



THE SCOTTISH GENEALOGIST

DECEMBER 2024

What is a Currier?

Ernie Greenough – A Man With A “Strange Outlook”

John McAlley, Master Mariner (part 2)

Betsy Esplin Bell (1858-1930)

**Who Knows What Lies On The Other Side
Of A Genealogical Brick Wall?**

A Churchyard Dispute

**THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF
THE SCOTTISH GENEALOGY SOCIETY (SCIO)**

Vol. LXXII No. 4

The Scottish Genealogy Society (SCIO)

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Scottish Charity No. SC053432

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GENERAL INFORMATION

WHAT DO WE DO?

The Society is established to promote research into Scottish Family History and to undertake the collection, exchange and publication of information and material relating to Scottish genealogy. We assist members with modest enquiries but do not carry out professional research.

COURSES

We run a series of Courses throughout the year on various subjects to help members and non-members with their research.

NEWSLETTERS

The regular Newsletters are e-mailed to members who have chosen to receive them, and recent back issues are available to read in the online Members Area. If you are not currently receiving our Newsletter please contact us at E-mail: scotsgenpublicity@scotsgenealogy.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Personal memberships of the Society are £20 per year (£25 for family memberships) and entitle all to receive "The Scottish Genealogist" as a PDF by email. UK residents can opt to receive a printed copy at no additional charge. For overseas members who wish to receive a printed copy of "The Scottish Genealogist", and for all institutions, the membership is £25 per year. All types of membership provide access to the online members' area of the website.

The Society has charitable status and members who pay UK income tax are encouraged to use the Gift Aid Scheme. Details of the scheme are available from the Membership Secretary. E-mail: membership@scotsgenealogy.com.

PUBLICATIONS

Information about publications can be obtained from the Sales Secretary, email sales@scotsgenealogy.com. Back issues of the Journal can be accessed in the members area of the website or by contacting the Sales Secretary.

ENQUIRIES

Correspondence should be addressed to 15 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh EH1 2JL. Telephone 0131 220 3677. E-mail: enquiries@scotsgenealogy.com.

TALKS

These may be online only at zoom.us or may be held in person and online, on various third Mondays in the Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, at 7.30pm.

Do please check our website for up to date information at:

<https://www.scotsgenealogy.com/scottish-genealogy-society/calendar>.

THE SCOTTISH GENEALOGIST

Articles are welcomed by the Editorial Team via email. Illustrations should be in JPEG format if possible. Members' queries are welcome for inclusion in the magazine, space permitting. E-mail: editor@scotsgenealogy.com.

SOCIETY WEBSITE

This can be accessed at www.scotsgenealogy.com. Members can access the Members Only Area on the website by clicking "login" at the top of the webpage.

Note that we accept no responsibility for the functionality, accuracy, or content of external websites that may be referenced on our website or in our emails. If you believe that a link we provide points at inappropriate material, please do advise us at enquiries@scotsgenealogy.com.

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Keeping up to date

The latest Society News

Sign in to the Society Website at scotsgenealogy.com and click on "Society News" in the "Members Area".

To subscribe to our monthly newsletter delivered via e-mail, click on your user name at the top right of the page and choose "Edit Profile" from the drop down menu. Then, under marketing, check the box for "newsletter".

Editorial

This quarter's Journal has caught up with the Society's transition to an SCIO. All references now reflect that. The design is beginning to align, as far as possible, with our excellent web site.

Two eagle-eyed members spotted three small errors in the last edition, the first for which I was responsible. Perhaps I should leave at least one in each edition to encourage members to hunt for it and thus read every word. I suspect the late Ivor Guild, a founder member of the Society, and Editor of the Journal for nearly four decades, would reach for a heavenly legal tome and find evidence that my doing so was a most serious offence.

The interval since the last edition has been filled with hunting down contributions for this edition. I have even resorted to a breach of the informal Editor's code of ethics by contributing an article of my own. I do however point out that I provided it before taking up this post. Members who wish to prevent similar editorial sins in future, have it their hands. Contributions are always welcome and your family stories are invariably engaging. The Editor can help, if need be, by ghost writing your article from bare bones provided by you.

In my other capacity as a volunteer in our Library, I have discovered the value of our being a Partner Library of Family Search. In successive weeks I was able to assist visitors to find images of centuries-old family marriage records in Uruguay and in Chile. En route I learned from Spanish visitors how surnames are constructed in their traditions.

editor@scotsgenealogy.com

Send contributions to editor@scotsgenealogy.com

We are also happy to provide feedback on your ideas before you start the serious task of writing a potential article.

*We are looking for up to 1,750 words with limited references.
A further 40 words describing the author can also be provided which may be published at the end of your contribution.*

Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Update

Currently the process of dissolving the old Scottish Genealogy Society SC016718 is well under way.

With our previous chair Jan Rea leaving her position in September 2024, the SCIO trustees were required to take a vote to co-opt a new chairperson, which was a requirement by OSCR. Paul Soutar has agreed to hold the position of chairperson for the time being. We convey our thanks to Jan for her efforts.

The bank account for Scottish Genealogy Society (SCIO) SC053432 has now been opened.

Several accounts, contracts and direct debits have already been moved to the Scottish Genealogy Society (SCIO) with minimal fuss, but others are proving to be more irksome.

Current membership subscriptions will be moved over as and when they are due for renewal. This may already have happened for your subscription by the time of this Journal issue.

Updates on further progress will be published in *The Scottish Genealogist* as well as on the website at www.scotsgenealogy.com.

secretary@scotsgenealogy.com

OSCR
Scottish Charity Regulator
www.oscr.org.uk

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Open Day At The Society Library

by Paul Soutar, Chair

The Society occupies an historic building so it was proper that we participated in the “*Doors Open Day*” once again. Organised by the Scottish Civic Trust it encourages historic buildings across the city to throw open their doors to anyone with an interest in our built heritage.

The Society participated by extending the Saturday hours of our library at 15 Victoria Terrace and with a stall in St Augustine’s Church on George IV Bridge.



We felt under some pressure during the day as over seventy visitors descended upon us. Scaffolding and boarding still continue to blight the entrance to the Terrace. Thanks to all who successfully made the journey and to the volunteers who answered questions and showed people around our premises.

There is an obvious overlap between people interested in old buildings and those with an interest in the generations of our ancestors, and those of others, who designed and used them. So we gained a number of new members on the day. Some local, others visitors to Edinburgh from across the oceans.

I believe our enthusiasm for genealogical research is visible whenever we meet the public. This was another useful opportunity to meet new people and extend our membership.

Congratulations to all who took part.

chairman@scotsgenealogy.com

What Is A Currier?

from the Editor

A search of Scotland's 1881 census reveals a peak of 1,228 occurrences of "currier" as an occupation. By 1901 it was down to 793 having been around the 1,000 mark in each census since 1851.

Searching for a definition we find:

currier, *noun* (British English)
a person who curries leather

from Collins English Dictionary

Also stating that the word's origin is:

c. 14: from Old French *corier*, from Latin *coriārius* a tanner, from *corium* leather

Which helps us understand that a currier does something with leather but gives little sense of what they do.

Bruce Durie's invaluable 2013 book, *Understanding Documents for Genealogy & Local History*, provides some succour as usual.

currier, (Sc[ots])
tanner of skins, hides and leather

Travelling back to the origins of today's English we at last find a definition a bit more revealing. Samuel Johnson's dictionary gives us:

currier, *noun*
one who dresses and pares leather for those who make shoes, or other things

And finally, a poetic use of the word currier. John Dryden's translation of *The Works of Virgil*, published in 1697 includes:

*Warn'd by frequent ills, the way they found
To lodge their loathsome carrion under ground
For useless to the currier were their hides
Nor could their tainted flesh with ocean tides
Be free'd from filth*

editor@scotsgenealogy.com

Ernie Greenough – A Man With A “Strange Outlook”

by Douglas Hope

Lesley Ernest Edward Greenough was born in 1908 in Surrey. He was later known as Ernest Leslie or Ernest Leonard and known to family as Ernie. The reason for the multiple names may well have been an attempt to disguise his identity.

He was married seven times. When we say married, maybe it should be “married”, as only three of these were lawful marriages, all others being bigamous. He was convicted three times for bigamy, once in England and twice in Scotland and he had ten children over three of his “marriages”. He was “married” in the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic Church, and Registry Office. At one point he was “married” to four women at the same time. Two of his marriages ended in divorce.

His first marriage was to Ruth Leah Gregory in Surrey in 1929. They had five children - Leslie Andrew, Terence R, Ernest John, and two others, but in 1938 Ernie deserted his family, leaving them unsupported. He ended up in Edinburgh, where in 1938 he bigamously married Mary Gill Allan. His marriage certificate shows him as a bachelor and a trooper with the Royal Dragoon Guards, though whether this was true is open to question (like much surrounding Ernie's life). He appears not to have served in the Second World War.

In December 1941 with Mary he had a son, Leslie Edward, who died in infancy. At that point Ernie gave his occupation as Aero Engine fitter. Mary suffered from lung cancer and while she was ill, Ernie began a relationship with Mary McGill. Mary McGill had a son, Ernest Leslie, with Ernie in December 1943 and when registering the birth, Ernie gave his date of marriage as September 1938, suggesting that he was married to Mary McGill. His wife Mary Allan died in 1944. With Mary's death certificate, Ernie could show future brides that he was a widower and four months after Mary death, Ernie bigamously married Mary McGill in Edinburgh, stating he was a widower, though, of course, he was still married to Ruth.

With Mary he had three children - Ernest Leslie, James Arthur, and Edith Rosemary. His occupations ranged from Chauffeur to Motor Trader to (strangely) Master Slater. Up to this point Ernie was calling himself Ernest Leslie Greenough.

In 1947, Ernie had become a chauffeur in West Linton, which meant his living away from Mary. In 1948, having received no money from Ernie, Mary visited Ernie's employer and was told that Ernie was on his honeymoon! He had bigamously married Mary Kelly in Edinburgh. He had stated he was a widower

and gave his occupation as Engineer fitter. At this point he was calling himself Ernest Leonard Greenough.

Ernie had stayed with Mary Kelly for only two weeks before he moved to Aldershot where he worked as a bus conductor. While in Aldershot he met Rose Ann Mary Higgins at a bus stop in September 1948. He bigamously married her in December 1948. So at this time Ernie was "married" to four different women at the same time – Ruth, Mary McGill, Mary Kelly, and Rose.

His misdeeds finally caught up with him and he was convicted of bigamy in Edinburgh in August 1949 for the marriage to Mary Kelly while still married to Mary McGill. He was given a prison sentence of eight months.

PRISON FOR BIGAMY. — Sentence of eight months imprisonment was imposed by Sheriff-Substitute Wm. Garrett, K.C., at Edinburgh Sheriff Court yesterday on Ernest Leonard Greenough (39), in custody, who admitted bigamously marrying an Edinburgh woman in a church in the city on May 22, 1948. It was stated that accused's first wife had died in 1944, and that accused had shortly afterwards married a woman he had met in Edinburgh. In 1947 accused had obtained employment as a chauffeur at West Linton, which necessitated him living away from his wife. Receiving no money, his wife had visited accused's employer and was told that accused was away on his honeymoon. It transpired that Greenough had met another woman and told her he was a widower, bringing forward his first wife's death certificate to prove it.

The Scotsman, 31 August 1949

He seems to have been released early as in February 1950. He was now committed to trial in Surrey for his bigamous marriage to Rose. His marriage to Ruth was still unknown to the authorities in both Scotland and England.

At his trial in Surrey in March 1950, he admitted his bigamous marriage to Rose. His defending council claimed that as Ernie had been charged in Scotland under Scottish Law in August 1949, he could not have the bigamous marriage in England taken into account, though he had wanted it to be. This seems to be stretching credibility. Had Ernie wanted all his offences taken into account he would have admitted to his first lawful marriage to Ruth, rendering all subsequent "marriages" unlawful.

The judge in Surrey observed of Ernie "You have strange outlook on life" and then said "We do not believe in hitting a man twice" and passed a nominal sentence of three days imprisonment, which meant his immediate release.

BIGAMY ALLEGED

Ernest Leonard Greenough, of 49, Perowne Street, Aldershot, was remanded on bail for 14 days by the Camberley magistrates on Thursday last week on a charge of bigamy. He was alleged to have married Rose Ann Higgins, at the time working as a nursemaid in Camberley, at St. Tarcisius Roman Catholic Church, Camberley, on December 18th, 1948. Det.-Sergt. Hobbs said he saw Greenough on August 6th, 1949, when he admitted having married Miss Higgins while his legal wife was alive.

The Surrey Advertiser, 18 February 1950

But living a lie often unravels, and his marriage to Ruth finally came to light and he was convicted for bigamy in respect of his marriages to Mary Allan and Mary McGill. He received a sentence of nine months' imprisonment. In court the Procurator Fiscal said "*accused was legally married in Surrey in 1929, became the father of five children, deserted his family in 1938, and had not supported them since.*"

When he left his wife he bigamously married a woman in an Edinburgh church, and lived with her until she died in February 1944. But while the first bigamous wife was ill he became friendly with bigamous wife number two whom on 10 June 1944, he "married" in a Registrar's Office in Edinburgh. The second bigamous wife had a child to the accused while he was still living with his first bigamous wife. He added, "*I may say, he has left the second bigamous wife and since then has become embroiled with two other women.*"

At some point Ruth must have divorced Ernie as she remarried in 1951. In 1953 Ernie lawfully married Mary McGill (who he had bigamously married in 1944 and with whom he had three children) and they had another daughter, Geraldine Anne, in 1955.

But Ernie's marital affairs were not over. In early 1962, Ernie returned from working away and confronted his wife Mary on her being out at nights. Mary admitted to adultery but would not say with whom.

On her refusing to end the relationship, Ernie left her. In 1971 he divorced her, so that he could marry for the last time – to Helen Hogg Davidson in Edinburgh.

Ernie died in 1975.

Douglas Hope lived in Edinburgh in from 1953 to 1976, then moved to Yorkshire where he still lives. He started researching his family tree around 2000. He has transcribed for FreeCen, ScotlandsPlaces and Borders FHS. This is his first published article.



Society volunteers at the National Library Family History event



**I've come to Victoria Terrace
to find my Granny**
*Can you be the Saturday volunteer
who helps to find her?*

*Coffee, Tea, loads of biscuits, good craic, gratitude
and new knowledge*
email: librarian@scotsgenealogy.com

John McAlley, Master Mariner (part 2)

by John Lord

We have followed John McAlley's professional career up to the point when he gained his Master's certificate. But what of his personal life?

In December 1847 (no specific date is given in the parish register), John married Isabella Simpson in the parish church of Airth. At some point, John, his parents and other family members, including Peter McKay, had become members of the Falkirk Anti-burgher congregation, meeting at the unusual octagonal-shaped "Tattie Kirk". In the summer of 1853 tragedy struck.

The church's register records the burial of "John McAlley's child", aged two months, on 12 July 1853. Looking ahead a little, on 17 May 1854 Isabella gave birth to a daughter, Agnes, named after Isabella's mother. She too was to die young, of whooping cough, on 6 September 1857, and was also buried in the Tattie Kirk's little graveyard. On 30 September 1858, while John was at sea, twins, John and Lillas, were born.



Isabella McAlley and her twin children, John and Lillas

Back to John's professional career. He had passed the Master's examination on 10 January 1854. On 18 January, in London, he took over the command of the brig *Favourite*, 182 tons, and brought her back to Grangemouth, her port of registry, with a cargo of guano. John was to remain her master until September 1859. During that time, as well as comparatively short trips between UK ports, the *Favourite* made a number of voyages to ports in the Baltic and the Mediterranean, one to Cuba, and one to Archangel in Russia.

Cargoes included coke and iron to Genoa, sulphur from Sicily, timber from the Baltic, coal from Newcastle, etc. In March 1855, on the way from Grangemouth to Calais with pig-iron, the *Favourite* went aground on rocks at the west end of Inch Garvie, in the Firth of Forth. Canmore (Historic Environment Scotland) includes wrecks in its listings, and so the *Favourite* has been immortalised! This despite the fact that she was towed off on the evening tide! Though the paper *Lloyd's List* records that she was "*making a great deal of water, and with serious damage*", repairs seem to have been carried out quickly, since in early May she sailed from Grangemouth for Stettin.

The Mercantile Marine Act, 1850, required masters to keep an Official Log, recording onboard illnesses, deaths, misconduct, punishments etc. Though not all these logs have survived, there is one for a voyage of the *Favourite* to the Mediterranean, November 1858 to May 1859. This records that "*John Simpson, Cook and Seaman, fell from the foretopsail yard when reefing and was lost overboard. Every possible means was used to save him, but failed. It was blowing a gale at the time, with a very heavy sea running.*" An inventory of his belongings, mainly clothes, follows, and an account of wages due to him.

In Sept 1859 the owner of the *Favourite* sold her, but John didn't have to wait long for another post: in October another Grangemouth ship-owner gave him the command of the barque *Hampton*, 440 tons. Between Nov 1859 and Dec 1860, John made three voyages in this ship: London to Demerara, and back to Grangemouth, via St John, New Brunswick; Grangemouth to Quebec, and back to North Shields (the Official Log records that "*Archibald McColl has been found not competent to perform the duty of Able Seaman and has been dis-rated to Ordinary seaman, to be paid at the rate of £2 per month.*" McColl and another seaman deserted in Quebec.); North Shields to Memel in the Baltic, and back to Grangemouth. At the start of this voyage, after being towed clear of the port by a steam-tug, John found three of the crew were missing. Leaving the ship in the charge of the pilot, he got the tug to take him back to port to collect the missing men, and bring them back. He was charged ten shillings per man!

The same owner next gave him command of the barque *Queenshill*, 612 tons. This vessel was to get John into the news again. Three voyages, April 1861 to June 1862, were without incident: Liverpool-Quebec-Grangemouth; Grangemouth-Quebec-Greenock; Greenock-Trinidad-Greenock.

His next voyage was to Quebec again. This gave rise to articles in the *Falkirk Herald* in July and August: The first, *"This fine clipper barque ... maintains her reputation for fast sailing, having made the passage home from Demerara to Greenock, with a cargo of sugar, in the short space of twenty-eight days. She left again on Saturday last for Quebec; and, as the Tadmor, belonging to the same owners, has left for the same place with a few days' start, some interest is manifested as to which vessel will first reach our great colonial timber depot."*

The last article reports that though the *Tadmor* reached Quebec first, the *Queenshill* had taken six days less, *"a performance that indubitably stamps her as the champion sailor of the Port."* The return journey was less auspicious! 17 September 1862 *Lloyd's List* printed a despatch received from St John's, Newfoundland: *"The QUEENSHILL (barque) from Quebec to Grangemouth, struck near Bradore, but is able to proceed"*.

On 1 Dec 1862 this was followed by another message, sent from Grangemouth: *"The QUEEN'S HILL, McAlley, from Quebec to this port, struck the rocks while running into Bradore Bay and became a total wreck; crew saved."* Bradore Bay is in the straits between Newfoundland and Labrador. However, perhaps misled by the mention of Grangemouth, Canmore has included this as a wreck in the Forth! The description "total wreck" in *Lloyd's List* turned out to be incorrect as, in October 1863, presumably after repairs, the *Queenshill* arrived at Glasgow from Bradore.

Before this, John had evidently come back in some other ship. On 20 October 1862 shipping news reported that the Glasgow barque *Hooyland*, 307 tons, owner Adam Pearson, master Captain Inglis, was loading for Porto Rico.

On 25 Oct 1862 the *Greenock Telegraph* carried an announcement of the marriage of Captain Inglis to Mary Lennox. Did Mary object to her new husband leaving her within days of their marriage? Whatever the reason, in November John McAlley was appointed master for this voyage. At Porto Rico he took on a cargo of sugar, and delivered it to London, before returning to Glasgow, arriving 2nd July 1863. There, Pearson gave him command of the brig *Elizabeth Rose*, 216 tons, sailing almost immediately for Kingston, Jamaica, bringing sugar back to Greenock in December 1863, where Pearson put the brig up for sale. John made use of this period out of work to move his family from Falkirk to Liverpool.

In June 1864, ship-owner Edward Bates of Liverpool appointed him to a vessel he'd just bought, the barque *Twilight*, 630 tons, described in adverts as *"this splendid iron clipper ship"*. The voyage was to China, where the ship spent just under a year, sailing between various ports, including Shanghai and Hong Kong, presumably trading. Returning, she called at Singapore, Rangoon (where she spent nearly five months), Falmouth, and Bremerhaven (where the cargo was discharged), arriving at Liverpool 4 Nov 1866.

In December she sailed again, to Singapore, arriving 6 May 1867. John's nephew Thomas, aged fourteen, making his first voyage, was a member of the crew, rated Ordinary Seaman. On 8 June the *Twilight* left for Liverpool, her cargo including pepper, sago, tapioca, buffalo hides and horns, gambier (used in tanning and dyeing), sapanwood, cotton etc.

On 20 Nov 1867 the *Cork Examiner* reported: "*Yesterday, a large vessel, named the Twilight, arrived in the harbour from Singapore. She fell in with a great deal of bad weather, and in consequence her voyage was prolonged to 163 days. Provisions ran short, and half the crew got laid up in scurvy.*"

The ship *Twilight*, from Singapore, with general cargo, put into Cork harbour yesterday for provisions and medical attendance. She was 163 days out, during which the most adverse and dangerous weather was encountered, and the crew falling short of provisions were in much distress. Fully one-half of them were attacked with scurvy.

from the Cork Constitution - Wednesday 20 November 1867

A report given by John on his return to Liverpool also detailed the severe damage suffered by the ship during two "fearful gales", one on 23 and 24 August, one on 1 November. Between these, on 30 September, was the doubtless welcome moment when they were "*boarded by a boat from the ship *Dilawar*, bound for Bombay, who brought a letter bag on board*".

On 19 February 1868 Mackinnon & Frew & Co, also of Liverpool, appointed John master of the square-rigged ship *Bengollyun*, 1154 tons. This was a last-minute appointment. John's name replaces a crossed-out master's name on the crew-list, and the ship sailed the very next day for Calcutta, arriving 20 June.

On 5 August, with a cargo including jute, cotton, linseed, tincal (borax), shellac, saltpetre, hides, silk and silk cocoons, she left again for Liverpool, arriving around 15 November. From 12 December 1868 to 5 October 1869 she made the same trip.

While at Calcutta, in late April and early May, two of the crew were admitted to hospital, with cholera; both died. In early November 1869 the *Bengollyun* sailed again for Calcutta. On the outward journey, while two men were on the main topsail yard, a tie gave way, and both were knocked off the yard into the sea. Though lifebuoys were thrown, and a boat launched to rescue them, both were drowned.

At Calcutta the ship was chartered to take its cargo to Boston, USA. On the way there, another seaman, while stowing the jib, fell overboard. Rescue attempts were again unsuccessful, though the ship's boat spent an hour searching. From Boston, the ship returned via New York, where almost the whole crew deserted! Replacements were engaged, and the ship arrived back at Liverpool 12 December 1870. From 20 January to 18 October 1871 John made one more Liverpool-Calcutta-Liverpool voyage, which seems to have been uneventful.

Shortly afterward, Mackinnon Frew sold the *Bengollyun* to a French ship-owner, and appointed John to the square-rigged ship *Dinapore*, 1047 tons, instead. He sailed on 29 November 1871, again to Calcutta, thence to New York. As they left Calcutta, a stowaway was found; he was signed on as a crew member.

On the way to New York, one of the apprentices (trainee officers) fell from the mainyard on to a hatch, and died a few days later.

From New York the *Dinapore* brought a cargo of Indian corn, rosin and staves to Liverpool, arriving 16 October 1872. On 11 December John was transferred to the *Serampore*, 1527 tons. On 4 January 1873 he set sail for Calcutta, with a cargo of salt, on what was to be his last voyage.

The ship was sighted off Whitehaven on 8 January, but was never seen again. She started to be reported as missing in late July.

MISSING VESSELS:

The **ONEIZA**, of Liverpool, Off. No., 42,663, Wright, from the Tyne to Aden, with coal, was spoken off Ushant on the 31st January last, and has not since been heard of.

The **SERAMPORE**, Off. No., 51,481, McAlley, of and from Liverpool, for Calcutta, with salt, was off Whitehaven on the 8th January last, and has not since been heard of.

from Lloyd's List - Thursday 18 September 1873

Meanwhile, on 4 June 1873 John's son, also John, had been indentured as an apprentice in the Mackinnon Frew ship *Jeypore*. After leaving Calcutta on 29 November 1873, this vessel, too, was never seen again. Isabella was bereaved, not only of her husband, but also of her only son.

Betsy Esplin Bell (1858-1930)

She had a long criminal record driven by her addiction to drink,
but was she her husband's victim?

by Stewart Stevenson

Betsy was born on 26 January 1858 in Dundee to David Bell, a carpenter, and his wife, Agnes Sandeman. Father registered the birth, but is recorded as "Not Present". George T Bisset-Smith, the Registration Examiner, published his book "Vital Registration", the manual for Scottish Registrars, in 1907. In it he states that a "liberal interpretation" should be given to the word "Present" in this context but also states that "Not Present" must not be used. I suspect that leaves most genealogists, me included, little the wiser as to what "Present" was actually supposed to mean.

So let's pass on to the story.

Betsy's parents married in 1856, with her mother Agnes making her mark, an "X", rather than signing the registration record, indicating that she was illiterate. Her husband David signed.

Betsy appears to have been the second and final child of this marriage. By the 1861 Census, she was living without her parents as a three-year-old boarder at 3 Coldside, Dundee, with a widow named Helen Anderson. Her older brother David, living in George's Place, Dundee, is described as a grandchild to the Head of Household, Betsy Bean. Two other grandchildren, Betsy Bell and George Costley also lived there. Perhaps a rather discouraging start to what ultimately was a rather chaotic life.

Indeed we see no more of Betsy's father, David Bell, in Scotland, but there is one in Australia, who marries another woman there in 1861 and has a large family with her. All without the inconvenience of divorcing his Scottish wife. While not conclusive, the evidence provided in Australia of his birth is entirely consistent with this being Betsy's father.

At the 1871 Census, we see mum and her two offspring back together in Hospital Wynd, Dundee. The mother, Agnes, is described as Head of the Household, aged thirty-four and employed as a power loom weaver. She is shown as married rather than as a widow, thus suggesting that she choose to believe, or at least record, that David Bell was still alive. But he was demonstrably not living with them.

Agnes' daughter Betsy appears again in the record when she married Hugh Higgins, a coal miner, in April 1878. Like her mother, she made her mark, indicating her illiteracy. She too is a power loom weaver and declares herself to

be twenty years old. Her first and only child arrived in October of that year, thus indicating that she was pregnant when she married.

Three years after marrying Hugh, the 1881 Census shows her as married and living in Blackness Road, Dundee, as the Head of the Household. Her mother, now dubiously described as a widow – her presumed husband actually died in Australia seven years later – and her two-year-old daughter, were staying with her, but there is no husband present. She had reverted to her maiden name, Bell, and her forename is Elizabeth rather than Betsy.

By now, Betsy's husband Hugh is living with his brother and mother in Bothwell, Lanarkshire. He is still a coal miner, although his age is shown as twenty-five rather than twenty-two, as suggested by his declaring he was nineteen when he married three years earlier. Ten years later, the 1891 census shows him still a miner, still in Lanarkshire with his mother, but now declaring himself to be thirty-two years old. Indeed no further records show his living in Dundee. He seems to have been with his wife and daughter for a very short time.

Meanwhile, by 1891 Betsy is living in Hilltown, Dundee, with her mother, who is Head of Household, and her daughter. Betsy now describes herself as unmarried. She is described as a Jute Weaver and claims to be thirty-three.

Soon she is a regular in the courts and in the columns of the local papers.

The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported in its edition of 14 October 1893 that Betsy Bell or Higgins had been found guilty of loitering in Dundee's Cowgate. That's the delicate Victorian term for soliciting for the purposes of prostitution.

LOITERING. - Cecilia Heron or Crichton was accused of loitering in Cowgate. Mr Campbell of the Dundee Boys' Home, stated that with the object of getting the woman to reform he had suggested that she might go to the Rescue Home. Miss Donald had stated that she was willing to take Crichton in. The Baillie said he was glad efforts were being made to rescue accused from a life of infamy and shame. On condition that she would act on the advice of Mr Campbell and others, he would allow her to go with an admonition. Betsy Bell or Higgins was brought up on a similar charge, the locus of her importuning being Cowgate. She firmly denied the charge, and called one of the constables who was a witness in the case a liar. Sentence - 10s 6d, or seven days imprisonment.

She was sentenced to a fine of ten shillings and sixpence or seven days in prison.

Nineteen or so years later, the *Dundee Courier* reported in its edition of 1 May 1912, under the heading “Dundee Woman’s Record”, that Betsy Bell or Higgins had passed a century of court appearances when she was fined forty shillings or twenty days in prison after pleading guilty to a charge of drunkenness.

The somewhat incomplete Dundee prison records show her having been incarcerated for being Drunk and Incapable (28 times), Breach of the Peace (7 times), Riotous Conduct (3 times), and twice each for Loitering, Obscene Language, and Breach of Section 70 of the Licensing (Scotland) Act of 1903. In total, about 850 days of short sentences.



Of these, the last may be particularly interesting in that it leads to a photograph of Betsy.

The 1903 Act provided for a blacklist of people who had been convicted of drink-related offences three times in the preceding twelve months. The list contained details of the most recent offence and a photograph of the inebriant. It placed a duty on sellers of alcohol to refuse to serve such people and to report any purchase attempts that they made. The police distributed copies of the blacklist to all licensees.

The *Dundee Courier*, in a recent “past times” article, reported that the 1905 blacklist had forty-two Dundonians on it, an astonishing thirty-five of whom were female. And, yes, Betsy Higgins or Bell appears there.

As a method of dealing with the problem, it failed utterly and was soon abandoned.

But it was not just the legal system that had lost its way in its search for a solution to drunkenness.

In January 1907, the *British Medical Journal* carried an article which stated “many of the committals are in the lowest state of unimprovable degradation”. Continuing, “upwards of 62 per cent are insane or mentally deficient”. Photographs were provided that purported to show that the cause lay with “congenital defect .. [which] determined the condition in which these cases are found”.

In Betsy's case, the evidence might suggest environmental factors, family circumstances, rather than a congenital defect drove her problems.

With the leading medical journal of its time discussing chronic insobriety thus, it should be no surprise that medicine offered no more of a solution to this addiction than the 1903 Act.

In the meantime, Betsy's spouse, Hugh Higgins, resurfaces in Edinburgh on 25 March 1901 when he participates in a marriage ceremony with Janet Scott Brown Greig. This is in the absence of any record of a divorce from his first wife, who continues to present herself in the Dundee courts as his spouse. Indeed, Betsy six days later, for census night, is in prison and is described as married.

We might assume that Hugh's new "wife", Janet, having given birth to a child without a named father five years earlier, was in want of a husband. At the "marriage", she was twenty-seven and a spinster, while Hugh declared himself to be thirty-seven and, despite still being married to Betsy, a bachelor.

He probably knew that he was entering a bigamous marriage as when he died in 1918, he was described as married to Elizabeth Bell. And there was no reference to his bigamous wife, Janet.

Six days after the "marriage" in 1901, Hugh and Janet established their home in Campbell's Close, Edinburgh, with Janet's five-year-old daughter.

But we can see nothing in the records suggesting that Janet had any contact with Hugh Higgins after a few years of this "marriage".

In the 1911 Census, she is a housekeeper in Uphall, West Lothian, attesting that she has been married eleven years and is without any children from the "marriage".

Things now take a dramatic turn for the worse, and Janet is received into the Lanark District Asylum in December of that year as a pauper, with the diagnosis "*she labours under mania*". She remained there for three days. But she returned at a later date and died there in 1916 from a cerebral haemorrhage. The death record shows her as married to Hugh Higgins.

Janet was buried in the Hartwood Asylum cemetery in lair 242.

The formal records cannot readily show what responsibility Hugh Higgins had for the damaged lives of the two women he married and then abandoned. But it is hard to argue that he had none.

And Betsy's previous family history was somewhat chaotic.

But despite it all, Betsy survived to die in 1930 aged sixty-nine, somewhat older than her life expectancy at the time of her birth. She was then described as the widow of Hugh Higgins, a man the records show as having had two wives. Her father, David Bell, is shown as deceased, with nothing in Scottish records to show that, like her husband, her father was a deserting spouse who committed bigamy.

Both the husbands whose bigamous misdeeds are described here, seem to have escaped detection during their lives. Only with the ready access that modern genealogists have to the critical and census records, can we see the infamy of such cruel husbands.


3

LIKENESS AND DESCRIPTION OF PERSON REFERRED TO,

REGISTER No. **28**

Name and alias—**BETSY BELL or HIGGINS.**
 Residence—130 Overgate, "White's Lodging House."
 Place of business or where employed—Rosebank Works.

Age—46 Years.
 Height—5 ft. 4½ ins.
 Build—Stout.
 Complexion—Fresh.
 Hair—Dark Brown.
 Eyes—Grey.
 Peculiarities or marks—Scar on brow; wears crop.



Profession or occupation—Factory worker.
 Date and nature of last conviction—10th July, 1905.—Contravention of Section 70 (1) of the "Licensing (Scotland) Act, 1903."—Found in a state of intoxication and incapable of taking care of herself and not under the care or protection of some suitable person.
 Court at which convicted—Police Court, Dundee.

N.B.—Should the above or any other known convicted person within the meaning of the previously quoted Section, attempt to purchase or obtain any excisable liquor, it is requested that the licensed person, or the person refusing to supply the liquor, will, as soon as practicable, give information of such attempt to the Police in order that the law may be enforced.

To, *Mrs Helen Whitton*
Publican
243, Rosebank Road

DUNDEE

Whose special attention is called to above.
 This Notice served by me on the *28* day of July 1905.

Alfred Hutchison Constable

Illustration Courtesy of Dundee Central Library

Who Knows What Lies On The Other Side Of A Genealogical Brick Wall?

by Gill Lindsay

For over twenty years I have been researching my paternal family with considerable success. Rooted firmly in Edinburgh and the Lothians (or so I thought) the superb ScotlandsPeople records, supported by a range of other sources, have enabled me to progress back several generations, unearthing fascinating information and confirming the veracity of several family stories in the process. However, one line, that of my two times great-grandmother, Wilhelmina Janet Ferguson, remained stubbornly elusive – until recently that is!

I knew the names of her parents (William Ferguson and Margaret Turnbull) but, try as I may, I was unable to find anything about them. Wilhelmina was born in Edinburgh in 1812 as was her elder sister, Margaret (b.1809) but that's as far as I was able to confirm.

Online Ancestry trees suggested potential names for her grandparents (my four times great-grandparents) but there were no reliable sources provided to support this. When I contacted a couple of the people whose trees were online, they admitted they had copied their information from other sources and Geneanet Community Trees Index. I did not see that as reliable. The name suggested was distinctive, but I couldn't find anyone of that name, only someone with a similar name living a century later. My brick wall remained stubbornly solid!

Then a chink of light appeared in the form of a hint that the elusive William Ferguson and Margaret Turnbull may have come from the Borders, settling in Edinburgh where they had the two daughters I was aware of. William is described as a 'coachman' on Wilhelmina's birth record and a 'spirit merchant' on her death entry. Margaret's birth record describes him as a 'carter'.

Directories confirm there were carriers travelling between Edinburgh and England at the time but, frustratingly, no names for the people operating this service. There are, however, entries for a William Ferguson, spirit dealer, in Netherbow/opposite the Linen Hall, Canongate from 1809, the year his daughter Margaret was born in Canongate.

Armed with this limited information and suggestions from FamilySearch I began building a tentative tree, based largely upon the sources found in FamilySearch and the limited information I had, and was able to establish that William Ferguson had



Our Library & Family History Centre is a partner library of FamilySearch. Come into 15 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh to search their information.

married Margaret Turnbull in Cornhill on the south side of the River Tweed in 1794. This enabled me to find five further children born in England and baptised in one of the Presbyterian Chapels in Wooler.

This all looked very promising, but I still needed to find more reliable sources, ideally original church records or at least reliable transcripts if they still existed. As anyone who has used pre-official registration parish records will be aware, they rarely give full details of the people concerned so need other supporting sources to ensure you have the 'correct' person.

Being resident in the south of England meant my long-planned trip north suddenly had a wider focus – now I was looking at Northumberland records as well as those in Edinburgh.

The helpful volunteers at the Scottish Genealogical Society (*Thank you! Ed.*) enabled me to locate the Scottish burial records I needed to confirm most of the information I had found and suggested further areas to investigate. The oldest child, Ninian Ferguson born 1795 in Wooler has a detailed entry on Find a Grave but the site and date of his burial could not be confirmed despite trawling through twenty years of burial records in the Edinburgh cemetery named whilst that of his wife and two of his children buried in the same cemetery proved correct.

A visit to the ScotlandsPeople Centre in Edinburgh (National Records of Scotland) proved equally helpful as, at the suggestion of one of the staff, I put Ninian's name into their catalogue and discovered he had gone bankrupt and they held the bankruptcy papers. Unfortunately, they were stored offsite so I had to order a copy of them, but the catalogue record provided an address confirming I was on the right track.

His name Ninian was the earliest record of the name I had found in the family, Ninian being my great grandfather's name (who seemingly may have been named after his mother's brother) – not in itself proof but a tantalising possibility. Now I needed to go south.

The Northumberland and Durham Family History Society based in Newcastle (<https://www.ndfhs.org.uk/>) and the Northumberland Archives held in Berwick (<https://northumberlandarchives.com/>) were my next ports of call.

En route south a casual conversation with a coffee shop proprietor in Coldstream confirmed historically there were lots of Fergusons and Turnbells in the area. Researching them would prove a challenge due to the wide variations on the spellings of Ferguson which sounded promising but also suggested this was not going to be a simple search.

Both NDFHS and the Northumberland Archives hold microfilm and transcripts of the records for the area which I hoped would confirm or refute what I had thus

far, and staff were very helpful in suggesting other avenues of enquiry. In short, I was on a roll. My tentative tree now had confirmation – I had the correct marriage of William Ferguson and Margaret Turnbull and the family of two daughters born in Edinburgh had now become a family of seven with the addition of five older children born south of the border and, based on where the children were baptised, even a suggestion of when the family had moved to Edinburgh.

This also established who the 'Nanon Ferguson' mentioned in Wilhelmina Janet Ferguson's birth record was – her older brother Ninian who was eighteen years old at the time of her birth, the same Ninian who had gone bankrupt.

The birth records for the English-born children also provided further information about William Ferguson and Margaret Turnbull such as where they were living and where they came from. The coffee shop proprietor's warning about spellings proved to be accurate, especially regarding the variations on the spelling of Ferguson and Ninian who, in one record, is shown as Minonion!

Having found the additional family members, further investigation even showed that in 1830 one of Wilhelmina's siblings Isabella (b.1802 Norham, Northumberland) had married in Abercorn, West Lothian, before moving to Glasgow. Her mother, Margaret Ferguson (née Turnbull), had died in Glasgow in 1842 and was buried in Abercorn although she is not mentioned on the family gravestone there.

The 1841 census records Margaret Ferguson, age seventy, living with her daughter Wilhelmina Janet Lindsay and her family at Cockmuir, Abercorn. That would explain why she is buried in Abercorn, as the burial record states, despite her dying in Glasgow where her daughter Isabella was living.

Further confirmation came when I received a copy of the 1850 bankruptcy documentation several weeks later. Ninian Ferguson, currier and leather merchant was then at World's End Close, Netherbow, Edinburgh. His two principal creditors were James McIntosh, his brother-in-law, and John Lindsay, Cockmuir, Abercorn, – his youngest sister Wilhelmina's husband and my 2xgreat grandfather!

Carriers.
Birrell, William, Niddry street
Brown, Hugh, Gillon's close
***Callender, T. & Son, 30 Yardh.**
Gilmour, Wm. 49 South Back
of Canongate
Ferguson, Ninian, World's end
close

Edinburgh & Leith Postal Directory 1850-1851

The Ferguson Turnbull families were marrying and baptising in Presbyterian Chapels in England, but this does not mean they were born there. Margaret Turnbull was baptised in Wooler, but her baptismal record describes her as being 'of the town and parish of Chatton'.

With clues such as this, I now need to travel north again to consult other location-based records in the hope of identifying more precisely where they were living.

There is something of an irony in all this. My parents, now deceased, had lived in precisely that same area in the later 20th century as my father's two times great-grandmother Margaret Turnbull had been born and lived in in the early 19th century, one hundred and fifty years earlier. You never know what lies on the other side of that brick wall!

Editor's Note: The Northumberland Archive appears to be one of many English & Welsh archives which may require you to proffer an "Archives Card" as proof of your bona fides. You can register for free at <https://archivescard.com/> but note that you must visit a participating archive within three months of applying for the card.

Once validated, it remains current for five years.

editor@scotsgenealogy.com

What's Coming In The March Edition Of The Scottish Genealogist?

Thomas Smith Arnott
The Stationmaster at Edinburgh Waverley

The Scottish Voyager
A Skipper's Travels

Anne Elphinstone, 'Heiress of Restalrig'
Friends of the Stewarts

A Bottle of Whisk(e)y and a Coat
John McFeat's Involuntary Journey to New South Wales

Précis Of Recent Talks

Something from the archives
selected by the Editor

.. and much more

A Churchyard Dispute

by Ken Nisbet

[a reprint from *The Scottish Genealogist* of December 2003, Vol. L No. 4]

[Editor's Notes:

The Nairnshire Telegraph is no more, having ceased publication at the end of 2020.

Ken Nisbet published the first of his very many articles in *The Scottish Genealogist* in December 1996. He currently serves as Chair of the Scottish Association of Family History Societies (<https://www.safhs.org.uk/>)

For the Editor, this article is of particular interest as the protagonists discussed here are related to his spouse. John Main "Callie" is a first cousin four times removed, and James Main "Bochel" also appears in her family tree as connected.

The article is peppered with tee-names (Callie, Bochel/Bochle, Cogs, Sailor, Long, and Ellen) attached to family surname Main. They are used to identify which part of the Main family someone comes from. Their use is marked in the following article by ** added by the editor.]

It is unusual to find a dispute over the rights to place a body in a grave reported in a local newspaper, however on 11 May 1882 in the *Nairnshire Telegraph* just such a case was reported on, involving the placing of burials in the wrong lair and a disrupted funeral. The families involved also used various surnames.

JOHN MAIN "CALLIE" ** v. JAMES MAIN "BOCHEL" **

A rather curious case was lately brought into this Court at the instance of John Main "Callie" ** fisherman residing at No.21 Park Street, Nairn, against James Main "Bochel" ** fisherman, Society Street, Nairn. The petitioner prayed that interdict should be granted against the defender from interfering with the stance, or lair, in the church-yard of Naim, lying to the east of the Parish Church of Nairn, and to which the pursuer had right, and over which a stone was laid, having engraved or cut thereon the following words.

"This stone is erected by Alex. Main and Catherine Main and John Main;"
and the initials "A.M."; "R.M."; "J.M."; and "M.M."

and which was bounded on the west by the lair on which a gravestone had been erected, having the inscription cut thereon-

*"Sacred to the memory of Major-General John Grant, late of H.M. Bombay
Artillery who died at Nairn on the 30 September, 1861, aged 57 years,"*

and on the east by the lair on which a gravestone had been erected, having the inscription cut thereon-

*"Erected by John Main, carpenter, Nairn in memory of Alexander, his eldest
son, who died at sea, 22 December 1842 aged 21 years; also Isabella, oldest
daughter who died May 31 1859, aged 41 years; also James, who died October
17 1834 aged 6 years; also David, who died October 10 1835,
aged 1 year and 5 months,"*

[interdict concludes] Or from otherwise molesting the pursuer in possession of and lawful right to said stance or lair, and further to ordain the said defender to restore the solum of the ground to the condition in which it was prior to his operations.

In the condescendence, it was explained that lair in question originally belonged to Alexander Main, fisherman, Nairn, and in it he and his two wives were buried. Over there was placed the stone already described, and the initials thereon were intended to represent "A.M." being the original owner of the ground, "R.M." being Robert Main a brother of the said Alexander Main, "I.M." being Isabella Main, wife of the said Alexander Main, and "M.M" being Mary Main, a daughter of the said Alexander Main, all of whom were buried in said lair and under said stone. The sons of the said Alexander Main were David Main, the eldest, who is now dead; Alexander Main, who was lost at sea; John Main who is also dead; and Adam Main, who is likewise dead.

On the death of the said Alexander Main, the right and title to the foresaid stance or lair devolved according to universal practice, and also at common law, on his eldest son the said David Main, but he having acquired right to another lair through his wife, gave over and surrendered his right to the lair in question to and in favour of the third son of said Alexander Main, being the said John Main., and directed that it should be considered the property of him and his successors for ever.

The pursuer is the eldest son of the said John Main, and as representing, his father has right to the said lair.

In or about the year 1877 the defender while the pursuer was absent at the herring fishing, and without his knowledge or consent illegally and unwarrantably caused the said lair to be opened, and the body of his son to be buried therein. On the pursuer hearing of this, he objected to the interference with the grave or lair, but not wishing to create a scandal by the lifting of the body, he allowed it to remain therein. The pursuer's mother Margaret McBeth or Main, widow of the said John Main, died on or about 2 December 1880, and the funeral took place on the fourth day of the said month. The grave was dug in the lair and the coffin placed therein, and some three feet of earth placed over it when the defender appeared himself in an illegal and unwarrantable and most rude and unseemly manner. The pursuer, to avoid all scandal, while maintaining his right to said lair, allowed his mother's body to be lifted and the coffin therein placed in the church until another grave was dug in an adjoining lair, which, also belonged to him, and wherein the body was buried.

With the view of asserting and maintaining his right to the lair in question, the pursuer caused corner-stones with the initials cut thereon, "*J.M.C.*" being intended to represent John Main Callie, but the defender has repeatedly, illegally, and unwarrantably, and without any rights and title, and also surreptitiously, removed the said stones and otherwise interfered with said lair.

Interim interdict was in the first instance called. The case was called last Friday, when no appearance being made the defender, Sheriff Smith pronounced an interlocutor declaring the interdict perpetual and finding the defender liable for £5 of expenses.

By using census returns and birth, marriage and death certificates some extra information has been gathered about these families:

The 1881 Census shows John Main living at 21 Park Street but his surname is shown as Callie^{**}. John was aged 54, a fisherman. At the same address were his wife Christina (48), children, James (17) a fisherman, Margaret (15), Bella (11), and Christina (9).

The defender, James Main, was by the 1881 census also living in Park Street, aged 36, a fisherman, with his wife Elizabeth (36), children, James (10), Margaret (8), and son John (3m). The family is recorded under the surname Bochle^{**}.

In the article the child who was buried in the wrong lair is unnamed. Research has shown this was James and Elizabeth's son Isaac who died at the age of 16

months, the cause being Chronic Diarrhoea. The surname is shown as Main but the certificate shows the father's name as James Main (Bochel**) and he was the informant.

The mother of John Main whose coffin had to be dug up again was Margaret Main (Callie**) who died 2 December 1880 aged 85, at 2 Society Street, Nairn. Widow of John Main (Callie**) Boat Builder (Master) daughter of Francis McBeth and Mary McBeth née Cameron, cause of death Cancer in Left Leg, the informant being her son John who lived at 21 Park Street.⁴

James Main and his spouse Elizabeth Ralph (another common surname in Nairn's fishing community) were married 24 October 1867 at 3 Society Street, Nairn, where the bride lived, according to the forms of the United Presbyterian Church.

James was aged 25 a fisherman by occupation, living at 18 Society Street and his wife Elizabeth a fisherwoman, aged 23, the daughter of the deceased James Ralph, fisherman and Margaret Ralph, *m.s.* Main.⁵

James's father, also called James Main (Bochel**), had married twice, his first wife being Elizabeth Main (Cogs**), deceased by the date of her son's wedding. James had remarried in 1847, to Helen Skinner from Nigg in Rosshire. In the 1881 census James M[ain] Boche**, fisherman aged 71, was living at 28 Society Street again a widower, living with sons David (25) and Isaac (23) both fishermen, and a domestic servant Jessie Sailor** aged 18.

Fortunately for the family historian, Isaac Main the son of James Main, was born in 1855 and this provides the extra information contained in certificates issued that year. He was born on 6 July at 18 Society Street, Nairn, and was the son of a seaman, James Main (Bochel**). James was also born in Nairn and his wife was Helen Skinner. Isaac was the youngest of four boys all of whom were living with the parents who had married in Nigg, Ross-shire in 1847 which is where Helen had been born.

Isaac married under the name Isaac Main Bochel** on 24 October 1884 at 23 Society Street, Nairn with his occupation being a merchant seaman and his spouse being Margaret Main Long**. She was the daughter of John Main Long**, Fisherman and his wife Elspeth Main Ellen**.

James Main Bochel** died of apoplexy, at the age of 84, at 50 Park Street on 8 April 1894. The certificate gives his father's name as John Main Bochel**, fisherman. and his mother as Janet Main Bochel**, maiden name unknown. The informant was his son John Main Bochel**.

Précis Of Recent Talks

16 September 2024, 1930 hrs at the Augustine United Church, Geo IV Bridge

“The Royal Company of Merchants – the City of Edinburgh Merchants”
by Vincent Mason, Archives and Treasures Committee

Vincent introduced himself as a retired dentist and now a volunteer at the archives of what are commonly referred to in Edinburgh as the “Merchant Schools”. However he soon disabused his audience of the notion that that was all the Royal Company of Merchants were responsible for.

The Royal Charter was issued by Charles II in 1681 although the Company’s history stretches back to at least 1260. The Merchants traded across the then known world with some 500 ships per annum sailing from Leith at that time. Vincent suggested, and deployed much evidence, that the Merchant archives where he volunteers, represented the best record of such activities in the UK.

The schools, now educating about 20% of Edinburgh’s pupils, arose from the early charitable work of local merchants and their spouses. The Mary Erskine School, for example is the second oldest girls’ school in the UK. And the James Gillespie school was the first free school in Scotland. John Watson provided about £2,000 in his will to prevent murder of illegitimate children which led to a, now closed, school bearing his name.

The Company’s work is reflected in their support of some 260 pensioners, thus making them one of the country’s largest private charities.

Today the wider social and charitable work of the Company is centred at Merchants’ Hall in Hanover Street, a building bought when the Glasgow Bank failed in 1879.

Vincent’s talk left SGS members substantially better informed, well entertained, and now aware that there is more to learn about this Edinburgh institution via their web site at <https://mcoe.org.uk>.

21 October 2024, 1930 hrs at the Augustine United Church, Geo IV Bridge

“Scotland Beneath the Surface”

by L Bruce Keith, Author

Bruce previously lectured to the Society on Bridgescapes. This time he led us beneath our feet into the diverse world of coal mining, hydropower, water, sewage, and transport.

As a civil engineer, he helped us to travel back in time too. Skara Brae had lain under the Orkney sands for thousands of years until a great storm uncovered it in the 1800s. This community long precedes more modern, less engineered structures like Stonehenge.

We probably all knew that valuables could be buried in times of conflict. But we now know that, cunningly, the most valuable treasures would be at the bottom of a very deep hole, covered in earth and then covered by further, less valuable items. Thus when dug up, the less valuable would appear first and persuade finders that that was all there was.

We heard that in about 1650 in Edinburgh at 555 Castlehill, a reservoir was constructed beneath ground and through a system of wooden pipes delivered water to wells all the way down the High Street and Canongate.

But modern constructions featured as well. The new offshore wind farms, such as that in the Beatrice area of the Moray Firth, rest on 1,000 ton foundations that penetrate hundreds of feet into the subsea rock.

Today, as for thousands of years, we depend on the Scotland beneath our feet for our health and prosperity.

Bruce’s new book, *“Scotland Beneath the Surface”*, which tells us much more than was possible in an hour’s lecture, is a welcome addition to the Society’s library. A recommended read for all, or perhaps a Christmas present for a loved one.

editor@scotsgenealogy.com

Puzzle Picture



What village is this in and what is the happening that this family group is illustrating?

The key person behind the story was the brother of the late Tam Dalyell MP's three greats grandfather.

That person was also an MP, who entered Parliament in 1827.

His late employer has a statue visible for many miles around the hilltop on which it sits.

He remains deeply unpopular and there have been many attempts to remove his memorial.

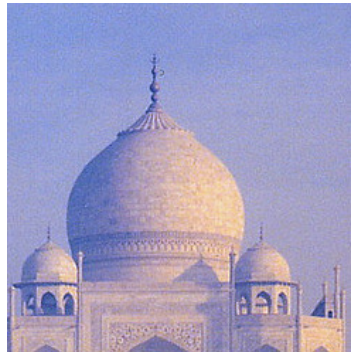
Previous Edition

The September Journal's picture was of the Taj Mahal at Agra in Uttar Pradesh, India.

The Taj was a white marble, richly be-jewelled building, created as a mausoleum for Shah Jahan's late wife. It is suggested that in modern times, only Fabergé could have created such a building.

But the Shah was also known for a second building planned for the other bank of the river Yamuna which was to be **his** mausoleum. It was to be a mirror image in black marble of his wife's tomb.

His sons prevented its building and imprisoned their father in a nearby fort where he would gaze at its site for the rest of his days.

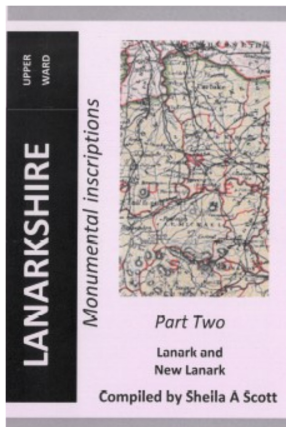
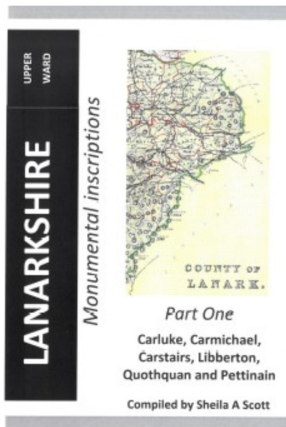


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Online services available at 15 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh include:



Recent Additions To The Library

December 2024

Title	Author
Monumental Inscriptions Mortlach and Cabrach with Dufftown & Cabrach War Memorials [Moray]	Moray Burial Ground Research Group
Deaths from Dumfries & Galloway Newspapers 1773 – 1855 (eleven volumes)	Dumfries and Galloway FHS
Ordnance Survey Map (1:250 000) - Islay	Ordnance Survey
Ordnance Survey Map (1:250 000) - Eastern Highlands (Sheet 5)	Ordnance Survey
Barclay Viewforth Church - An Index of Members of Congregations Commemorated on Memorial Plaques within Barclay Viewforth Church, Edinburgh	Edward S Flint
Florentius Volusenus: Christian Humanist - The Commentatio Quaedam Theologica (1539)	Scottish History Society
The Irvines of Orkney	James M Irvine
The Revised and Updated Edinburgh Graveyard Guide	Michael T R B Turnbull
Hawick Archaeological Society Transactions 2023/24	Hawick Archaeological Society
Scotland Beneath the Surface	L Bruce Keith
Greek Secrets Revealed: Hidden Scottish History Uncovered, Book 2 – Fife and the North	Ian McHaffie

librarian@scotsgenealogy.com

Family History Journals – New Arrivals

All these and more can be read in the Library

The Manchester Genealogist, Vol. 60 No. 3 2024

“1861 Census – Unknown Missing Manchester Records” by Paul Barrow

“Thomas Savage, Trustee for William Shakespeare, and the Rufford Collection”
by David J Breeze

Aberdeen & North-East Scotland FHS, Journal No. 171 August 2024

“DNA: What a Difference 40 Years Can Make” by Peter F W Grant

“Identifying ‘a Child named Colin More’ using Kirk Session Records” by Sally Low

Oregon Genealogical Society Journal, Lane County, Vol. 62, No. 2, Fall 2024

“A Pioneer Story – The Cresswell Family” by Rob and Nancy Creswell

“Byogofy of C W Beale” by Charles William Beale, Submitted by Gary Mertz, © Sarah Jane Bennett Mertz

Ancestor, Quarterly Journal of the Genealogical Society of Victoria, Vol. 37, Issue 3, Sept 2024

“Robert Nash - 3rd Fleet convict: fact and fiction” by Jill Watson

“The Talented Mr Sherry” by Jillian Brewer

Sib Folk News, Orkney Family History Society, Issue No. 111, Autumn 2024

“Who lived where on Swona, Orkney’s abandoned island?” by Noreen Fenton

“Summerdale – The Last Battle Fought in Orkney” by John Sinclair

Saskatchewan Genealogical Society Bulletin, Vol. 55, No. 2, August 2024

“Lessons Learned in Visits to Saskatchewan Cemeteries” Part 1: Genealogical Resources by John H Althouse

“Young People – Family History: Artificial Intelligence ideas on attracting young people to join Family History Societies” by Roberta Cox

Anglo-Celtic Roots, Quarterly Chronicle of British Isles FHS of Greater Ottawa, Vol. 30, No. 3, Fall 2024

“The Misses Strachan of Fyvie – Researching the lives and achievements of Christina Strachan and her four sisters” by Claire Callender

“A Scottish War Bride’s Legacy – Margaret Deschamps, née Taylor Hannan (1924 – 2016)” by Andy Desjardins

South Australian Genealogist, Vol. 51, No.3

"Big History and Little History: Auntie Ruby's Tea-Set" by Marian Quartly

"George Ernest Luckett (1869-1943): An Occasional Hero, Part One" by Diana Field and Mandy Whitrod

Descent: Magazine of the Society of Australian Genealogists, Vol 54, Pt. 3, September/Spring 2024

"Clara's Story" by Maxine Elder – Winner of the Croker Prize for Biography

"Feeding the Goldfields" by Carolyn Ball – How a currency lad became Australia's first millionaire

librarian@scotsgenealogy.com

Memories of Jim Cranston



Being librarian is one of the key tasks undertaken by volunteers at the Society. Beside needing to have organising ability, the questions directed at this jobholder require a quite encyclopaedic knowledge of the contents of our library and of the stories told on our shelves.

One well-regarded former librarian, the late Jim Cranston, has been kind enough to leave the Society £1,000 to further our work.

Our Treasurer, Mirren McLeod, was delighted to show Jim's niece Louise Rae around on a recent visit and to acknowledge our gratitude for his bequest.

ADVERTISING

*The Society is happy to include suitable advertising
in the Scottish Genealogist*

Rates are – quarter page £25, half page £50, full page £100

Inside Back Cover £120, 25% discount for series bookings

For further details contact scotsgenpublicity@scotsgenealogy.com

Dates For Your Diary

Ordinary meetings, when in person, take place at 7.30pm in the
Augustine United Church,
41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1EL

Donations of £5 each from non-members are much appreciated.

In person meetings, apart from the AGM, are also available via zoom.us,
free to members, price £5 to non-members.

Please check our website at
<https://www.scotsgenealogy.com/scottish-genealogy-society/calendar>
for information and do check for programme amendments before setting
out for meetings.

SPRING 2025 TALKS

Monday, 20 January 2025 at Augustine United Church
The Slave Compensation Scheme, A Midlothian Connection
by James Waugh

Monday, 17 March 2025 at Augustine United Church
William Schaw Lindsay, Victorian Entrepreneur
by Bill Lindsay, Historian & Author

Monday, 21 April 2025 online at zoom.us or watch at 15 Victoria Terrace
Commemoration and Remembrance
by Ken Nisbet, Military Historian

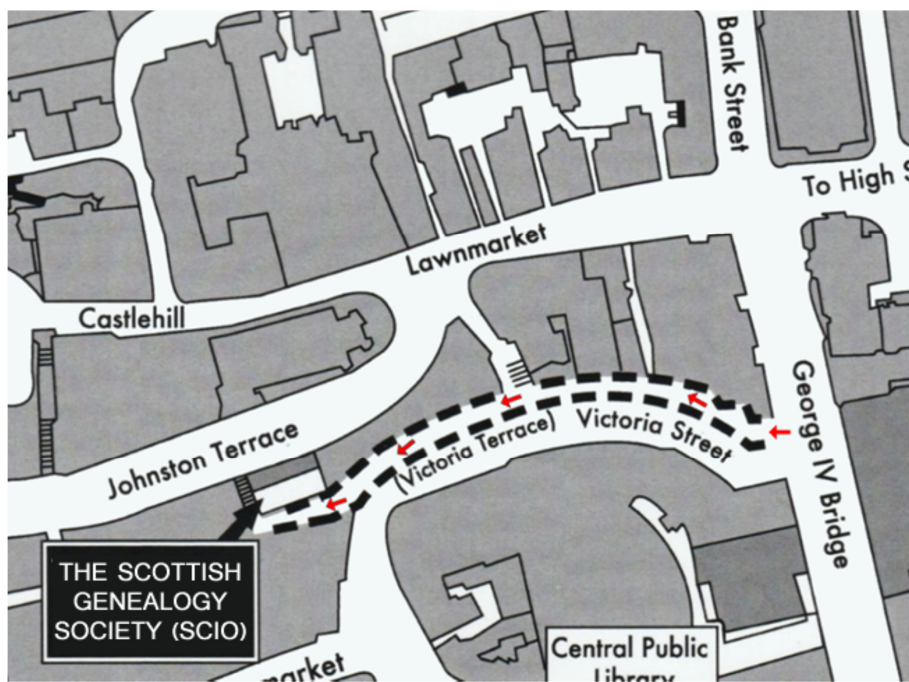
VISIT 

Wednesday, 14 May 2025, 1.30 pm
Poppy Scotland Factory, 9 Warriston Road, Edinburgh EH7 4HJ

AGM

Thursday, 05 June 2025

Please contact meetings@scotsgenealogy.com
if you wish to attend a talk via zoom.us



Library & Family History Centre Opening Hours

Monday	10.30am to 4pm
Tuesday	10.30am to 4pm
Wednesday	2.30pm to 7pm
Thursday	10.30am to 4pm
Friday	Closed
Saturday	10am to 2pm
Sunday	Closed

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Published by the Scottish Genealogy Society (SCIO)

Scottish Charity No. SC053432

ISSN 0300-337X

Printed by Tantallon Press, Loanhead, Midlothian