servants roon' about Kinloss.” This closely matches the family's earliest known movements,

though it likely mixes up some of Peter's family history with memories, as he claimed to have witnessed his grandfather's death. According to the Laing headstone, James died in 1794 (though it has already been shown to have at least one inaccurate date). Bear in mind Peter knew of the stone and used it as proof linking to his age, but its validity – like so much else – comes down to his word or memory alone.

The *Forres, Elgin & Nairn Gazette* stated Cramond had “made some progress with the examination of the books of the proprietors of Craigmill, Todholes, &c, to ascertain who were tenants of those farms in certain years”. He found no record of William Laing having been a tenant at either, supporting Elizabeth's memories of events. William had likely lived there with his family, but he was not responsible for the farm and mill in the late 1700s and early 1800s.



Map: M. Davidson

By 1841 Peter had moved to Elgin, where he was recorded as 35 years old and worked as a labourer. For this census, enumerators were meant to round down adult ages to the nearest five years, so Peter likely thought his age was between 36 and 39, which was very close to accurate. One thing to keep in mind is that people often didn't know exactly when they were born or their current age. We see this in the age of Peter's father William, who was born in 1777 and died in 1861 aged 84, yet was 94 on his death record and 108 or 109 according to local stories. The “135-year-old” great-grandfather probably died in his 80s or 90s. From the 1851 census onwards, Peter's age vastly increased. They all give birth years between 1785 and 1790 based on the information he supplied.

There is an advantage to appearing to be old and well-travelled in life in that it commands respect and attention – the “wisdom of old age” – exemplified, ironically, by the credulous focus on the memories of the elderly witnesses. This ignores the increased confusion and unreliability which others might say go hand-in-hand with advanced age. The only reliable witness was Peter's niece, who was in her early 60s.

It seems likely that Peter was caught by his own lie, or ego, in his fondness for stories and showmanship. In enhancing the ages of his forebears, he may have added years to himself to make the tales more exciting – and, having told them to so many people, he had to stay the course. Another benefit would have been the respect that would have enhanced his business and reputation. For example, in November 1887, Peter was called to court as an expert witness on old boundary changes. Although permitted to sit due to his age, he found it necessary to stand up to give his answers “full justice”.

The reason for the age enhancement might never be known. Peter himself might not have remembered after so long, but it was to his advantage. Peter was referred to in an *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* column in July 1939 that discussed “cripples, rascals, and beggars”: “Aw hae min' o' Peter, 'at wisna a hunner year aul' ava. Fat wis his story?” What indeed?

Matthew Davidson

—oOo—

Searching for the Family of Barbara Watt, around 1795

My forebear Alexander Forbes of Auchernach, Strathdon, was born on 9th April 1787 with a hare lip. An oil painting shows him with a moustache which somewhat disguised the affliction. Alexander fell in love with Barbara Watt, a lady's maid, who became pregnant. Alexander's family packed him off to India, probably because his half-brother General Nathaniel Forbes held a position within the East India Company.

The family story is that Alexander returned to Scotland just in time to place an Indian silk scarf in Barbara's coffin. She died shortly after giving birth to a daughter, Sophia, around 1820 in Old Machar, Aberdeen. This place of birth came from the 1855 birth record of Sophia's daughter, Mary Forbes Thomson, and from censuses. It might suggest that Barbara's family also came from there. That birth record is so important in providing information about Sophia's age and I am very grateful to Matthew Davidson for finding that.

Alexander saw to it that Sophia had a good education. Despite this, the family story is, that at age 16, she ran off with a man 14 years her senior, said to be a circus performer! This was Robert Thomson, born in 1806 at Kincardine O'Neil, to parents John Thomson and Margaret Esson. The surname is sometimes spelled Thompson.

In 1881 they farmed four acres at Auchterless. Older relatives believe Sophia and Robert were financed by the family to live at a distance from Forbes territory! The couple had 12 children and Robert would have been 62 years old when their final child was born. I feel that they would have had a good life. Robert died at Small Burn Cottage, Auchterless, aged 84 in 1889, and Sophia died at Dee View, Raemoir Road, Banchory, aged 97 in 1915.

One of their children was David Forbes Thomson born on 14th December 1850 at Kincardine O'Neil. (He died on 17th November 1918, at Banchory.) He worked as a flesher (butcher) in Inverurie and met my great-grandmother Isabella Christie (née Bain), a widow who ran the Black Bull Inn there. Before this marriage, Isabella was a cook at Balmoral and also did most of the cooking at the Inn, which is probably how they met.

Isabella and David became engaged, but David had a change of heart and decided to marry someone else, but not before Isabella was expecting my grandmother, Isabella Thomson, something of a scandal in the small town.



*Alexander Forbes
1787–1864
Auchernach, Strathdon*

David and his wife soon had a son named Robert and the two children regarded themselves as full brother and sister. Studio photos were taken of them together as children and as adults, and they kept in touch all their lives, even after my grandmother came to live in Australia in 1908. We all referred to Robert as "Uncle Bob". I have a photo of my grandmother, Isabella Thomson, and her half-brother, Robert, from around 1898. Robert Thomson had just returned from a trip to Canada in this sepia photo (see overleaf). He bought Isabella the silver bracelets she is wearing. They are now in the possession of my granddaughter, and still have the Canadian coin attached to hold them together.

I would like to learn more about Barbara Watt's family. Can anyone help with her parentage, death date and her daughter Sophia's birth date? Advice would be appreciated: being 90 years old and living in Australia makes things a bit difficult!

The Forbes connection: Alexander's brothers, Nathaniel and George

Nathaniel Forbes obtained a furlough to return to Scotland in 1808 and undertook several house purchases and building projects here over the next few decades. It seems that Nathaniel did return to India, but his wife Sophia (who was also his cousin) came back in 1818, around the same time as Alexander's return and the birth of Sophia. I have several pages about Nathaniel Forbes as he was quite a character. His wife Sophia took up a court case versus his illegitimate children over his will – the children won. My late second cousin



Lieutenant George Forbes



*General Nathaniel Forbes
1766–1831*

Left: Half-siblings, Robert and Isabella Thomson

All images: J. Steele

Dr Elizabeth (Leebie) Dickie had his writing desk and other furniture as well as the three miniature paintings shown here.

Sophia Forbes was fond of the motherless baby: she gave her money and also left her £1,000 in her will. Perhaps she got on well with Alexander, since he named the baby Sophia.

Lieutenant George Forbes (brother to Nathaniel) was born in 1768 but died at sea, aged 26, returning to Britain from India.

Joan Steele, Australia

—oOo—

Jean Thom's Sampler: From Kittybrewster to Australia

Jean Thom was baptised at Kittybrewster in Aberdeen, Scotland, on 1st March 1761. Her parents were William Thom and Jean Moir. She sewed this 515mm x 200mm sampler in 1774 in Aberdeen, only four years after Captain James Cook sailed to Australia. Nearly a century later it was taken there by Jean's great-niece, Catherine Isabella Marshall, to remind her of her Scottish roots. It has since passed down through the family.

The larger letters on the sampler, WT and IM, are her parents' initials. Jean used a 24-letter alphabet which uses I instead of J and also V instead of U. The year it was sewn, 1774, is just above them and her own name is at the bottom.

Jean married George Stronach, an Aberdeen blacksmith, at Old Machar parish in 1791 and had a son named William Stronach in 1795. Jean died in 1804 at Kittybrewster and was buried in Old Machar. She had five brothers including Gilbert (1769–1849), a farmer who married Jean Wilson (b. 1788), daughter of John Wilson and Jane Lowes, in 1832 at Echt, Aberdeenshire. They had two children together prior to the marriage: Jane Thom (b. 1821) and William Fowler Thom (1823–77).

Jane Thom married John Marshall (1816–62), a shipping broker, in 1845 at St Nicholas Kirk in Aberdeen. Their children included Catherine Isabella Marshall (b. 1849) and William Gilbert Marshall (b. 1856).

William Fowler Thom studied at Aberdeen Grammar School before going on to King's College in Old Aberdeen where, after graduating with an M.A. around 1846, he went to assist his ailing father on the family farm at Essie in St Fergus parish. Gilbert Thom died on 11th February 1849, aged 80, and is buried in the old walled cemetery of St Fergus. William

later studied for the Church and gained his licence to preach on 13th June 1866 at Glasgow. He was a member of the Free Church of Scotland, which was formed after the Disruption of 1843.

At the request of Rev. James Cameron M.A. D.D., one of his contemporaries from school and university, William migrated to Australia to practise with the newly united Presbyterian Church. Rev. James Cameron had been sent to recruit ministers by the Rev. John Dunmore Lang, head of the Presbyterian Church in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW). William Thom arrived in Sydney, aboard the 1174-ton Aberdeen-built sailing ship *Nineveh*, from London on 4th July 1867. Travelling with him was his orphaned niece, Catherine Isabella Marshall, who brought the sampler with her.

Rev. William Thom became the 61st minister on the rolls of the Presbyterian Church of NSW. While awaiting his appointment to a parish, he was a temporary minister in the Penrith district of NSW, in 1868. It was here that he met his future wife, Clarinda Sarah (Menie) Parkes, the first surviving daughter of the then Colonial Secretary of NSW (and later five times Premier of NSW) Sir Henry Parkes and his first wife Clarinda Varney.

In early 1869, William accepted a posting to the Twofold Bay Parish. This included the towns of Bega, Pambula, and Eden, across NSW to the Victorian border; a huge territory to cover by horse and buggy.

William (aged 45) and Clarinda Sarah (aged 29) were married by the Rev. Dr James Cameron at the Parkes family home, Werrington, at South Creek, on 30th March 1869. They moved to Pambula and took William's niece, Catherine (then aged 20), to live with them. William and Clarinda Sarah had two sons born there before they left Pambula in January 1872 for Melbourne, where a few months later their third son was born at Ascot Vale.

In December 1873, Rev. William Thom was inducted into the Pastorate of St Paul's Ballan, becoming the second minister of the church. The Thom family, including Catherine Marshall, was the first one to live in the new manse at the rear of the church.

William Thom died on 28th July 1877 due to injuries from a buggy accident. His widow Clarinda Sarah and family returned to NSW to live at her house, Carlyle, in Mount Victoria, so that she could be near her parents.



At Carlyle, on 22nd September 1885, Catherine Marshall married Edward Bucknall. Her brother, William G. Marshall, witnessed the wedding. Edward and Catherine lived at Rodborough, near Majorca in Victoria, where they had one child, Elsie (Elizabeth) Grace Bucknall born on 18th January 1887. Edward Bucknall died at Rodborough in 1899, after which Catherine and Elsie moved to NSW.

Elsie married William Henry Alfred Taylor at Woollahra, Sydney, NSW, in 1916. They had six sons, the youngest being Adrian (1929–2019), but later divorced and Elsie married Harald Kristian Tofft in 1936. They had a daughter who remembered the sampler being held by drawing pins on the mantelpiece of her grandmother Catherine's open fireplace. The pinholes are evident in the top corners. Catherine died at Glenhaven, NSW, on 7th July 1939. Her daughter Elsie, who had inherited the sampler, also died there on 27th June 1954. When Adrian moved from Sydney to Rylstone in 1994, he generously offered me the sampler. I am the grandson of William Stronach Thom. Both Adrian and I are 3g-nephews of Jean Thom.



The flax material has darkened over time and the red and green natural dyes have faded. I had it treated by International Conservation in Sydney, NSW, who washed it gently for several weeks with distilled water to remove the accumulated smoke and dust. To maintain its shape, when mounted vertically in the frame, they sewed it to a section of acid-free cotton backing and it is mounted behind UV glass to further protect it. I found the stitching on the back to be very neat and as this would be covered when framed, I had it

photographed and mounted on the back of the frame. Hopefully, all of these measures will conserve it for another 250 years.

I have often wondered if the III after Jean's name is a clue that William (m. 1758) is the son of another Jean Thom, his wife Jean Moir having become Jean Thom II. More research for another day!

Ian Thom, Australia

—oOo—

Nigerian DNA in Scotland

It was exciting to discover that my wife has 2% Nigerian DNA from her father, Roderick Stevenson. He was Scottish from both his parents, so where could it have come from? But it was not a complete surprise. His and his mother's complexions were so dark that a romantic ancestral story about a washed-ashore Spanish Armada sailor had been invented to explain them. The DNA test blew this out of the water, and the more likely origin is, sadly, the slave trade.

Roderick's mother, Leah (1871–1947), said that she could pass as ethnic Middle-East or Jewish, whichever suited – a useful attribute as head of a large school for girls in London's East End. She was an amazing woman who played bridge, drank whisky and smoked black Turkish cigarettes. My wife loved her. She had a gramophone and played dance records of the 1920s. In contrast, her tall, fair and blue-eyed husband, Frederick Stevenson, was a more austere Scot from Aberdeen. He was estranged from his family because they disapproved of his marriage and my wife believed his sisters held racist views. Did they suspect that Leah was not purely Scottish, and could I find out through genealogy?

Leah was the daughter of David Justice and Helen Dingwall. David was a marine engineer who moved from Glasgow to London around 1866 to be near the docks. The Justice family came from Perth where James Justice, b.c. 1750, was a blacksmith in Tibbermore. The Dingwall family was also in Perth, where Roderick Dingwall was a carpenter working on the Palace of Scone. He was born 1773 in Kiltarlity, near the town of Dingwall. Nothing seemed unusual in their family trees or in the branch lines except that Roderick Dingwall ventured to Glasgow to marry Ann Bain in 1802. Glasgow was involved with trade to the West Indies, so was Ann Bain the bearer of the DNA? I could not determine her origin or her life before marriage.

I checked my wife's DNA matches for those who were descendants of the Justice or Dingwall lines. There were seven such matches covering all the known lines of descent, including from the suspect Helen Bain. None of them had any West African DNA. Given this, we wondered if Leah was illegitimate, particularly since her father was a sailor and shipping records showed he was in Quebec around the time Leah was conceived. However, DNA matches to my wife from descendants of David's siblings proved that he was the father after all.



Jean Stevenson with her father Roderick and grandparents, Leah and Frederick. Who has the Nigerian DNA? Photo: G. Mann

Another approach was to search my wife's DNA matches for those that did have West African DNA, resulting in a large list mostly based in the USA. None of those contacted had any known Scottish connection; and the closest match, a second cousin once removed with 1% West African and 86% Scottish or Irish DNA, notified us that she was adopted.

The matter rested for over a year before, unexpectedly, the close DNA match contacted me once again. She had discovered her birth grandparents' names were Dorothy Lillian Wright and Albert Alderson: gorgeous names for a genealogist to work with. Albert was a soldier from Darlington, and he married Dorothy in Hove in 1940. Tracing Dorothy's ancestors, I enjoyed the lovely moment in research when you come across a name that you recognise. Dorothy's mother was Ada Gertrude, maiden name Stevenson! She was a sister of Leah's husband, the pale-complexioned grandfather Frederick. The Nigerian DNA came from him, not from the dark and lovely Leah.

What a joke that it was the disapproving and suspected racist sisters who carried the West African genes. Sadly, my wife died before Ruby's letter arrived.

Other Stevenson descendants are now known who carry West African DNA. They are all descended from Alexander Stevenson (1810–48) and his wife Jane Ronald (1809–78). Jane was the daughter of James Ronald, a perfumer and hairdresser of Montrose. Alexander Stevenson is my long-standing "brick wall". He first appears in the records in 1833 aged 23, when he advertised an organ for sale in the *Aberdeen Journal*. The following year he married Jane Ronald at St Andrew's, Aberdeen, and moved to London to work for an organ company. He died before the 1851 census.

Perhaps this will help me find his origin, since descendants of his siblings should also carry West African DNA. He named one child George Ogilvy, so it is likely he or his wife had Ogilvy ancestors. Are there any others who have found they have this DNA percentage? Please get in touch, especially if you have Stevenson, Ogilvy or Ronald ancestors. You can view my work on the various Scottish families: <https://www.mygenealogies.co.uk/>

But why were Leah and her son so darkly complexioned? It seems after all that it is not so uncommon in Scottish people – and neither is the story of a Spanish sailor to account for it. My wife inherited no Mediterranean content from her father’s DNA, which was almost entirely Scottish or Irish, with just a few percent from England and Finland – and Nigeria.

Dr Geoffrey Mann

—oOo—

The Forbes Family of Rettie and Cowhythe but not Blairshinnoch

We are long overdue in printing this account from Bill Lemmon, who valiantly undertook to make some local enquiries to follow up a Brick Wall question from an Australian member about Forbes family connections. See “Finding the Family at Blairshinnoch Farm, Banffshire”, Journal 169 (February 2024), pp. 34–38.

At last I had a wee news wi’ Jimmy Forbes at Rettie fairm, Saturday past, on the way to the Banffshire Field Club meeting at the Portsoy Bothy. Jimmy was not really familiar with his family’s forebears more than those shown on the inscriptions (shown opposite) that form part of the impressive memorial at Portsoy cemetery. This is a large double plot, a sign perhaps of a spare bob or two.

He reckoned that prior to this, the Forbeses were at the Engie braes area [Enzie]. This is, of course, the area between Buckie and Keith.

Rettie was at one time the largest “place” on the Seafeld Estate and is still the largest original single place: other places that are now large had further ground added to them. Of local ken it was a seven-pair place [*Ed.: i.e. had seven pairs of horses to work the farm*]. It also had the largest house on the estate, built, he says, in 1903.

The Blairshinnoch article recorded that Jimmy’s grandfather, Alexander Forbes, was one of three brothers who all farmed separately in the Boyndie area (pronounced “Beenie” locally). Alexander Forbes farmed Rettie; Charles Forbes farmed Dallachy and Henry Newman Forbes farmed Cowhythe.

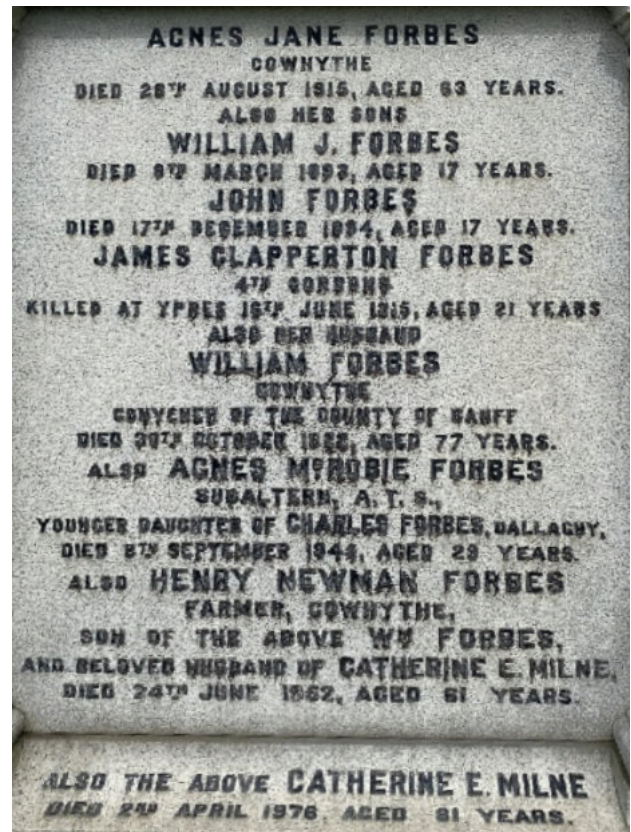
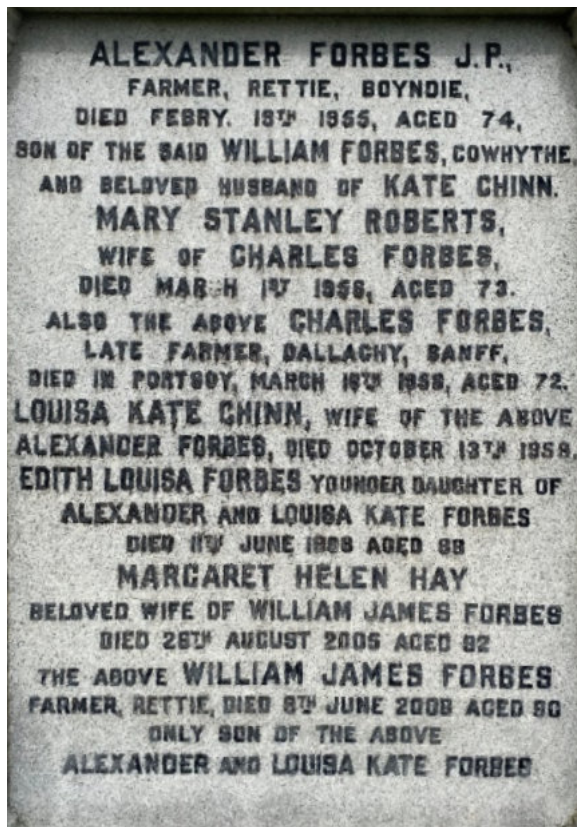
Alexander Forbes and his wife, Louisa Kate Chinn, had three children. Jimmy’s father William James Forbes, who married Margaret Helen Hay, was their only son. Their daughters were Edith Louisa Forbes, who died unmarried in 1998 aged 88, and Agnes Forbes who married David Bannerman. The couple moved to Leicester, where Agnes died in 2008.

Another brother, George Forbes, lived in Stromeferry, on the west coast, and died in the mid-1970s. It was reckoned he had moved there for the fresher air for his health, there having been some frailty in the family. Jimmy recalls stories that two other children died at birth, and that John Forbes and William Forbes, recorded on the gravestone as dying at the age of 17, one in 1893 and the other in 1894, had both died of TB.

I showed Jimmy the wedding photograph from Journal 169, p. 34, which was thought to show Forbes family members from Jimmy’s neighbourhood, but he didn’t recognise anyone in it to be his predecessors. The photograph was not taken at Rettie or Cowhythe he says, based on the building style.

However, back to Rettie, Jimmy went on to say he can recall there having been working there a grieve, foreman, seven horsemen, three cattlemen, a shepherd and a groom. The groom’s duties, as well as being groom to the farmer, included going round as “stagger”, that is, taking their stallion to mate with mares on other farms.

No doubt, too, because of the size of the place there were “orra” loons and perhaps milkmaids and casuals too. In the big hoose there was a back stairs that led up to two bedrooms which were the “staff quarters”.



In another recent chat with Jimmy Forbes, he said there had been a blacksmith workshop in an extension at the rear of the original Rettie farmhouse. This has recently been incorporated into the house area, with part of the original fire hearth being retained, together with the original fire bellows.

It is unknown if the blacksmith on the place was employed full-time there or if outside work was taken on too. At that time, he would have been able to make, repair and maintain farm equipment, over and above having to shoe the horses at least twice a year. If there were foals on the place, I have heard of the blacksmith having to “work them in” too.

Jimmy has given his time and information, along with permission to print the aerial photographs of Rettie (below), which show the main house, and also the impressive scale of the present farm steadings and other houses attached to the “place”.

Incidentally there is a ballad called “The Hairst o’ Rettie” that is well worth a listen to. It is available on YouTube, probably best sung by the late Joe Aitken fae Kirrie [Kirriemuir].

Joe Aitken: https://youtu.be/btAoi1nt_hg

John Strachan/Hamish Henderson “Hairst o Rettie”:
<https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/20456?l=en>



A postscript from Bill: I was following up on some “lost bodies” in my maternal Brodie clan at the Family History Centre in King Street recently, with the guidance of Stuart Petrie. While we were speaking of Brodie/Stevensons in the Culvie area, I was approached by Sonia Packer, another volunteer helper there, who said that she too was aware of that family. It transpired that Sonia and I are second cousins twice removed, descended from the same Alexander Stevenson (1828–1913) each through separate daughters of his.

Okay, so there’s nothing special about that except he was a blacksmith to trade, as was his brother George, and their father before them, John Stevenson (1791–1832). He may have worked elsewhere but is registered as having died at Rettie, the very place we have just been discussing in relation to Forbes families.

The census records for 1841 and 1851 show George Stevenson (1819–86) in Rettie, along with his mother Ann (1795–1878) and siblings.

Alexander (1828–1913), seemingly an apprentice blacksmith to his elder brother, moved to Culvie, Marnoch with his wife Isabel Moir (1828–95), from whom we are descended.

Who would have thought that Mary Mead’s photograph (see right) and the subsequent visit to Jimmy Forbes would lead to a chance meeting with Sonia and the discovery of a family connection?



Bill Lemmon

Ed: These sorts of coincidences are just what makes family-history research so rewarding. Another good reason to get involved with your Family History Society!

—oOo—

Finding and Using Records of Inheritance

Once you have exhausted every BMD record and every Census, where next? The answer is probably Records of Inheritance. There is a great deal of genealogical and family history in wills, testaments, inventories, retours and other old documents. But often, there isn’t as much information as you might think. Finding these resources isn’t difficult, but their interpretation might be.

Is the property Moveable? Or Real?

First, Scots law (up to the 1860s) considered property to be in two categories for the purposes of inheritance:

- Moveable (money, furniture, farm animals etc.)
- Immoveable, Heritable or Real (land, buildings, houses etc.)

Moveable items

Only Moveables could be disposed of after death by a Testament, which may or may not contain a Will. A Testament without a Will is called a Testament Dative. It states where and when the person died, the items they left, in the form of an Inventar (inventory), and a final Confirmation clause naming the Executor and any Cautioner (pronounced *kay-shunner*). The Cautioner was someone who gave a bond, surety, or guarantee that everything would be carried out as directed. A Testament Testamentar has an extra clause – between the Inventar and the Confirmation – directing disposition of the “Deid’s Pairt”.

Moveable Estate is in three “pairs”. The settled Estate (after paying all bills and debts, gathering in anything owed etc.) was divided thus:

- The “Widow’s Pairt” or *jus relictæ* – at least one-third must go to the Relict (widow or widower).
- The “Bairns’ Pairt” or *legitimi* – at least a third must go to all the children jointly.
- The “Deid’s Pairt” or *legacie* – at most one-third can be directed at the deceased’s “will” (wishes).

Because these inheritances were automatic, it is not always guaranteed that the Relict or the Children will even be named – to the fury of the genealogist. With any luck, the Executor will be the Relict or the eldest child, say. But the Will component (if any) may name children, siblings, grandchildren and other relatives. Or, it might all be left to the Cats’ Home!

Heritable or immoveable property

So where did the farm/castle/house/lands go? Up until the 1860s, the Real, Immoveable or Heritable parts could not be included in a Testament or Will. In that case you will need to look for one of two things:

- A TDS (Trust, Disposition and Settlement) (often indexed with the Testaments at Scotland’s People but otherwise in Registers of Deeds somewhere).
- An entry in the *Retours of Services of Heirs* – the actual records of property inheritance. This only applies to “heritable possession” (so, not leases or rentals). Larger libraries and archives may have the original Volumes of the Retours. But they are hard to come by, so in 2012 I scanned them all, rearranged them for ease of consultation, and published them as three large tomes. I have donated a set to the ANESFHS Library where they can be consulted. Volume A has a Guide to their use. You can see them at <http://www.bruce-durie.co.uk/books.html> with a link to purchase.
- The Retours volumes also contain:
 - lists of quinquennial valuations of land
 - inquiries into matters of Tutorship (looking after the interests of minors)
 - inquiries into matters of Curatorship (looking after the interests of the infirm etc.)

Many of the manuscript documents are in older styles of handwriting. What happens if you can’t read the writing? There are two tricks here:

- Get a similar document from a later period with easier handwriting. The structure and even complete phrasings will be the same, allowing you to pick out relevant details and identify them in the older document.
- You will often find all the details you need in the Index entry on Scotland’s People and there is no need to download the actual document.

Finally, you may need to consult the original Charter through which the land etc. was granted. Good places to start are the catalogues of the National Records of Scotland, the National Register of Archives in Scotland or the Scottish Archive Network: <https://catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/>. And don’t ignore your local Archives – municipal and University.

Dr Bruce Durie

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Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives: Update on Move

As some of you may know, the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives (ACAA) are in the process of moving out of Old Aberdeen House (Dunbar Street) into their city-centre

Town House site, as the primary school which shares the building has been granted an expansion.

Both archive sites are closed to public access at the time of writing, and multi-stage preparations have been ongoing since the ACAA closed its doors in June 2024. These have included legacy accessioning tasks, appraisal, repackaging, and box labelling (for move control), all necessary for ensuring up-to-date collection information and putting a robust tracking system in place.



Among the appraised materials were, for example, hundreds of Aberdeen School Board letters and thousands of architectural plans. Materials have their conditions assessed to determine their suitability for transport and the need for wrapping or otherwise protecting those that are fragile (such as maps, oversized volumes and ledgers, or Second World War glass slides). Repackaging requires going into the storerooms with the appropriate personal protective equipment plus tools that may be needed, for instance, to extricate fragile documents from deteriorated binders. These are then re-bundled and put in new archival boxes, labelled, and returned to their original location. The tracking system required nearly 10,000 individual labels being typed out, printed, stuck onto boxes and cross-referenced against other listings.



While these efforts were all in progress, new records were still being added to the collection such as materials from the Rosehearty Harbour Board collected from Aberdeenshire's Local Studies Department. These arrived still in their original condition – bundled with string or butcher's twine and wrapped in brown paper – and all had to be checked, re-organised and re-packed.

The records started moving off site in November, and this work has been greatly assisted by volunteers. Many boxes have been transported out of the upstairs storerooms without the aid of a lift! Some records have been re-homed in a new storeroom in the Town House, which was completed in the early months of 2025.

As we write, the archives are expected to re-open on 29th April 2025. Updates can be found on the ACAA website at www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/archives. To book a research visit in advance, please email archives@aberdeencity.gov.uk. Please provide information about your research, references where possible (public catalogue is available to search at <https://archives.aberdeencity.gov.uk/CalmView/>) and an indication of the day and time you would like to make an appointment. More information can be found on their webpages: <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/libraries-and-archives/aberdeen-city-and-aberdeenshire-archives/visitor-information>.

If you want to make a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act for records held by the archive, or a Freedom of Information request, please contact the relevant council via:

Aberdeen City Council

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/access-information/get-access-your-information>

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/access-information/make-freedom-information-request>

Aberdeenshire Council

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/data/data-protection/your-rights/>

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/foi/>

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Matthew Davidson

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Maggie Law Maritime Museum

The Maggie Law Museum in Gourdon is a good partner outlet for the Society, specifically in promoting our publication *Gourdon: A brief history*. Recently they have donated us a large number of maps of the South Aberdeenshire area (to farm detail), some dating back to the 1700s. These are now in the safe hands of Stuart Petrie. As a thank you, we are pleased to share information about their summer opening.

In other Mearns news, *Laurencekirk: Days Gone By* is back on our shelves. First published in 2004, it records the personal memories and research information of Arthur Bruce, a native of Laurencekirk who lived all of his life there. Arthur was an elder of Laurencekirk Parish Church and the publication of the book was originally to raise funds for the Church. Such was the popularity of the book that it was subsequently re-printed.

A few copies are likely to make their way onto our shelves in the Research Centre in King Street and will be of interest if you have Mearns connections.



Maggie Law
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email: maggielawbookstore@gmail.com
see us on Google maps



Mearns folk will also love this stunning photo from the collection in our King Street Research Centre.

The postcard caption reads: "Preparing the Lines, Johnshaven".

Do you recognise any of the men in the picture? If so, we'd love to hear from you.

journal@anesfhs.org.uk

Image courtesy of
Aberdeen City
Libraries/The Silver City
Vault

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Volunteering Opportunities with ANESFHS

The Key Contacts list gives a flavour of the different activities carried out by the volunteers who run this Society.

If you have a few hours to spare, please consider joining one of our teams and lending a hand to keep the Society flourishing. If you are based in Aberdeen, we are always looking for folk to staff the Research Centre. If you live further afield, your nearest local area group will be glad of assistance to organise and publicise events.

As always, we welcome your articles for the Journal and would also be glad to have your help in sourcing and editing articles.

To enquire about volunteering with the Society, please email chairman@anesfhs.org.uk. Thank you!

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

Journal Submissions

Submissions to the Journal are always welcome. Please send text and images **separately** (not embedding images in a document), e-mailed to journal@anesfhs.org.uk or queries@anesfhs.org.uk

Prospective articles and other items should 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 **August 2025**. Last date for submissions is **10th July 2025**.

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 – as long as these are in files **separate** from the text.

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 www.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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Saturday morning by appointment: please telephone

ANESFHS Family-History Centre closures, 2025–26

Closed on local holidays: 21st April, 5th May, 14th July and 22nd September 2025

Closing at 4:00pm Friday 19th Dec. 2025; re-opening at 10:00am Monday, 5th Jan. 2026

See website for further details

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