

CENTRAL SCOTLAND

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Alloa Old Parish Church

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to anyone who subscribes to the aims of the Society. Current rates are:-

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Each paid-up member will receive two issues of the Journal each year. Meetings of the Society in October, November, April and May will be held in Bridge of Allan Parish Church Honeyman Hall at 2pm and December to March will be zoom meetings at 7pm.

Please see local press and the Society website (www.csfhs.org.uk) for details.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Contributions in the form of articles, news items, reports etc. are invited and should be sent to :

Central Scotland Family History Society
Newsletter, c/o Elsie Fraser, 17 Rylands
Avenue, Dunblane, FK15 0HH.

E-mail: newslettercsfhs@yahoo.co.uk

Copy for the next issue should be submitted by 20th August 2026.

HELP WANTED

This feature is designed to offer members the opportunity of assistance from other members of this or other Societies. Please submit any query briefly and clearly. Always quote your name and membership number. Please put names and places in **BLOCK CAPITALS**.

It will be appreciated that the Society cannot undertake to act as intermediary, and all subsequent correspondence must lie between individual members, although the editor will always be pleased to hear of any outcome

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CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS

It's winter time – a good time to be updating your family research, either by investigating new websites and new avenues of research, or trying to break down your brick walls. You may want to add more flesh to the bare bones of your tree, so you may find my article about the use of newspapers of interest for this.

Irish research has always been a mystery to me, so I recently attended a free talk online entitled 'Researching Ulster Ancestors after 1800'. The talk is now available to view on YouTube at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFVE9mHMwXk> You may not have ancestors from Ulster, but you may still find some useful information and websites about Irish research.

The committee is delighted to announce that the Society is about to embark on a transcription project. There is more information about it later in the journal. We will need volunteers to help with this – it is a project you can do at home, using the records on the Scotland's People website.

Our advice sessions at St Ninian's Library in Stirling have restarted, with a full house in February. However I only have 3 volunteers and myself, so I am looking for more local people to offer to volunteer. We meet on the first Thursday of each month (not July or August) from 10.00am to 12noon. The sessions are aimed at helping people get started on their research, so we introduce them to Scotland's People and Ancestry (the Library Edition, which they can access for free at any of the local libraries). As well as suggesting they register with Scotland's People, we encourage them to visit the ScotlandsPeople hub at Alloa. If you feel you could help with this, please contact me through the Society's website.

Our AGM will be in May as usual. For the past few years, this has been followed by a couple of short presentations from members about some interesting aspect of their family tree. If you would like to contribute to this please let me know, otherwise you may be stuck with one of mine yet again!! Our afternoon tea will follow – tickets will be available at the April meeting.

We have had some interesting talks this session and we thank our secretary Carol for organising them. But it is becoming more difficult to find appropriate speakers and topics, so if you know of anyone who might give us a relevant presentation, please get in touch and we can follow it up. Or if there is a topic you think we have not covered for a while, let us know, and we will see if we can trace a speaker.

Please remember - this is your Society and the journal is yours, not just the committee's. We would appreciate some input into future issues. Nowadays, not all our speakers are willing to have their talks recorded and published, so without them the journal would be very sparse. The next issue will be in the autumn with a deadline usually of mid-August. Please have a think about your own family tree and see if you have something which might be interesting, unusual, puzzling, hereditary..... Granted – a lot of us will have miners and farm workers as ancestors, but even they can make the news in later life.

In the meantime, I hope you find time to expand your family tree and discover some new ancestors, either through DNA contacts or by diligent researching.

With best wishes

Sandra

Central Scotland Family History Society Annual General Meeting
to be held on
Wednesday 13th May 2026 at 2pm at Bridge of Allan Church Hall

Agenda

- 1) Apologies
- 2) Minutes of AGM 2025
- 3) Matters arising from the Minutes
- 4) Chairman's report
- 5) Treasurer's report
- 6) Election of Office Bearers
- 7) A.O.B.

Minutes of Central Scotland Family History Society Annual General Meeting

held on 14th May 2025 at 2pm at Bridge of Allan Church Hall.

- 1) **Apologies:** Alva Harker
- 2) **Minutes of AGM 2024** previously issued were read and accepted. Adoption of minutes proposed by Margaret Turner seconded by Peter George.
- 3) **Matters arising from the minutes:** nil.

4) Chairman's report: 2023 - 2024

Here we are at the end of another interesting and successful session. We have had a wide range of talks both here at Bridge of Allan and during the winter months on Zoom. We have heard about local mining and shipbuilding industries; we've been given advice on how to make the best of use of the FamilySearch website and how to overcome brick walls - all to help with our own research; we've learned about the importance of guilds and trades and been told about the introduction of early passports, which might help us in our One Place Study. All talks were professionally presented, and I am sure have given much food for thought.

We hope our members are happy that we continue with the pattern of meetings which we have now set since Covid restrictions, as this seems to be the best all round answer. It is always good to see our members who live far away, as well

as our more local ones, at the winter Zoom talks. Attendance online averages about 35 at each meeting.

Our secretary, Carol, is working on the syllabus for next year, with a few speakers already booked, but we are always open to suggestions from members. Using Zoom opens up the possibility of speakers from anywhere in the world, though not everyone is comfortable doing a presentation on Zoom. So it is good to have the option of having talks here in person. If you have any thoughts for a speaker or topic, just let a committee member know, and we'll look into it.

At the beginning of 2025, we decided to pause our monthly advice sessions at St Ninian's Library in Stirling temporarily, due to varying factors. There seemed to be less interest from people keen to start researching their family history, and often people who had booked to attend, didn't turn up, when I had volunteers there ready to help. However, I have helped a couple of people these past two months on request. We will revisit this during the summer with the library staff and see if we can find a new way to continue.

Margaret and Elsie are responsible for the two journals during the year, so a huge thank you to them for their time and effort in transcribing the talks and preparing the journal for printing. I continue to produce the e-newsletter roughly every couple of months, when there is enough new and relevant information to pass on. Our thanks to anyone who has contributed to either of these publications.

In March a few of the committee manned our stall at the Lanarkshire Family History Society's History Fair, which was held in the Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life in Coatbridge. It was a chance to network with other family history societies and advertise our society to members of the public.

Finally, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for supporting the Society and we look forward to seeing you all again next session.

Good luck with your research and enjoy the summer.

Sandra M Reid

Chairperson

5) Treasurer's report:

I would first like to thank Jim Cram, our Independent Examiner, for his prompt examination of our accounts.

Unfortunately, we have made a loss this year of £142.82 but this is covered by our healthy bank balance.

Income – Subscriptions are down mainly due to last year being an anniversary of the introduction of our 3-year subscription, so is always higher that year. Gift Aid on our subscriptions is therefore also lower. Publication sales are now almost all digital downloads sent by email and are continuing to be steady sales.

Expenditure – All our costs continue to rise. We will keep an eye on the hall rental for the in-person meetings as the church has indicated that the price will rise again for next year. Some of our regular speakers are now looking for £50 or more for a talk, so we are working hard to try to find people who are happy with our £30 per talk. Postage costs were kept down by buying stamps in advance of the price rise. Our biggest price increase was the cost of our website as we had to move to a different company.

We are not going to increase subscription costs for next year, but this may have to be looked at the year after if we make another loss.

Margaret Turner, Treasurer.

Adoption of the report proposed by John Patrick, seconded by Sandra Muir

Election of Office Bearers:

John Patrick has intimated his wish to stand down from the committee. The Chairman thanked him for his contribution to the work of the Society.

It was agreed that we would elect the Office Bearers and Independent Examiner en bloc.

Chairman: Sandra Reid,

Vice-Chairman: vacant

Treasurer: Margaret Turner,

Secretary: Carol Sergeant,

Committee Members: Peter George, Alva Harker, John McCormack, Feona Mann,

Independent examiner: Jim Cram

Proposed by Elsie Fraser, seconded by Lindsay George.

A.O.B: Nil

It was noted that more speakers do not wish their talks to be transcribed for the Journal so Members were encouraged to send contributions.

Women at War

By Geoff Bailey

(talk brought forward from April 2025)

Photos from Creative Commons

The talk centres on Falkirk District during the Second World War. About 30 years ago, I visited people in their homes and interviewed them about what work they did during World War II.

At the time, women were expected to wear skirts. Women working at some of the local foundries during the War upset a lot of the local people because they wore trousers to and from work. Some women told me they had to wear skirts to go to work and change into their trousers there, just to avoid the comments. Very much different times.

Some of the women who were in the WAAFs based at Grangemouth had their accommodation at Polmont and they used to go in the evening to the Black Bull Pub. These were English women and at that time English women had no problem with going into a pub on their own, but Scottish women going in unescorted were deemed to be a certain type of woman and this scandalised the domino-playing old men. The publican had to provide them with a separate room of their own at the back of the pub just to keep everyone happy.

Women worked at Abbots Foundry on Bankside in Bainsford. They were assembling all sorts of engineering things for the army. Gasmasks arrived in 1939 in their cardboard containers. Very quickly it became apparent particularly to the young boys that these containers made great goalposts, but they would get soggy and disintegrate.

Women's roles were very much demarked at the beginning of the war, so you would expect them to be at home looking after the children and arranging things like street parties. The children from Brown Street in Camelon held their concerts in the local park. They were largely arranged by the children themselves but the mothers had to be there. They also held fund-raising parties and it was actually the children in Falkirk District who raised the money to buy Spitfires and not the adults. One day some children walked into the "Falkirk Herald" office and said they wanted to give their pocket money to buy a Spitfire and the guy behind the desk said it will take more of them if they wanted to buy a Spitfire. So they started a campaign fund at the "Falkirk Herald" and printed every week which children's groups had donated money. One of the things that children would do would be to line up "ship halfpennies" along the white line in the middle of the road and see how far they would stretch. At the end of the day, they would collect all the halfpennies and hand them in to the fund.

Every street in those days had someone who could play the accordion. Children, despite the rationing, were brought up much more healthily than after the war because the diet had to be balanced. You got free orange juice. You would

ensure the milk was still there, a certain amount of protein, a certain amount of fat. Very little obesity.

The people living in the Glasgow Buildings in Williamson Street were very regular in holding concerts and arranging community events. It was a tenement building and they all knew each other. Older children were holding concerts held in church halls. In Grangemouth they put on Gilbert & Sullivan shows, partly to raise money but also as part of the entertainments programme, because travel was discouraged during the war in order to keep transport free for military use. So there was a lot of home entertainment put on by the children.

There was also a campaign to Make Do and Mend, so you never threw anything away, you just patched it up. In those days it was cheaper to mend something than to replace it, unlike nowadays.

One woman I spoke to came from Blyth near Newcastle and she was living in Grangemouth at the time because that was where her husband was serving. The husband was a Dutch submariner. At the beginning of the war, the Dutch submarines escaped the German invasion and they were based in Blyth, but were serviced and maintained in Grangemouth. You could be based in Grangemouth for six months.

Most of the women were at home and their husbands were away at the war. What you didn't want to receive was a letter to say your husband had been taken prisoner by the Japanese or the Germans. What I didn't realise was that if your husband was taken prisoner, his pay stopped and so the wife didn't get her contribution. A lot of women had time on their hands and they might spend it working voluntarily in canteens in church halls and other places, providing tea and bacon butties etc. for the troops based in the area or for the patients at the base hospital over at Bellsdyke. The canteens, like the one in Laurieston, provided the basics – not just a good cup of tea and a sandwich or a biscuit but also a piano so they could have a singsong, as well as newspapers and writing paper so the soldiers could write home.

Some of the women who did work banded together. If you worked in Carron Ironworks, you voluntarily paid a halfpenny a week to a central fund and that money was put towards a party at the end of the month to which they invited ex-servicemen, injured servicemen and the wounded soldiers from the base hospital. They would invite them along and have a dance.

The women who worked on the buses, the conductresses, would also band together and they would buy gifts to hand over to the wounded soldiers or the people suffering from shellshock at the base hospital. This could be writing paper or chocolate or cigarettes or stuff like that.

Women did go into uniform in large numbers. There was a Laurieston group of the WVS (Women's Voluntary Service – they didn't become the WR(oyal)VS until after the war - and they were vital to the war effort, because they were raising funds to pay for the war. They would go round selling National Insurance stamps to the houses in the street and they also went door-to-door taking surveys on who had a

spare bedroom. After Dunkirk, we needed to house all the people coming over, including the soldiers who were returning. The evacuees from Glasgow and Edinburgh were billeted in spare bedrooms. The WVS were very prevalent at places like Larbert Railway Station because they would have had a canteen there. After Dunkirk, when the troops were coming over, they had to be sent north in order to provide them with accommodation. Some of the troops hadn't had anything to eat or drink since they landed at Dover and the women would push sandwiches through the windows when the trains stopped as well as cups of tea in enamel tin mugs. If the men hadn't finished with them, some of the women had to travel on the train to Stirling and collect the mugs, then travel back again. They were based at Larbert station throughout the war.

The war of course started on the 3rd of September 1939. Susan Fordham was on holiday at the time at her granny's home in Glasgow and she was sent back to Polmont the next day as they expected the German bombers to come over right away. She joined up and spent the war in Slough, cleaning out army tanks. She met her future husband while she was down in England. During the war, people met other people that they would never otherwise have come across.

There were WAAFs at the airfield in Grangemouth. There was a lot of clerical work, dealing with supplies as well as decoding. A lot of the messages that came in were in code. They refueled the aircraft, they checked the airframes for damage, they fixed the engines, as well as making lunch for those working there. Max Bygraves was based there at the time. A lot of the WAAFs came from England. One of the other things they did was packing the parachutes, which would be reused 5 times. After each use it needed to be dried and it was hung in a large shed, then it would be repacked. After it had been used 5 times it was sold. If you found a parachute you were supposed to return it but this rarely happened as parachutes were made of silk and the women made them into clothes, including underwear.

Women in the Land Army worked on local farms. One woman from Causewayhead in Stirling worked on her father's farm, but was sent to work on a farm in High Bonnybridge. It was a big farm and they were quite well off and it employed Italian POWs, who she reckoned were better looked after than she was when she worked there. High Bonnybridge was the back-end of beyond and she worked 6½ days a week. On her half day off there was no bus service so she couldn't go anywhere. She was pleased when the war ended and she could go back to working on her father's farm.

Women also worked as Air Raid Wardens. It was important for them to have a good knowledge of their area and that they knew what facilities were available. The public air raid shelters were kept locked unless there was an air raid and these people held the keys. Why were they locked? First of all, they were used as public urinals if they were left unlocked or they were used by courting couples or the batteries for the lights would be stolen. They also needed to know if people went to their own private air raid shelters or stayed in their own houses in the event of an air raid because if the house was hit you didn't want to waste time looking for people in the debris if you know they are not going to be there.

Also in the ARP units were the Civil Defence workers. They were based in a hut in Laurieston. Nurses and doctors trained the women in First Aid. They were part of the ARP service – first aiders and ambulance drivers. Some were trained to deal with mustard gas which they were expecting the Germans to drop. If you drop mustard gas from the air, it is in the form of a gel which sticks to your clothes and it gives off fumes. The idea was you would go to a shower unit, take off your clothes, put on replacements, have a shower and you could go back out. The women would hose down the streets after a raid with their hosepipes. How would you know that there was mustard gas about? The red pillar boxes on the streets were painted with a special substance that would change colour if there was mustard gas around.

We had something called a Neighbourhood Scheme, where if one town was affected by bombing, the nearest town would go and help them out and their next town would cover them in return while they were helping. Women learned to drive and to map read and drive ambulances. Every ambulance had two people – at the beginning of the war, one man and one woman – but by the end of the war it could be two women. We had a number of military units in the area, all with their own ambulances.

Falkirk Royal Infirmary was relatively new at this time and at the beginning of the war they sent patients home because they knew they would need the beds for the wounded soldiers that would come through. People volunteered as nurses to help out. For a long time, women were only allowed to empty bedpans and clean the floors and were not allowed to do any nursing whatsoever. They built more huts at Falkirk Royal in 1939 in preparation for the war. These were meant to be temporary but some are still there. They were used as wards when necessary.

Close friendships were formed between patients and carers, sometimes resulting in marriage. The patients got free food to help them go out into the community to prevent them becoming institutionalised. It was felt that fresh air was as good as anything else as treatment and they would wheel the beds out onto the hospital veranda so that they could partake of the afternoon sun.

Some women did train to firefight as part of the Auxiliary Fire Service, but most of them were in the office co-ordinating services. In the office there would be a big map of the district showing where all the firefighting appliances were and in the event of an air-raid they could maximise the use of those services.

It was considered that women were better at doing the fiddly jobs, especially if they were tedious or boring. At Grangemouth Docks they were making magnetic mines for laying at sea. The first magnetic mine in the world was made in Grangemouth. Pieces for Hurricane planes were made in Camelon, some parts of Spitfires were originally made in Cambus. You would get a wooden frame, spread the canvas over it, put daub over it (which smelt like pear drops) until they realised that at the speed a Spitfire was going, the canvas compressed and it became less aerodynamic. They then started making them of aluminium instead.

In Camelon and Bainsford they also made water canteens for the army. The women went into the local foundries. The foundry at Bonnybridge wouldn't let the women do any heavy lifting. The women at Carron Ironworks had to clock on and off. In those days you were "quartered" (docked 15 minutes pay) if you arrived more than one minute late. One woman won the British Empire Medal because she put more copper bands on artillery shells than any other woman in Britain. Her husband was a POW and she had a young son to support. She was on piecework at the factory. She needed the money because the more work she did, the more money she got and that is why she won the medal.

There was a shell factory at Carron Ironworks, one of three. The vast majority of workers there were women. Women also operated lathes. Their shoes had wooden soles on them because you were standing in bits of sharp steel that had come off the machines and leather shoes would have been cut to shreds.



Many of the women I spoke to apologised because they had a great time - it was fun, they were paid and they were independent. Women also worked as chemical workers at I.C.I. in Grangemouth. These were good jobs. You walked around with a clipboard, you looked at gauges and you took readings and you might adjust the odd setting.

One of the factories that was established as a direct result of the war was to make aluminium sheeting for the R.A.F. It used a lot of heavy machinery but when it was opened in 1943 there were very few men available to work there. 85% of the people who operated the machines were women. It was known as the White Foundry. There were no strikes, no industrial disputes and productivity was really high. The war ended and the women had to give up their jobs and you get the first strikes. The Grangemouth Dockyard Company built ships during the war. This company was one of the largest in the district. There were about 2,500 people working there during the war, over 1000 of which were women.



The other big workplace was Nobel's Works making detonators. Women did all sorts of jobs there. They did clerical work as well as welding. One woman I interviewed worked at Bo'ness. Before the war she worked in a shoe shop in East Calder. She did not volunteer, she was called up and she wasn't happy about it. She went to Prestonpans for training in electric welding. She then got sent to a shipyard and she hated it. She hated the swearing and the coarseness of some of the other women. When she got there, she was paid more than the male apprentices and the male apprentice had to carry her tools for her. She had been working in a line where her next-door neighbour might not yet have finished her work so you couldn't remove your welding mask in case you got a spark from the adjacent person. While they were doing this, the riveting was going on for the outside of the ship. There was no decking, so you were exposed to the rain and snow. Women also did oxyacetylene welding in the shipyard. One woman I spoke to was an overhead crane driver.

The shipbuilding company was building ships for a long time before the war happened. Because it was a reserved occupation and a skilled workforce, the women were there to augment the people already working there. On the other hand, over at Bridgeness, in Bo'ness, Thomson & Balfour who previously made doors and windows, started making motor launches. The Fairmile Company would have the frames made in piano factories. They would be shipped by rail to the site here and they would be assembled. This only started happening in 1942 and there were no men left to employ. They had to hire the women and train them in plumbing, in joinery work, electrical work and all the different trades. The plumbers worked on the fuel lines and did all the complex stuff as well as fitting the engines. The women were better than the men at riveting. It became the tradition for women to launch each new vessel. The first time it was launched was by the managing director's wife in her fur coat. The second was launched by the assistant director's wife and the tenth was by the woman in charge of the canteen. But the one thing they would never allow was a minister to be present at the launch because they were superstitious.

It was very important that women fill these jobs and got upskilled. The war showed that women were capable of being upskilled and there were now separate toilets available. So things changed when the war ended but the legacy lived on. When you take women into the workforce, you need to look after their children. Temporary wartime nurseries were built and they remained after the war. One was only demolished ten years ago.

Dr James and his Two 'Wives', Rosina and my Aunt Jemima - a Victorian Soap Opera

By Andrew Melville (Mem No. 1220)

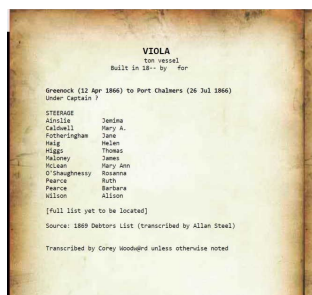
My paternal great-grandmother was born Margaret Ann Wilson Ramsay in 1855 in Clackmannan. She married William Ruthven Melville from Dundee in 1875. They 'emigrated' to Leeds in 1880, had 8 children, the youngest of which was my paternal grandfather. Many of the descendants, including myself, remained in Leeds and Yorkshire.

Margaret was the 7th of 8 siblings. The eldest of the 8 was her only sister, Jemima Wilson Ramsay born in 1839. That makes Jemima my Great Grandaunt. As will be seen, she led an interesting and colourful life, albeit one with difficulties and hardships, having emigrated a little further than Leeds!

The other significant connection for me concerning Jemima came as a result of the long days of Covid lockdown and searching for potential distant relatives. One of these was Jacky in New Zealand and the connection was via Jemima Ramsay. I quickly realised that Jemima had lived and died in New Zealand but that is just a part of the story. I must acknowledge that much of what follows was provided by Jacky who was brought up with the tale of her great-great grandmother Rosina – who I discovered had a close connection to my great grandaunt Jemima!

Jemima Ramsay's parents, Thomas and Anne, were certainly not wealthy. In the 1841 census they were both 20 years old, living in Clackmannan and have 2 children, Thomas' occupation is given as an engineer. One imagines Jemima as the eldest having to help with younger siblings as the family grew. In the 1851 census Thomas is now a blacksmith and there are 6 children.

We know that Jemima married Richard Ainslie in Edinburgh in December 1862 (she had been in service in Edinburgh in the 1861 census). He was a soldier (became a sergeant in the 25th Regiment of Foot). Unfortunately, they were not to be married long. He died in March 1864 in Glasgow of pleurisy and pneumonia. It is not known if Jemima was with him but the death was registered by a soldier colleague. So, Jemima was now on her own, a widow aged 25. One imagines a reluctance to return to the family in Clackmannan but what does the future hold for her? The next we know of her is in 1866, on board the SS Viola bound for Port Chalmers in New Zealand (see below)



Jemima Ainslie (born Jemima Wilson Ramsay) SS Viola Greenock-Port Chalmers 1866

New Zealand was not an unusual destination for Scots at this time – an expanding population no doubt keen to attract women as well as men with suitable skills. There were financial incentives too, with loans to enable travel. Jemima was in steerage with a number of other women. Of course, there were risks and many uncertainties involved. Jemima was one of a number of single and unaccompanied women on the Viola and the Ship's Surgeon was meant to support them. The Ship's Surgeon on this trip was one Dr James McBrearty.

Dr James obviously supported Jemima assiduously as, after she arrived at Port Chalmers in New Zealand, Dr McBrearty also stayed and they had a child together - James, born in August 1867. Unfortunately, James dies aged 3 months apparently in suspicious circumstances. It is assumed Dr James has been involved since he registers the child's death. Newspaper reports indicate a suggestion of poisoning and an investigation and inquest take place. Nothing untoward was established but subsequent newspaper reports refer to Jemima's arrest for 'lunacy' (could mean anything from being drunk, being homeless or exhibiting unusual behaviour). Perhaps this is not so surprising given Jemima had been a single mother in an unknown country – it's not clear just how supportive Dr James was. Of course, it is not known if Jemima and James knew each other before the trip - there is no evidence of any contact and it appears probably unlikely.

The next we know is that Dr James and Jemima married in May 1868 in Dunedin. The only snag about the marriage was that James McBrearty was already married!

Dr James and his wife Rosina (born Hamilton) were married in Glasgow in 1863. When Dr James set off on the Viola, Rosina was in Glasgow with their 2 young children and pregnant with a third. Exactly why he travelled to New Zealand is speculation but often taking on a job of Ship's Surgeon was to leave other problems behind (it was not a glamorous position and a surgeon in the 1860s was nothing like having the expertise of the more modern role). He did have some medical qualifications and was described as a surgeon in the 1861 census (with his 14-year-old brother as his assistant!)

Again, it is not known if Jemima was aware of her 'husband's' history and when she became aware of their bigamous marriage but her problems would only get more difficult. Jemima and Dr James have another 10 children between 1869 and 1881, just three of whom survived to adulthood.

Dr James established himself as a notable medical practitioner in the southern part of South Island. He spent 18 years of very strenuous practice on the Taieri Plain in Otago. There are reports of him travelling around the mining districts at significant risk, often providing emergency care, and he must have become well known in a developing area. In 1885 he took up the post of Surgeon Superintendent and was involved in the establishment of Kumara Hospital. After 6 years there, he moved to Greymouth where he remained. His name lived on in the area and the McBrearty ward remained at Kumara Hospital until at least the 1970s.

Dr McBrearty became something of a pillar of the community while at Kumara and Greymouth. He was Surgeon-Major to the Naval Volunteers (a significant role with links to the military), Surgeon to the Druids, and the Hibernian Society. He was involved with the Brunner mines where he was heavily involved when there was a major mining disaster in 1896 (with 65 fatalities). He was also involved in local Trotting. Athletics and Football clubs.



DR. J. McBREARTY, SENIOR.

Little is known of Jemima herself during this time. She was presumably bringing up the children and following her husband in his developing career. She died in 1914 and is buried in Kumara Cemetery. A memorial was erected in the Cemetery by Dr James to his 'wife' and some of the children.



Inscription

Erected by Dr McBrearty to the sacred memory of his dear children
 George, died 6th March 1888 aged 13 years
 Mabel, died 14th August 1888 aged 7 years

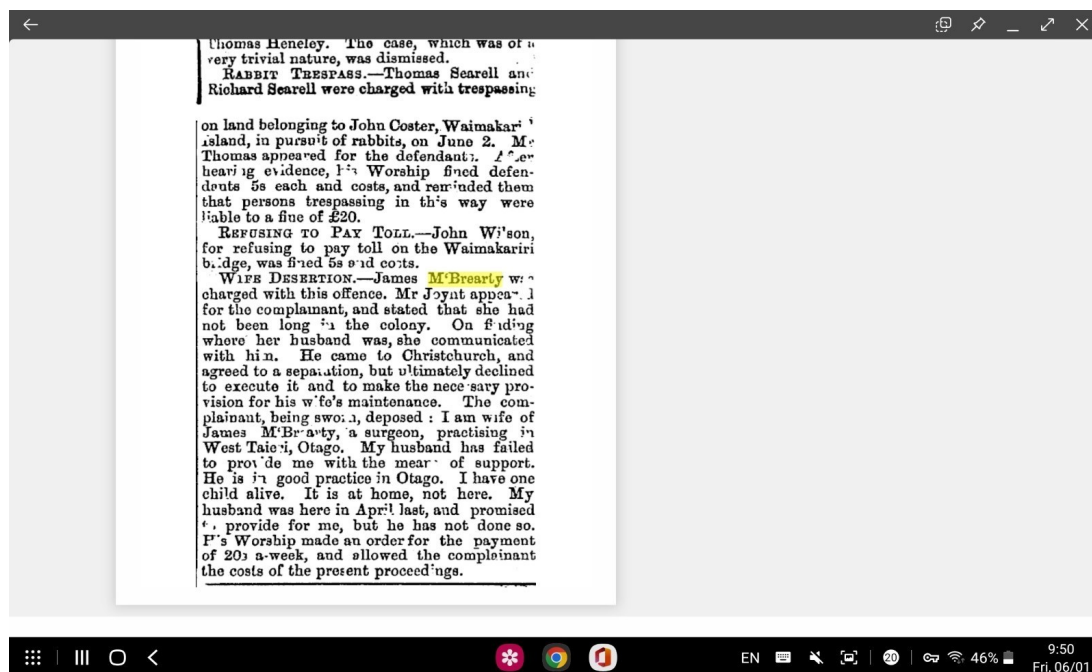
Jemima McBrearty mother of above and wife of Dr James McBrearty
 Died 11th May 1914 aged 75 years
 and

Dr James McBrearty

Died 31st July 1920 aged 83 years

Whether any of the family, his patients or social contacts knew of Dr James' wife and children in Glasgow is not known but, to add to the story, the 'proper' wife Rosina emigrated to New Zealand herself in 1871. She left her 1 surviving child behind with her parents. She already had family living in the Christchurch area of New Zealand and probably came to be nearer them.

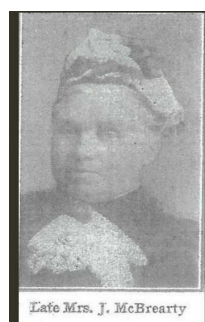
She lived across South Island (around Christchurch) but she had not forgotten about her husband. There is a newspaper report of her taking him to court for desertion and maintenance soon after she arrived in New Zealand (see newspaper report below). One can imagine some 'difficult' conversations taking place!



Whatever happened subsequently Rosina and Dr James resumed some sort of a relationship as they had 4 more children together (at similar times to his children with Jemima). She was still technically his wife and these children were registered as legitimate (as were those with Jemima). How all this worked in practice is hard to imagine, the busy doctor travelling from one side of the island and back again.



(Believed to be) Rosina Hamilton



Jemima McBrearty (born Jemima Wilson Ramsay)

Rosina died aged 42 in 1889 in Christchurch after a long illness, it is not clear how involved Dr James was, if at all. However, the children did not go to live with him and Jemima in Greymouth, staying locally in the Christchurch area across South Island. The youngest of the children, Percival, was 10 when Rosina died. He was the great grandfather of Jacky, my link in New Zealand. He lived until 1972 (died aged 94). Apparently, he did not have a positive view of Dr James and talked of running away from homes after his mother died and learning to fend for himself.

Dr James himself died in 1920. The surviving children with Jemima lived on in Greymouth while those with Rosina remained around Christchurch.

So, a story that started in Glasgow and Clackmannanshire found its way right across the world to the developing areas of the southern part of New Zealand. There was plenty of drama along the way - bigamy, illegitimacy, courts and an inquest - and much hardship and sadness. It was truly a Victorian soap opera!

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Help Wanted

I am trying to locate an original family tree of family OATT, which according to a newspaper article from 1987, was still in existence in 1962. I am assuming the tree was still in the possession of a family member back in 1962. See below the articles printed in the Stirling Observer on 22 November 1962 and 9 October 1987. I was aware the tree and a family bible had existed, as they were mentioned in the will of Mary OATT in 1872, but I didn't dare hope that anything had survived.

I am an OATT descendent and have done a good amount of family research, but being able to see and study this document would be amazing. I would be very grateful of any help you could give me or any suggestions.

Muirne Buchanan

Observer starts woman's hunt to trace her roots

A CHANCE look at the pages of the "Stirling Observer" from a quarter of a century ago by a woman who emigrated to Australia 60 years ago, has started a hunt to find her relatives.

Mrs Mary Marshall, 2 Parker Street, Preston 3072, Victoria, Australia, who visited Scotland this summer and has now returned home, would like to contact members of the Oatt family — her maiden name.

There were Oatts in Doune and Stirling and when Mrs Marshall visited the archives department of Central Regional Council she saw an "Observer" for Thursday, November 22, 1962, in which Mr George Dixon the archivist, found mention of a family tree covering 137 years — from 1683 to 1820 — dealing with Oatts and Downies.

These were said in the newspaper to be principally resident in Kilmadock.

The 1962 "Observer" stated that the framed family tree had been unearthed by a reader and was all "in the most immaculate copperplate writing".

The last recorded births on the tree were those of Eliza Oatt at Doune on November 6, 1814, and Francis

By DAVID ROBERTSON

Oatt, at Campsie on December 6, 1820. And the last Downie mentioned was Rebina, who married Francis Oatt at Kilmadock in 1806.

Mr George Dixon, the archivist, would be every bit as pleased as Mrs Marshall to discover either relatives, or others, who could fill in some of the blanks.

Oatt is a well known name in Stirling, Francis and William being responsible for the building of some of the fine Georgian properties in the town.

William Oatt, an architect and builder died in Lower Bridge Street, on April 23, 1847, at the age of 81. His oldest daughter, Mrs Margaret Cameron, went to America, dying in New York State on August 11, 1854.

The "Stirling Observer" would like to hear from any Oatt relatives in this area, and will undertake to pass information on to both Mrs Marshall and Mr Dixon.

ONE of our readers has unearthed a fascinating framed genealogical tree, complete with what looks like family crests in colour, with the first date 1683 and the last date 1820, and all in the most immaculate copper-plate writing. The principal families represented are the Oatt and Downie clan who were resident principally in the parish of Kilmadock, Doune. The two last births recorded are that of Eliza Oatt, born at Doune, 6th November, 1814, and Frances Oatt, born at Campsie, 6th December, 1820. The last Downie name listed is that of Rebina Downie, who married Francis Oatt at Kilmadock, 1806. Any reader who is an ancestor of either family and interested in this particular family tree can have further information if they care to contact the "Observer."

Stirling's Dead Centre: Tales of the Old Town Cemetery

By Dr Murray Cook, Stirling Council's Archaeologist (Nov 2025 talk)

I am going to talk about the Old Town Cemetery, the Top of the Town Cemetery. I happen to think that Stirling is perhaps the most important place in Scottish history and basically it has to do with its frontier status. The Forth is the frontier of Pictland and Alba from 700 – 1100 and then that expansion down to the Tweed with the coronation of David I basically reflects military strategy. If you want to go north or south, you have to control Stirling. That means that the church and cemetery complex at Stirling is actually amongst the most important and this cemetery has material from the Wars of Independence, through the Rough Wooing, through the Union of the Crowns, the Union of the Parliaments, the expansion of Empire, the end of Empire, Mad Mitch and the Siege of Aden.

The Church of the Holy Rude is the spiritual home of the Bible – the first Protestant coronation in Scotland took place here. While it is called the Old Town Cemetery, we actually have the Church, the medieval cemetery, the expansion of the Victorian cemetery, then a further expansion of the Victorian cemetery called the Valley Cemetery or the Mar Place Cemetery, within which is a military row, then the former military cemetery prior to the middle of the 19th century (no memorials just burials) and then finally the 20th century expansion known as the Snowdon Cemetery.

I am going to talk a bit about individual stories. During Covid, I read every single grave inscription in the cemetery just for something to do every day and then used that material. I photographed what I believed to be the interesting ones, made a database of the interesting ones and then began to research individual lives.

We also have Mar's Wark and Ladies Rock. Now, there's an erroneous story about the Ladies Rock saying this is where the ladies of the court watched the jousting. It is more likely to be Our Lady's Rock, something Catholic that gets lost in the Reformation. The whole cemetery complex was reformed in the middle of the 19th century. The Victorian cemetery is laid out in terms of wealth and religiosity, so it is full of founders of the Church of Scotland. There are statues of important reformers such as John Knox, Ebenezer Erskine and Guthrie who was a minister of the Church of the Holy Rude and was the first minister to be beheaded by the state in the Covenanting Killing Times with the Restoration of King Charles II.



The Ladies Rock has two paths to it. It has a correct path and it has a shortcut. In "Pilgrim's Progress", the 17th century allegorical story about a journey to Heaven there is something called the Hill of Faith which has a shortcut to it. If you take the shortcut, you end up in Hell and you have to return to the Straight and Narrow Path. So the Ladies Rock has a false path and a correct path. If you go up the false path you can't get any further and you have to go back to the correct path. Except that at some point, Stirling Council added some extra steps so it is no longer a dead end!



These are the Solway Martyrs. This was one of the greatest crimes of the 17th century. The Covenant was proposed by Presbyterians; Charles I is forced to sign it and Charles II is forced to sign it. It guaranteed religious freedom. Westminster under Charles I, James II and VII started to interfere with people's worship. So Covenanters are people who upheld the Covenant and they held conventicles, where people worship as they see fit. A family in the Solway area fell out with the

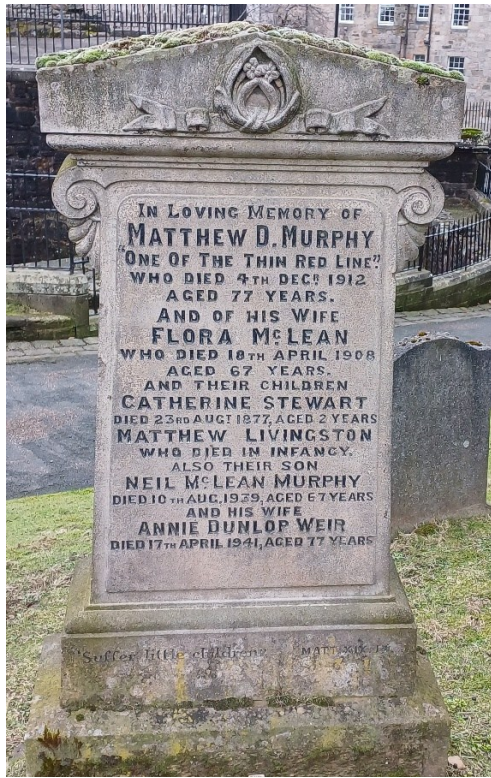
State, refused to accept the authority of bishops and were tied at low tide to stakes and are drowned in the River Solway. This was used by Covenanters to justify their retaliation. Then of course with the Glorious Revolution of 1689 where we get William of Orange and the Protestant ascendancy.

Now to the individuals. General Samuel Graham is commemorated inside the church. He is one of those people who are everywhere at the end of the 18th century. He repressed a slave revolt in Haiti, and fought in the American Revolutionary War. It was a time of tit-for-tat killings. The British patriots hanged someone and so George Washington said "we have 12 British officers in gaol, so hang one of them". They decided to put the officers' names in a hat and picked one. Samuel was one of the people whose name was not picked out of the hat. Lt Asgill was the name of the chap who was picked but there was European outrage at this and Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, in particular personally intervened to save Asgill. Washington had his wings clipped by Congress as everyone was shocked by this barbaric behaviour.

At the side of the church is the grave of Irish Lt Marcus Marr. He died in the Castle after returning from conflict overseas at the end of the 18th century. His unit was involved in the Siege at Srirangapatna, the capital of Mysore, one of the independent states in India. Famously Tipu Sultan, known as the Tiger of Mysore, kept pet tigers. There was a ferocious battle and Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington, led the successful assault. The Indian state collapsed and Wellesley ordered all the tigers in captivity to be shot as there was no longer a supply chain to keep them fed.

The most famous memorial in Stirling is a 17th-century stone, reused in the 19th century. It has winged death-heads and the date 1823, with just initials rather than the names John Livingston and Helen Stevenson. This is the scene of the most famous act of graverobbing in Stirling. In 1822, Helen's sister Mary is buried here. Her corpse was dug up on the orders of a local medical student. There was outrage and a riot, soldiers were called down from the Castle and people were fired upon. There was a trial and the doctor escaped, joined the military, was given a pardon and ended up as Queen Victoria's surgeon.

One of the most famous engagements connected to Stirling was the Crimean campaign of the mid-19th century which was an absolute disaster. Politicians looked for something that had gone very, very well and that was what we now call the Thin Red Line. This comes from a journalist who wrote about "a thin red line of death". This was the predecessor unit of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders where a thin line of men used co-ordinated rifle fire to stop a Russian cavalry charge. This was the first time in history that this had happened. There are a number of officers from that unit, perhaps the most famous of them is Gerald Ewart, more famous for having been involved in the Relief of Lucknow, an episode in what we call the Indian Mutiny. He is buried here. We also have an Irishman, Matthew Murphy, who was one of the Thin Red Line. He served in the army, ended up in Stirling and had a normal life here on leaving the army.



But there are Irish officers moving into Stirling, marrying well and ending up prospering. There is a Captain Galbraith who ends up as Provost. His son, Dr Galbraith, was profoundly middle class, lived in King's Park, joined the military, was involved in the Maori conflict and was also involved in one of the Franklin rescue expeditions to the Arctic.

The military row at the Valley Cemetery is where servicemen and wives of servicemen are buried if they died in the Castle. All of these graves are pre-World War I, which means they are not looked after by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. There are also veterans buried with private memorials. They have the name of the veteran always maintained. If you look at a grave, everything can be faded except for one individual whose name is still pitch black. That is a serviceman or servicewoman that is being maintained by the CWGC. One of the things we are trying to do in Stirling is to map all the veterans pre-WWI and post-WWI and get them all located and commemorate them. This year we planted daffodils and put crosses on each grave we knew about.

The youngest veteran in the whole cemetery, Drummer James MacDonald, died aged 14. We have no idea about his story, but we think he was probably an illegitimate child whose father was in the army. The troops took charge of the wee boy or maybe his soldier father and his wife died and the army brought him up.

One of the graves that attracts the most international attention is William Moyes. He is in the Valley Cemetery and the reason he gets so much attention is that he was the 6th Senior Engineer on the Titanic. Tradition has it that he stayed at his post to keep the engines running in order to maximise the chances that people in the water near the ship would be seen. He is not buried there, he is on the Titanic.



This is the oldest but “newish” grave in Stirling. This is in the Snowdon Cemetery. The block here is the last piece of stone hollowed out from the Abbey Craig, quarried to make the Wallace Monument. There was a Dominican Priory in Friars Wynd in Stirling. The small Priory of around half a dozen men was opposite what is now the train station and the Dominicans negotiated with Wallace ahead of the Battle of Stirling Bridge. We have therefore an individual dug up during the redevelopment of the Priory. His bones were carbon dated and he was proven to be alive at the time of the Wars of Independence. He was reburied with a full Dominican Mass in the Snowdon Cemetery. The Dominicans met Wallace, King Edward I and Robert the Bruce, so this man either met these leaders or knew someone who met them.

The local gravedigger’s favourite grave is that of Daniel Ferguson, who was a bonesetter. He was not a doctor. If you were a 19th century manual labourer who broke a limb and it didn’t heal properly and you couldn’t afford a doctor, you could end up unable to work and so end up in the poorhouse. Bonesetters would reset your bones so that they would heal straight and you could carry on earning your living. We know he is a bonesetter because of the broken bone on the gravestone. Believe it or not, this is one of the most expensive graves. That is because of the bronze portrait of Daniel, drawn by his nephew. All of this was paid for by Daniel’s patients.

I often lead guided tours of the cemetery. I always ask if there are any Americans in the tour group. If they say yes, I ask if they mind a bit of gentle teasing. I take them to this grave and it is Butch Cassidy’s great-uncle. Butch Cassidy was a famous outlaw in the Wild West. I just say, “Read this inscription” and the Americans mostly gasp in horror because they think it says he was born killin’. Actually he was born in Killin.

The Mystery of Mary Baird

By Claire Callender (Member No. 1219)

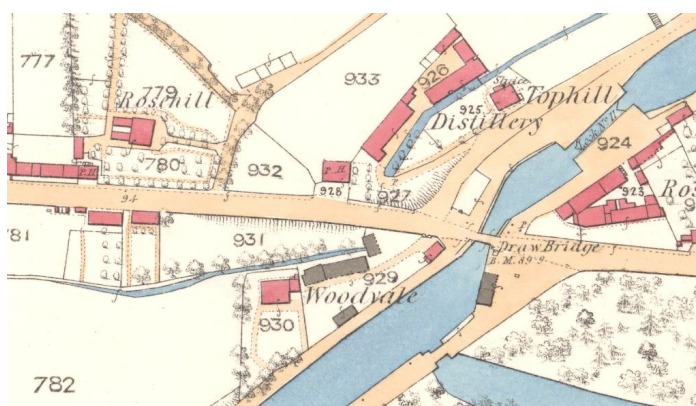
Over the past few years, I have researched and written about numerous ancestors who lived and died in the Falkirk area. Camelon, on the Forth and Clyde Canal between locks 9 and 16, has been of particular interest, as I explored tavern keepers, ships captains and Jamaican connections there.

Recently, I have been focusing on writing about some of my female ancestors. Sometimes, it is more challenging to uncover the lives of women in past centuries, as they tended to disappear into the social fabric of the times, appearing in censuses simply as wives or daughters or in parish records with only a husband's name, and earning a mention in local newspapers only if they broke the law or participated in community or church events. The earlier the time, the more diversity of sources becomes crucial in exploring women's lives. This is the story of my fourth great-grandmother, Mary Baird, and how a High Court record, a will, and local newspapers revealed family connections not reflected in standard parish and census records.



Blue Bell Inn on Main Street around 1900.

Source: Falkirk Archives



Detail from 1860 map of Camelon. Map is OS 25-inch to the mile, 1st edition, 1855—1882 Stirlingshire XXX.3(Falkirk). Survey date: 1860, Publication date: 1862. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

In 1845, according to local newspapers, Mary Baird was innkeeper at "Cowie's public house" in Camelon. It was not uncommon for women at that time to stay on as tavern keepers after losing a husband, so I thought it likely that she was a widow by that time. Mary's husband, Alexander Cowie, is listed as a vintner in Pigot & Co.'s New Commercial Directory of Scotland for 1825-6 and

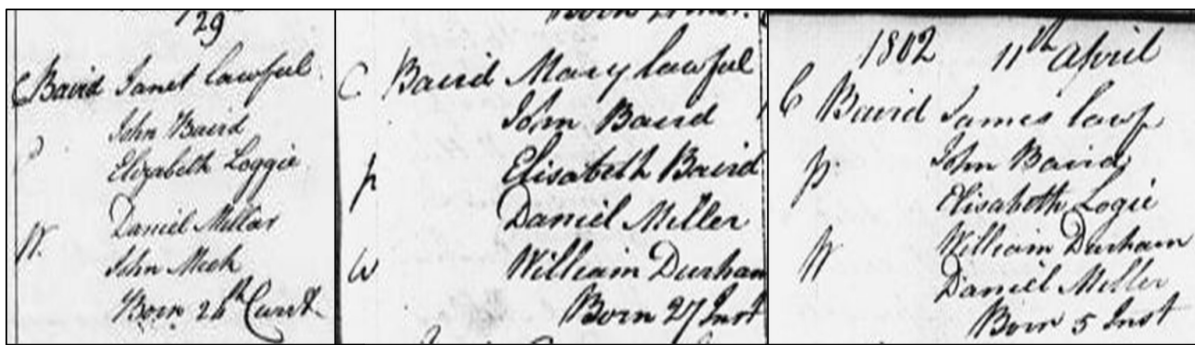
again in 1837, and his occupation is given as “innkeeper” on the death certificates of his children. He probably died before the 1841 census, leaving Mary to run the inn. Cowie’s public house was located between Lock 11 and Lock 12 in Camelon. Later known as the Blue Bell, the inn is shown in the photo on the previous page. The building is marked on the 1860 map of Camelon as PH (public house) and is mentioned by name in other newspaper reports.

Parish records provided basic facts about Mary Baird and Alexander Cowie. They married in Falkirk parish in 1823. The entry in the Falkirk OPR lists both as “of this parish.” They had at least four children between 1824 and 1831. John (1824), James (1826), Elizabeth (1828) and Mary (1831) all survived to adulthood. Initially, I did not find Alexander or Mary in any census records until I realized that Cowie is often transcribed incorrectly and the 1841 Scotland census revealed Mary Cowie (transcribed as Courie (*ScotlandsPeople*) or Caure (*Ancestry*), publican, aged 40, living in Camelon with her four children: John (15), James (12), Elizabeth (10) and Mary (8). Son John’s occupation is given as app(rentice) attorney. (The ages of the children are slightly off, and the name of the public house is not mentioned). I have not found death records for Alexander or Mary, but it seems likely that Alexander died sometime between 1837 and 1841, and Mary Baird Cowie probably died between 1849 (when she was last mentioned in the newspaper) and early 1851, as she was not listed in the census that year.

Mary Baird and Alexander Cowie were married in Camelon, so I thought it likely that she was born there or at least lived there earlier in her life. The only likely baptism recorded in Falkirk parish records was for a Mary Baird, born to John Baird and Elisabeth Baird, baptized 27 October 1799. Bearing in mind the possibilities that her birth was never recorded, or that her mother’s maiden name may also have been Baird, I proceeded on the assumption there was another maiden name to be discovered, and this was quite likely my Mary Baird.

There were two notable Baird families in Camelon around the time of Mary Baird’s birth. John Baird Esq. was a solicitor and businessman based in Edinburgh and considered gentry. In 1826 he purchased Camelon House and associated lands. He and his family were often mentioned in newspaper articles and in valuation rolls for the area, but I quickly ruled out the possibility that Mary Baird was a part of his family. There was also another John Baird in the village, who was a farmer at Sunnyside. His irregular marriage to Elizabeth Logie of Torphichen parish on 31 August 1793 is recorded in the Falkirk parish records. John Baird and Elizabeth Logie had five children with baptisms registered in Falkirk parish—Janet (1797), James (1802), Elizabeth (1808), Elizabeth (1811) and Alexander (1814). This John Baird was also the great-grandfather of John Logie Baird, inventor of television. Much has been written about John Logie Baird, but many of the published details of his forebears are vague and unconfirmed. What seems quite certain is that James Baird, one of the sons of John Baird and Elizabeth Logie and grandfather of John Logie Baird, was an engineer and part time farmer. According to “John Logie Baird, a life,” a book co-written by John Logie Baird’s son Malcolm Baird, James took over Sunnybrae Farm in Camelon in 1825. He married Jane Simpson, the

daughter of a Falkirk builder in 1839. James and Jane Baird lived in Glasgow until around 1848/9; their first four children were born there. They later moved to Camelon where their fifth child was born in 1852.



Baptism records for Janet (1797), Mary (1799) and James (1802) Baird. Baptisms (OPR) Falkirk. National Records of Scotland.

I considered it very likely that Mary Baird Cowie was part of this family. There is a suitable gap in birth years for her to fit nicely in 1799, and a comparison of her baptism record to those of the children born on either side of her, Janet and James Baird, show that the same witnesses appear across all three. Daniel Miller, John Meck and William Dunham all appear in the Kirk Sessions for Falkirk as Kirk Elders.

HENRY STEIN pleaded not guilty to a charge of theft, aggravated by previous conviction. The charge amounted to the prisoner's having stolen two five-pound notes and a one-pound note from a jacket belonging to Mr James Baird, feuar and engineer, residing with Mary Cowie, tavern-keeper, Camelon. The theft took place on or about the 11th of March last, at or near an unfinished house near Sunnyside, in the parish of Falkirk, where Mr Baird and the prisoner (then in Mr B.'s employment) were employed. A number of witnesses were examined for the prosecution, tracing the possession of the notes to the prisoner, and also the previous conviction. Lord Wood summed up, and the Jury returned a verdict of guilty as libelled, and his Lordship sentenced the prisoner to seven years' transportation.

Stirling Observer, 19 April 1849. britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk ©British Library Board

The parish record entries are not definitive, but other sources have provided several interesting pieces of supporting evidence. If Mary Baird was indeed part of this family her brother was the James Baird mentioned above, who moved back to Camelon around 1848. With this in mind, I returned to one of the newspaper articles that I had found when trying to place Mary Cowie as an innkeeper in the 1840s. The article appeared in the Stirling Observer on Thursday, 19 April 1849 and briefly described theft of money belonging to James Baird, who was living with Mary Cowie, tavern-keeper in Camelon, by Henry Stein. I waited in a state of anxious anticipation for many months during the covid-19 pandemic until I finally obtained a copy of the relevant High Court documents. They didn't disappoint,

providing a wealth of entertaining detail and further evidence for my theories about Mary Baird Cowie.

I was hoping that somewhere in the witness statements in the precognition, trial papers or minutes it would be mentioned that James Baird was living with *his sister* Mary Cowie, tavern-keeper. That was not to be, but the statements from James Baird and Mary Cowie themselves provided confirmation that James Baird was in fact the grandfather of John Logie Baird, and that he lived in the Blue Bell tavern with Mary Cowie for several weeks while he built a new house for his family. On 16 March 1849 James Baird gave a witness statement to the High Court:

I am a feuer and engineer and reside in or near Camelon in the parish of Falkirk and county of Stirling with Mary Cowie, tavern-keeper there.

I have built or am in course of building a new dwelling house at or near Sunnyside near Camelon aforesaid to be occupied by myself. It is my own property and is called or is intended to be called Sunnybrae. The mason work is completed and the carpenter work is nearly so and I expect to take up my residence at the house in about a fortnight.

His identity is also confirmed by a statement from his wife, Jane Simpson, who testified:

I am 36 years of age. Wife of James Baird an engineer and I reside with him in Abercromby Street of Calton in or near Glasgow. On the morning of Monday the 12th day of March current my husband was going to Falkirk and before he left I took from a drawer in a chest of drawers in the house two 5 pound notes and three one pound notes and gave them to him.

£13 (worth about £1300 in todays money) seemed a large sum to have in your pocket. Another witness, Thomas Kyle, testified as to why James Baird had such a sum:

I am 45 years of age, a manufacturer in Tureen St of Calton and I reside there. On Saturday the 24th day of February I sent my son Thomas to the House of Mr James Baird with three five pound notes in payment of a sum due by me to him.

Perhaps James Baird was to use the money to pay the workers who were helping him build his house. He also paid Mary Cowie for room and board. She testified:

The witness Mr. James Baird has been lodging in our house for about six weeks past. I know that he was in use to keep paper money in a pocketbook which he kept in an inside pocket of his jacket. He was in use invariably to put on this jacket when he went to work at his house at Sunny Brae and returned with it on him when he came to his meals.

I recollect that on the Monday morning the 12th current Mr Baird paid me some money which he took from his said pocketbook, out of a bundle of notes which he had in it. He gave me £3 and I saw Mr Baird replace the other notes into the pocketbook tie the flap around it and put it in his pocket.

The High Court record gives a detailed account of the “spree” that Henry Stein went on with his stolen money, buying new clothes, drinking and travelling to several neighbouring towns, until he was finally arrested on a train between Stirling

and Falkirk on his return. He was sentenced to seven years transportation for his crime and ended up in Fremantle prison in Western Australia.

After living with Mary Baird Cowie at her tavern for several weeks in 1848/49, James Baird finished building his house at Sunnybrae and by the 1851 census he was living there with his wife and children. The house, shown in the photo is still there today. The last child in the family, Robert Simpson Baird was born on 11 January 1852 and baptized in Falkirk parish on 3 February. Witnesses to the baptism were Mr Fulton, a local landowner, and Mrs R. Neilson. Mrs Neilson was Mary Baird Cowie's daughter Mary, who married Robert Neilson in Camelon on 30 April 1850. Another confirmation of a family connection.



James Baird's House, Sunnybrae
Photo by Geoff Bailey, July 2023

I felt that my evidence collection was growing, but I still needed more to confirm the connection between Mary Baird Cowie and this Baird family. The next story I excavated was that of Mary's son John Cowie

John Cowie was born in 1827 and by the age of 16 he was an apprentice attorney. He went on to establish Cowie & Cox, Writers in partnership with his colleague and friend Josiah Cox. They practiced law in Camelon from around 1848 until John Cowie was appointed Town Clerk of neighbouring Bo'ness in 1861.

When his mother Mary Baird Cowie died sometime around 1850, John, as the eldest son, inherited the Blue Bell inn building and a piece of land that was rented out for cattle grazing. He is listed as the proprietor of the Blue Bell by the 1855 valuation roll. However, he may not have lived in the inn himself—his sister Mary and her husband Robert Neilson were innkeepers at the Blue Bell in the 1851 and 1861 censuses, and remained until 1869 when they left for Cumbernauld to carry on the family tradition of tavern keeping at the Spur Inn. And in an odd twist, in 1861 John Cowie was living as a boarder with the Stein family whose son Henry had stolen the money from James Baird.

In August 1866 John Cowie died at the age of 42 after falling down a railway cutting following an accident in his horse-drawn gig. A well-known figure, his death was reported in some detail in local newspapers. He had made a will in 1859 leaving the Blue Bell inn to his younger brother James. However, in February 1866, just a few months before he died, he revoked his will in favour of Jessie Donaldson, daughter of a Bo'ness mason, to whom he was engaged to be married. All his assets, including the inn and land that he had inherited from his parents then passed out of the Cowie family.

John Cowie's will provided more evidence of connections to the Baird family. In the original will, written in 1859, he appointed four men as his trustees: James Baird of Sunnybrae near Falkirk, Josiah Cox, Writer Falkirk, Alexander Baird residing at Newhouse near Camelon and William Menzies, Miller, Larbert Mill.

Josiah Cox was his business partner and William Menzies a local businessman. The other two provide more evidence of the proposed family connection—James Baird, and his brother Alexander would be uncles to John Cowie.

The will was witnessed and signed as follows: "At London the twenty ninth day of March Eighteen hundred and fifty nine before these witnesses Adam Cox residing at number fifty one Houndsditch London and John Hall formerly residing in Bainsford near Falkirk presently in London."

Adam Cox appears to be a cousin of Josiah Cox's father and witness John Hall is almost certainly the son of James and Alexander Baird's sister Janet Baird Hall. He lived in Bainsford in the 1850s but had left before the 1861 census, leaving his wife and children there.

And so, I was convinced beyond reasonable doubt that my fourth great-grandmother Mary Baird Cowie, was connected to these Bairds of Camelon. Of course, a DNA connection would confirm my theories, and I am hopeful that a match will appear on my Ancestry account one of these days! My dad, who was a radar engineer, a technical wizard and a lover of all things engineered and electronic, died long before I did any of this research, but I think he would have been quite delighted to learn that he had a connection to John Logie Baird.

MELANCHOLY ACCIDENT—DEATH OF MR JOHN COWIE.—An accident of a most distressing nature occurred near South Queensferry at an early hour on Friday morning, whereby Mr John Cowie, writer, Borrowstounness, lost his life. Mr Cowie, it seems, left Bo'ness in a gig on Thursday afternoon, in company with Mr Robert Baxter, sheriff-officer, to transact some legal business at Queensferry. After disposing of their business, it was agreed to take a drive as far as Cramond Bridge, on reaching which place they made up their minds to go as far as Edinburgh, which they accordingly did. Having spent a short time in Edinburgh, they proceeded on their journey home. It was now late in the evening, and exceedingly dark. After passing through Queensferry, Mr Baxter was thrown out of the gig in consequence of the jolting occasioned by the excessive roughness of the road. What happened to Mr Cowie afterwards until his body was found can only be conjectured, as he was not again seen in life. It is believed that he was also thrown out of the gig, receiving injuries about the head. Owing probably to the darkness of the night, and to the fact that the unfortunate gentleman was thrown into a deep cutting, Mr Baxter seems to have been unable to find any traces of Mr Cowie. His dead body was found by some navvies next morning, however, near Port Edgar. There was a cut on his head, and his chin was resting on his breast. The horse and gig were found in a turnip field in the morning, but no injury had been done to either. Mr Cowie was about 40 years of age, and, as many of our readers are aware, belonged to Falkirk, where he at one time carried on business as a legal practitioner. He was much esteemed for his many amiable qualities, and

Falkirk Herald, 14 August 1866. britishnewspaper archive.co.uk. Copyright British Library

Going Down to the Farm – Researching Your Farming Ancestry

By Ken Nisbet (January 2026 talk)

Most family historians with Scottish Ancestry are going to have either farmers or farm workers in their family tree. Up to the end of the First World War and even into the 1920s, a huge number of individuals were still employed on the land as horses were still being widely used. As mechanisation on the farm increased, they needed fewer farm workers.

What do we mean by a croft or a farm? A croft is defined as being the Scottish term for an agricultural smallholding that only provides the crofter with a part-time means of sustenance. So if you are a crofter, you are not a full-time farmer. Crofters paid their rent directly to the tacksman or to the landowner. They did not have a fixed lease. Prior to 1886, they had no security of tenure, rights of succession, fair rents or compensation for improvements such as stone clearing and ditch digging.

In 1886 we get the Crofters Commission set up. At that time, the Commission considered the crofting counties to consist of Shetland, the Orkney Islands, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross & Cromarty, Inverness and Argyllshire, although some crofts were also found in the highlands of Perthshire, as well as in Aberdeenshire and Banffshire.

Farmers, on the other hand, had security of tenure and a lease for a fixed period of time. In the 18th century it tended to be for shorter periods of 10 or 12 years. By the 19th century, leases were usually for 21 or 25 years. Sometimes they came with an improvement clause – e.g. part of your lease stated you had to clear the ground and remove all the stones. You were also able to pass the lease on to other family members

How do you know if your ancestor was a farm worker? In many cases you would start by looking at the statutory birth, marriage and death records. On large farms, several families could share a common farm name and address, but the majority would live, not in the farmhouse itself, but in workers' cottages outside the main house. In the North-East of Scotland, they lived in "farmtouns" of buildings clustered around the steading, whereas in Central Scotland in Stirlingshire and Clackmannanshire, workers lived in individual cottages on the surrounding land.

The 1851 and 1861 censuses are particularly useful for information about farms. In these two censuses, Farmers had to state their acreage and how many farm labourers they employed. In the 1921 census, you can also see the name of the farmer's employer.

Testaments and inventories can also give useful information. If you have access to one of the Family History Societies with premises affiliated to FamilySearch –

Glasgow and West of Scotland FHS, Tay Valley FHS and the Scottish Genealogy Society in Edinburgh – you can search there for testaments and inventories. Farmers often had inventories, even if they did not leave a will. These lists can give you a lot of information about the farm and its way of life.

Farmers often employed family relatives. The death of the farmer was one of the reasons your ancestor might have left the farm to work elsewhere, as the incoming farmer may have had their own relatives to find work for, or they may just have wanted to start afresh. Feeing fairs were usually held twice a year. Farm workers were normally employed for a six-month period and were paid at the end of it.

If you know where the farm was situated, it is worth having a look at the Valuation Rolls on the ScotlandsPeople website to see who owned the land, as most farmers were tenants. It is not until after the Great War that you find more people buying their own farms. For example, the Brodie Estate in Nairnshire sold off 20,000 acres after World War I.

Farm servants' prowess in ploughing competitions was occasionally mentioned on gravestones. These farming competitions were incredibly important to the local community and they are often featured in detail in local newspapers.



Photo from Creative Commons

Not all farmers were successful. They could go bust like any other business. This could be another reason why your relative had to move on.

If farmers went bankrupt, they would be sequestrated (records of sequestrations are held in the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh) and notifications would appear in local newspapers. When farmers moved on because of bankruptcy or retirement, they would hold what was called a displenishing sale, sometimes known as a roup. When they sold up, they sold not just the farm stock, but also all their implements. They would often sell all the household furniture too. You sold everything when you moved, so the lists can tell you a lot about life on the farm at that particular time.

It can also be useful to look at the National Library of Scotland's map collection, which is free to view. You can download the location of the farm or copy and paste it into your own research. You can also look for the name of the farm in Trove (formerly ScotlandsPlaces) and Canmore. The Ordnance Survey Name Books are

available on the ScotlandsPeople website. Many of them have been transcribed, so you won't have to decipher original handwriting. Some of the Valuation Rolls are also available on ScotlandsPeople, going up to 1940.

Most counties had a farming society which organised annual farming shows. The records of these societies are held in the National Library of Scotland. Your relatives may appear as participants, especially in the ploughing competitions and it may also mention which farm they worked on. Local archives can also hold information on local farms, such as farm diaries, photos and auction mart records.

If you are searching for newspaper reports, I would recommend using Find My Past and the British Newspaper Library website. Your local library may have a subscription you can use. It is easier to search by farm name rather than the name of the farmer. Local newspapers may also report when farm leases came up for renewal which could help you date when your relatives were on a particular farm.

The Scottish Farm Servants Union was founded in Turriff in Aberdeenshire. Why was it founded there? It all has to do with the famous incident of the "Turra Coo". In 1912, when employment insurance began, the employer had to pay an insurance stamp for each worker. A farmer in Turriff said that as his employees were getting payment in kind by him providing their accommodation, he refused to pay the full stamp cost. The government disagreed with his claim and impounded his cow. This was not viewed favourably by the locals. The cow was taken off to be sold in Aberdeen. The Turra Coo was bought back by the farmer's supporters and returned to him.

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Contemporaneous Indexes in the St Ninians Kirk Session Records

By Craig Adam (Mem No. 802)

The announcement by the Society Chair in the January 2026 Newsletter, about the proposed project to index Kirk Session records, reminded me that recent research on my ancestors in St Ninians revealed, surprisingly, that most of those Kirk Session records were already indexed, apparently contemporaneously with recording the minutes themselves. Others may well be aware of this, but I felt it worth spreading the knowledge, especially as I have not found such comprehensive indexes in other Kirk Session records I have worked with.

This appears to have been an initiative by the session clerk who compiled the minutes for 1712-1724 and continued by his successors until 1854, with a less formal index in the 1854-1878 volume. Presumably this clerk felt that simply adding the names of people under discussion in the margins of each page, as is commonly done, was insufficient for future users of those minutes so he appended a formal index at the end of each volume with headings for each type of business within the minutes. Under each heading are listed the names of those relevant to

each case discussed by the Session; these usually - but not always - being arranged alphabetically. Each name has linked page numbers associated with it allowing the individual to be tracked through a succession of session meetings in the minutes.

In the first indexed volume for 1712-1724, there is a very ambitious set of headings including - Accusations, Adulterers, Burial Places, Drunkenness, Fornicators, Fornicators antenuptial, Incest, Lairs, Sabbath-breakers, Scandals, Seats and Swearing. By the middle of the next century this had been reduced to the more manageable – Fornicators, Petitions and Rebukes! Sometimes, lists of elders, bellmen, boxmasters, marriages and occasionally excommunications are included. These indexes, together with the mostly clear handwriting of the St Ninians Session Clerks, has made my research much more efficient and productive than for many other similar sets of records.

For my ancestry, it transpired that the detailed minuting of the allocation of lairs by the session clerks in St Ninians throughout the 18th century, allowed me to track the activities of my 6G-grandfather David Rae (or Rea) and later his son Marshal Rae, both blacksmiths in the parish. In 1792, David sought to have lairs previously allocated in 1743 to Andrew Peacock, the father of his wife, Margaret Peacock, made available for his family's use. The detail of her ancestry provided in the minutes in support of this and related entries has allowed me to track my Peacock ancestors in St Ninians back to before 1700. In addition, the parish accounts revealed that Marshal Rae was regularly employed installing and repairing iron work in the church and its estate – including the 'Steepel Bell' in 1809 - eventually being appointed 'interim boxmaster' in 1810 then 'treasurer' by 1814.

Presumably some thought has been given as to how modern, digital indexes might be arranged and whether we can learn anything – or not - from how our 18th century ancestors chose to categorize their Kirk Session indexes! Indeed, good indexes are essential in opening up the vast and unpredictable range of ancestral data located within the Kirk Session records, particularly for the 18th and early 19th centuries; so, this initiative deserves our support.

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NEW MEMBERS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1237 | Dr Stuart Mitchell, Dunfermline |
| 1238 | Diane Melvin, Shipton under Wychwood, Oxfordshire |
| 1239 | Douglas Archives, Balfon |
| 1240 | Aileen Farquhar, Dunblane |
| 1241 | Andrew Scott, Southam, Worcestershire |
| 1242 | Jean Duff, Western Australia |

Members' Interests

SURNAME	PARISH	PLACE (if not a Parish)	COUNTY	COUNTRY	PERIOD FROM	PERIOD TO	MEM NO.
BURNS			CLK	SCT	1650	1800	1239
BURNS			STI	SCT	1650	1800	1239
DOUGLAS	ALL	ALL		ALL	1100	2025	1239
DRYSDALE			CLK	SCT	1500	1600	1239
JENKINS	LARBERT		STI	SCT	1840	1890	1242
MACLEAN			STI	SCT	1650	1800	1239
MACLEAN			CLK	SCT	1650	1800	1239
MCLEAN			STI	SCT	1650	1800	1239
MCLEAN			CLK	SCT	1650	1800	1239
ROBERTSON	DUNBLANE		STI	SCT	1800	1964	1240
ROBERTSON	DUNBLANE		PER	SCT	1800	1964	1240
WAUGH	LARBERT		STI	SCT	1845	1870	1242

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Deaths of Members

We have sadly been notified of the deaths of the following members:-

No. 12 **Dr Tom Anderson**, one of the Society's founder members passed away on 14 December 2025, aged 91 years. Beloved husband of Irene, father to Richie and David, father-in-law of Anne and Jill, grandfather of Scott (married to Debby) and great grandfather of Sophie and Kirstin.

No. 1118 **Edgar Anderson**, joined 2011. Lived in Rickmansworth.

Exchange Journals Received: List 70 – Spring 2026

Most of the journals are now available in electronic format as e-journals and the intention is to have these available to view on our website. In the meantime, if you wish to request a copy, please contact centstcotfhs@gmail.com.

Society	Issue	Format
Aberdeen & North East FHS	176 Nov 26	e-journal
Caithness FHS	No. 79 Sept 25, No. 80 Dec 25	e-journal
Dumfries & Galloway FHS	No. 112 Jul 25, No. 113 Nov 25	e-journal
East Ayrshire FHS	Iss 56 Apr 25, Iss 57 Aug 25	e-journal
Glasgow FHS	No. 133 Jun 25, No. 134 Oct 25	e-journal
Highland FHS	Vol 43 Iss 3 May 25, Vol 43 Iss 4 Aug 25, Vol 44 Iss 1 Nov 25	e-journal
Lanarkshire FHS	No. 90 Oct 25	e-journal
Lothians FHS	Sep 25	e-journal
North Ayrshire FHS	Autumn 2024, Spring 2025, Autumn 2025	e-journal
Orkney FHS	Iss 115 Autumn 25, Iss 116 Winter 25	Hard copy
Renfrew FHS	Iss 54 Sep 25	e-journal
Shetland FHS	No. 135 Hairst 25, No. 135 Yule 25	e-journal
Tay Valley FHS	131 June 25, 132 Oct 25, 133 Feb 26	e-journal
Troon@Ayrshire FHS	106 Autumn 25	e-journal
West Lothian FHS	Iss 65 Nov 25	e-journal
Genealogist Magazine	Vol 35 No. 2 Jun 25, Vol 35 No. 3 Sep 25, Vol 35 No. 4 Dec 25	e-journal
The Manchester Genealogist	Vol 61 No. 3 2025, Vol 61 No. 4 2025	e-journal
Journal of Richmond-Tweed FHS Inc Ballina NSW, Australia	Iss 163 Mar 25, Iss 164 Jun 25, Iss 165 Sep 25, Iss 166 Dec 25, Iss 139 Dec 25	e-journal
Journal of the Western Australian Gen Soc	Vol 16 No. 2 Jul 25	e-journal
Family History Society of New Zealand	Aug 25, Sep 25, Dec 25	e-journal
Scottish Interest Group NZSG	Iss 138 Summer 25, Iss 139 Sep 25	e-journal

USING NEWSPAPERS FOR FAMILY RESEARCH; Part 1

By Sandra Reid (Member No. 369)

When I started my family research over 30 years ago, newspapers were not a resource you automatically turned to. It was rather time consuming. It usually meant visiting a library, loading a microfilm onto a machine and turning the handle to try and find the article you were looking for. There were often no indexes, though I do remember that Falkirk Library did have some subject indexes for the Falkirk Herald on microfiches. So first, you had to choose your fiche, load that onto the fiche reader, scan through the fiche till you found the subject you were looking for, take a note of all the issues which you thought were pertinent to your research, then ask the librarian to fetch the relevant microfilms.

Compare that to today, when you can access digital copies of articles which are indexed via Find My Past (FMP), Newspapers.com or the British Newspaper Archive - all from your own home. You can download and save them for future reference. I have a subscription to FMP, so normally I use their newspaper records. I do not have a subscription to Newspapers.com (part of Ancestry) even though I do have one for Ancestry, but I make a list all the people I want to look for until there is an offer of free access to their website for a weekend - and I just hope that I am free myself that same weekend.

I have discovered lots of random snippets and adverts, as well as much longer articles and obituaries, which have added that necessary flesh to the bare bones of my tree. Yes, it is easy to check the registers for the basic data, but does that really give you an insight into the sort of lives your ancestors lived? You can read social history books and articles, but that only gives a general impression of what life was like at the time. A newspaper entry might be more specific to your ancestor. Hopefully this is demonstrated by the examples I have included in this article.

My earliest recollection of finding something in a newspaper, which got me really excited, was in the archives of the Aberdeen and North East of Scotland Family History shop. Down in the basement, at that time, they had shelves of folders containing many unpublished sources – one of these was a typed index to newspaper articles. I decided to search for all the surnames I was researching in the north east area, and found three references to my maternal 3 times great grandfather – a George Leslie, who was a stonemason and crofter, but interestingly, in some censuses, a teacher of music and singing!! This had always

intrigued me, as I play the piano and organ, as did my maternal grandmother. The three articles covered the years 1850 – 1852.

The 1850 one was entitled '*Sacred Music Practice at Ord, Banff*', and I quote:

Mr Geo. Leslie, teacher of church music, Grange, having taught in this district throughout the winter, a number of pupils from the different schools met with him in the chapel on the evening of Monday last, for the purpose of practising, when the minister, along with other individuals, attended. Such was the proficiency evinced by the pupils, that all the audience, and in particular, the reverend gentleman, expressed themselves highly delighted, and astonished at the improvement made in so short a period.

The one from 1851 was called '*Drumblade Oratorio*':

Mr Leslie, teacher of music from Grange, about two months ago commenced five different schools at the following places in this parish, So now our locality, on every night of the week, except Saturday, presents a somewhat animated appearance, with our juvenile classes pacing towards the different schools, and at times a symphonious sound falling on the ear, little accustomed to hearing such. For some reasons, which we need not state at present, it was deemed advisable to have a performance for public inspection. This came off on the night of the 23rd ult. in a spacious house belonging to Mr Wilson, Newton. The performers were all arranged according to the different parts they had to execute. The vivacity sparkling in the juvenile countenance, the blaze of light, along with the thrilling chords of music, had a grand effect. We were lightly pleased with the appearance and number of the performers, but somewhat disappointed at the fewness of the auditors.

And the one from 1852 was '*Music Lessons at Burn of Oldmore*':

Mr George Leslie, teacher of sacred music from Grange, has commenced to give instruction under his new and improved method in this district, and his endeavours are attended with the utmost unprecedented success. By only a few lessons, those having no previous knowledge of music, and even children under nine years of age, are able, with ease, to initiate themselves into this delightful art, and to read music at first sight. Mr Leslie's fine musical abilities, coupled with his free and engaging manners, cannot fail to secure for him the highest esteem and greatest success among the more intelligent of the community.

I wonder what his 'new and improved method of teaching' was? So here was an ordinary mason/crofter who made the local news in Banffshire newspapers – and this was before official registration of births, marriages and deaths. Incidentally, I also found him being a judge at a ploughing match in 1859. George died in 1900 at the age of 94, but annoyingly the son-in-law who registered his death did not know who George's parents were. That seemed to be a dead-end for the moment. Let's leave George aside for now.

George's son, John – my 2 times great grandfather - married a Jane Duncan, whose maternal grandfather was a James Leslie – a precentor and teacher of church music!!! This James Leslie died in 1847 in Fochabers aged 69, so I was not able to learn who his parents were either. From the 1841 census I knew that he

was not born in the parish where he lived and died. Was there any connection between these two musical Leslie men?

To cut a long story short, I spent a lot of time researching through the OPRs for the parish of Alvah where George was born, and where I suspected James was born too in an earlier generation. My hunch was that they were nephew and uncle. Though I had no definitive proof, I was happy to leave it at that at that point. However, fast forward about 20 years, and in 2025 I am checking the Banffshire newspapers on FMP for obituaries for both men, and strike gold! Initially there was this obituary in 1900 for George, with the proof I was needing to connect him to James in Fochabers:

DEATH OF A NONAGENARIAN - On Tuesday last Mr George Leslie, late of Alvah and Grange, passed away at the age of ninety-four years, being a lad of nine years when Waterloo was fought, and of which times he had a vivid recollection. He was long and favourably known as a successful teacher of music, being a nephew of the late Mr James Leslie, music teacher, Fochabers. The deceased's labours were mostly in Aberdeen and Banffshire, and few parishes in the north-east parts - from Drumblade to the river Spey - but had his services. Those who can go back fifty years will remember his splendid voice and teaching abilities. He is survived by a large family of sons and daughters, two sons residing in Elgin.

If that was not proof enough, there was this fantastic appreciation by, as yet, an unknown local person:

THE LATE MR GEORGE LESLIE, MUSIC TEACHER, AND HIS UNCLE, MR JAMES LESLIE.

The announcement of the death of Mr George Leslie in the "Courant" of Friday last opens up to mind old associations in connection with himself and his uncle. I knew Mr George Leslie as a successful teacher of music upwards of fifty years ago. I saw then an active, lively man, and when I saw him about ten years ago, when he was in his eighty-fifth year, he retained the same erect figure and active air which became him so well in his younger days. He was a fine stamp of a music teacher, with his expansive forehead and fine-toned voice, combined with his teaching qualifications.

I also knew something of his uncle, Mr James Leslie, music teacher, Fochabers. I hold a letter written by him, 25th August, 1818, inviting my uncle and mother to assist him on a trying occasion. Mr Leslie was at the time teaching classes in Keith, and there was another teacher on the same ground at the same time. Each had his supporters and partisans. It was arranged that the rival teachers should appear on a particular Sunday in the Parish Church with a select choir of their own supporters, and to sit facing each other in opposite galleries. Mr Leslie had just finished teaching classes in the parish of Cairnie, where my uncle and my mother had distinguished themselves, and he invited them to join the choir at Keith on the Sunday in question. They complied with his request. The Rev. John Cruickshank of Glass preached on the occasion. He was an able preacher, with some thing of the bold dash of the old Covenanters. The words of his text were - "I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it" - 1st Cor., xii. 18 - from which he preached a stirring discourse which somewhat dampened the ardour of the rival vocalists.

Mr Leslie was the author of an instruction book on sacred music. A beautifully got-up book it was. I have seen copies in many households fifty years ago, but it has been supplanted by more recent treatises on the subject. Mr Leslie could also sing a Scottish song with a feeling that few could equal. On one occasion, while on a friendly visit at my grandfather's at Upper Sinsharnie, he was asked for a good old Scottish song, and, after a little persuasion, he gave the family circle a treat by singing "Saw Ye Johnnie Coming?" This was before my time, but I have heard my mother say that the pathos with which he rendered some of the words left a lasting impression on her mind, particularly the girls' earnest supplication. "Fee him, father, fee him."

I may on some future occasion amplify my notes on the above two old worthies. J. P.

I have tried to search for this proposed article but to date have not found anything. Nor have I been able to find an obituary for James Leslie in 1847, but I will keep looking. The description of George as being 'erect' and having 'an expansive forehead' resonates with the photo I have of his son John, my 2 times great grandfather, in his obituary in 1923 in an Elgin newspaper.

It has maybe taken me 20 years to finally get the proof I was wanting, but it has been well worth the wait! The details about both men in these articles certainly prove how newspapers can add flesh to the bare bones of a family tree. They also give a flavour of social life in the local farming community in rural Banffshire at different times in the 19th century.

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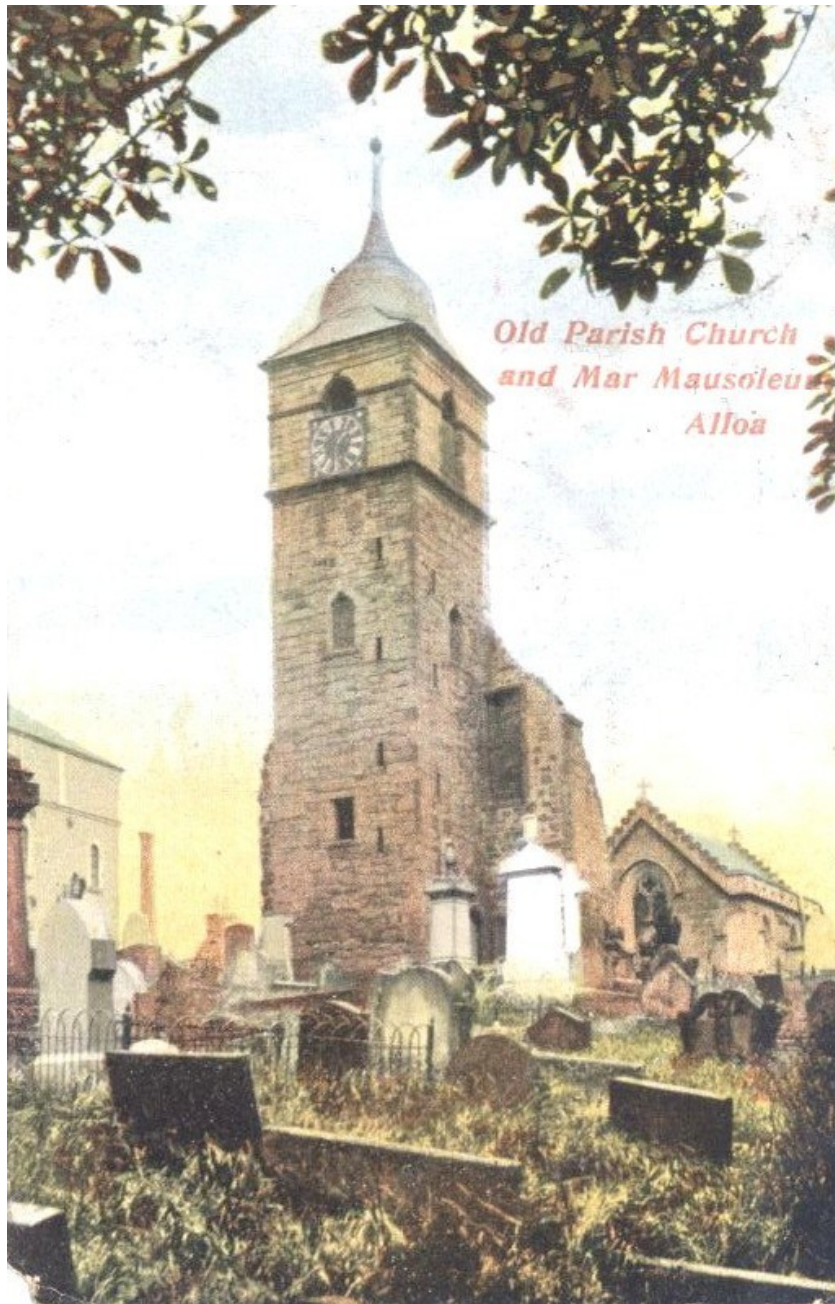
Cover Photographs

Alloa Old Parish Church and the Mar Mausoleum

Worship on this site dates back to 1401 when a chapel was provided as a place of worship for the owners of Alloa Tower and the manor.

All that remains of the 17th-century building is the west gable of the nave. The Mar Mausoleum is the building just to the right of the church.

The back cover picture is from 1900 and the picture on the front cover is a modern photograph taken from approximately the same position.



Alloa Old Parish Church and Mausoleum

