



West Stormont's

Auld Times



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Swans wintering on the King's Myre



Auld Times is the journal of

The West Stormont Historical Society

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EDITORIAL

In this issue we present a couple of well-researched articles by Ros Pearson and Mike Lawrence, some book reviews, and a little bit of detective work on a brass plaque handed to the Society for safe-keeping.

We are also taking the opportunity of including an excerpt from the Minutes of the AGM held in Luncarty Church Centre on Monday 13th November. The meeting was quorate, but not particularly well attended (comments and feedback on that are welcomed). Some key decisions were taken regarding the main business of the evening: the Project Proposals previously circulated.

The projects were discussed in some depth. Straight away a feeling was clearly being expressed that only those projects rooted in the West Stormont area should be considered. The proposal to contribute to the conservation of two of the three Murthly Pictish Stones prior to them going on display in the new museum in Perth was scrutinised in depth. Yes, the stones were (marginally) from West Stormont, but there had been little to no outreach from the Museum to local groups. The full £2,000 would need to be offered for this to make any meaningful contribution. And how would that be acknowledged? It was agreed this project offered the least value to West Stormont and the Society.



The proposal to create exhibition materials – a banner, static boards, and an audio-visual unit – to underpin a short series of Open Days generated enthusiastic discussion, and lots of supplementary ideas.

The latter included researching and creating an interpretive board for each of the communities in the West Stormont catchment. Using the one in Stanley as a model. However, that would be a much larger and more expensive project and necessarily would involve

productive discussion and negotiation with a series of local groups. Conversely, it highlighted the merits of using a mobile exhibition/Open day to point up the Society's achievements and towards the benefits of the more comprehensive project.

The value of helping to conserve the account book of a soldier in the Black Watch resonated with the members present. The regiment is held in such high regard throughout the area, and the soldier in question was from Redgorton.



Moreover, his lengthy service was reasonably well documented but warranted further research. Which could involve a working group from the membership. A feature in *Auld Times*, an illustrated talk by one of the members involved or by someone from the Black Watch team, and links to the Society's website were all productive ways forward from this proposal. The sum involved for the basic conservation work was not large, but it was felt that staff at Balhousie Castle museum had missed a trick in not proposing to have the individual pages digitised as part of the project. However, there was an indication that match funding for this project could be secured from the Friends of the Black Watch.

The members agreed the following:

- a) Not to proceed with a contribution to conserving the Murthly Pictish Stones at Perth Museum.
- b) To cost in detail materials for a mobile exhibition.
- c) To seek more detailed costing for the digitising and conservation of the account book AND pursue match funding from Friends of the Black Watch.
- d) To remind members that projects b) and c) would each require the setting up of a working group to assist the administrative committee.
- e) To commit up to £2,000 to achieving projects b) and c).

Members will be circulated early in the new year once detailed cost for projects b) and c) have been determined, and an action plan and timetable prepared.

GLORIOUS INGRATE

PAUL MCLENNAN

At our first Monday night Talk of the new term, 25th September, member of long-standing Moira Hutchison arrived with a metal plaque. And a query: would anyone be able to shed some light on it? Her information was sparse. It had come from Rae Imrie via her daughter. And, she thought, may have been associated with Battleby farm.



The plaque measures 12" x 8" and is an eighth of an inch thick (30.5cm x 20.5cm x 0.5cm). The top half is given over to a memorial inscription:

To the Glory of God &
In Memory Of
DAVID MILLAR
"The Poet of the Tay"
1803 – 1865

TWELVE TREES HAVE BEEN PLANTED HERE IN HIS
MEMORY

The bottom half has eight lines from "The Tay", a long narrative epic published in 1850.

There are screw holes for fastening the plaque somewhere, but its condition is such that it clearly was not mounted outdoor. Wherever the trees were.

A few of us had a go on the night trying to determine where and when it was erected. Some had heard of, had even read "The Tay: a Poem", but it was largely forgotten and none of us knew anything about David Millar. After the talk, another member, Colin McLeod googled around and found a bit of an answer . . . on the Society's [website!](#) In *Redgorton Parish Churchyard Memorial Inscriptions* (2002). The recorders were Margaret Brown, Jean Dickson, Rae Imrie, Allan Scott, and Eleanor Scott. Inscription #235 records the text given above.

Colin added: "Presumably this is the plaque, and if it was inside, that explains why it's not weathered. The *Perthshire Advertiser*, 02 May 1951, reported: 'Twelve trees planted in Redgorton Churchyard were dedicated on Saturday to the memory of David Millar, the Poet of the Tay...' The planting marked the centenary of publication of the [extremely long!] poem. Two years later, The *Scotsman*, 17 August 1953, reported 'Sir Alexander Cross of Battleby yesterday unveiled a memorial plaque to David Millar: The Poet of the Tay in Redgorton Parish Church.' So, the plaque was later than the trees, and was presumably removed when the church closed. "

Excuse me, but why Redgorton, Colin? That mystery only deepened when I learned Millar was born in Newburgh in 1803, and died at No. 40 Glover St, Perth on 27th April 1865. How does the Cross man, baronet of Battleby come into the story nearly a century later?

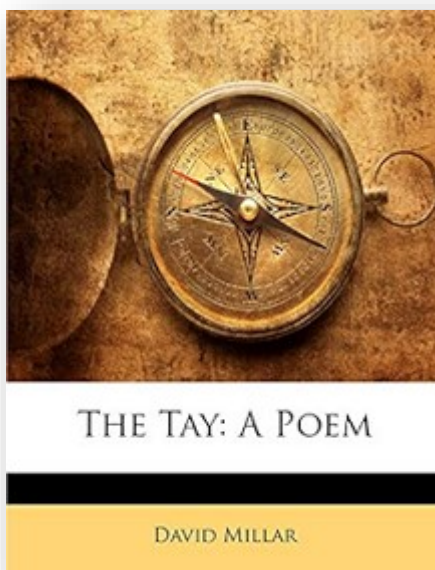
Well. David Millar had ambitions to be a writer from boyhood in Newburgh, but he was a weaver when he married Ann Donaldson there in 1835, maybe earning 15/- or 16/- a week. He developed his literary interests and love of nature with frequent contributions to the *Fife Herald*, however, and his cuttings from that helped land a job with the *Perthshire Advertiser* in 1840: As a traveller. The man who twice a year made a sweep through Perthshire and adjoining counties collecting dues from advertisers. As an early "Notice to Readers and Advertisers" put it:

"Our Half Yearly Collection will commence on Monday first, the 26th current, on which day our traveller, Mr David Millar, will proceed to the Northern Districts of the County; and as collection of our Newspaper accounts is attended with much trouble, and very considerable expense, we have specially to request that parties who may be absent from home when our traveller calls, will be pleased to leave directions for the payment of their accounts when presented."

Millar was the PA's traveller for twenty-five years, making fifty sweeps through the county and leaving an indelible impression on those he met. He was fondly remembered

for his genial cheerful nature and a hearty laugh. As the editor, James Sprunt (who had also begun working life as a handloom weaver) put it: “It is not too much to say that he was not better known than respected, and not more respected than he was liked.”

In between these jaunts, Millar worked as a reporter, and found time to write a series of ‘Walks in the Country’ for the paper inspired by his love of nature, topography and a keen interest in antiquarian lore. He was also quietly, secretly, working on his magnum opus. A narrative in verse following the River Tay from soup to nuts: from Killin all the way to Broughty Ferry. With many digressions along its major, and many minor tributaries.



“The Tay: a Poem” was published in 1850 and was well received by those who read it. However, his own unconquerable modesty, and the secrecy employed during the writing of it, meant that it was not flagged in advance, nor talked up after publication. Robert Ford, in *Harp of Perthshire* (1889) commented:

“Had he shown his hand earlier, in all probability his poem would have had a much more extensive circulation, and might have enjoyed a popularity more nearly approximate with its merit. . . It is really a valuable contribution to the national literature. . . that should be known and read by all who are proud to claim Scotland as the land of their birth.” (p 483)

Millar continued as the Advertiser’s traveller. In April 1865, Saturday 22nd, he returned from Rannoch having completed his spring round (walking the last part, from Bankfoot, back to Perth). He visited friends that evening and on Sunday spoke of going into the office the next morning. Everything seemed normal, but he woke in the night seized with cold cramps, and vomiting. The family physician, Dr David Stirling was called. Those of us fondly reminiscent of a time when doctors made house calls, take heed. Stirling’s ‘curious prescription’ was for Millar to hold an ice cube in his mouth for as long as possible, even

though he was chilled. Eventually Millar slipped into a torpor and, at nine on Monday evening, passed away. Stirling wrote ‘cholera’ as the cause of death, noting ‘18 hours’, the classic time frame for an unrecoverable case. David Millar left a wife and seven children. He was buried in Wellshill cemetery.

This seems to have been an isolated incidence. No epidemic was recorded at the time. Although, coincidentally, the PA had carried a long article the week before on the unsanitary conditions to be found in the Fair City. The views and opinion of an anonymous correspondent from London: “The manner in which soil, ashes, refuse matter and surface filth of every description are strewn about the streets and thoroughfares are a disgrace to the authorities.” The closes and vennels were “unspeakably filthy”. There were open cesspools. And as for the water supply? Well, oops: “The recently constructed drains in the High Street and South Street discharge into the river just immediately above the point where the water is pumped for the supply of the town.”

The Millars had a house and garden in the spacious, more salubrious New Town, on the east side of Glover Street. However, we do not know where those friends he visited on the Saturday evening lived. And cholera can have a remarkably short incubation period, a matter of hours. However, as the median period is 1.4 days, it is more likely that Millar had walked home having picked up the infection from drinking water near Bankfoot.

But what of Redgorton? The Rev. J MacRae, parish minister, wrote of the upcoming centenary of “The Tay” in an article for the PA on 29th November 1950. Mentioning that Millar had drawn attention in his verses to the kirk’s bare, treeless graveyard. Perhaps with Robert Burns’ successful plea to the Duke of Atholl in the Humble Petition of Bruar Water in mind:

“Would then my noble master please
To grant my highest wishes,
He'll shade my banks wi' tow'ring trees,
And bonnie spreading bushes.”

Rev MacRae suggested to Sir Alexander Cross a generous gift in like fashion might put things right, and be a fitting memorial.

There is a coda to Millar’s tale.

On 12th August 1850, James, his second son, was swimming in the river at Willowgate with his brothers and some pals when he got out of his depth, was carried under by the current and drowned.

“The Tay” was then in galley proofs at printers Richardson & Wood of George St. Millar quickly penned a postscript:

“The song that rose in gladness sinks in grief!
Fair Tay, thou’rt beautiful, but most unkind! . . .
A shadow’s o’er thee now, ingrate but glorious Tay!”

PLOT 1 HARRIETFIELD

ROS PEARSON

The new planned village of Harrietfield ,1823

And the people who first lived on Plot One

Harrietfield is 200 years old

The village was laid out in 1823. Ninety-nine year building leases were available to people with local connections for the 18 plots of land.

Why plan a new village?

Harrietfield was established as part of a much bigger change – the reorganisation of agriculture. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries compact farms with a house and steading were replacing the age-old system of a few households grouped into a fermtoun working the traditional runrig system of farming. The new system needed far fewer farmers and did not provide a place for those with useful non-agricultural skills, like the blacksmith, joiner, mason, gamekeeper or carter. A planned village was a common solution.

Why plan it on this spot?

The village was laid out beside the east-west road to the north of the river Almond where there were two existing buildings: the small farm of Croft Robin which was also an inn, and opposite it the newly built church (1811) of the dissenting congregation. The cattle drovers' stance was

just to the north at Kindrum next to the smith's forge and near a 'brew seat' (place permitted to brew ale) at Drumachar East. In addition, this part of the estate did not have fermtouns or enclosed farms but was occupied by a number of small individual tenants whose leases came up for renewal in 1820.

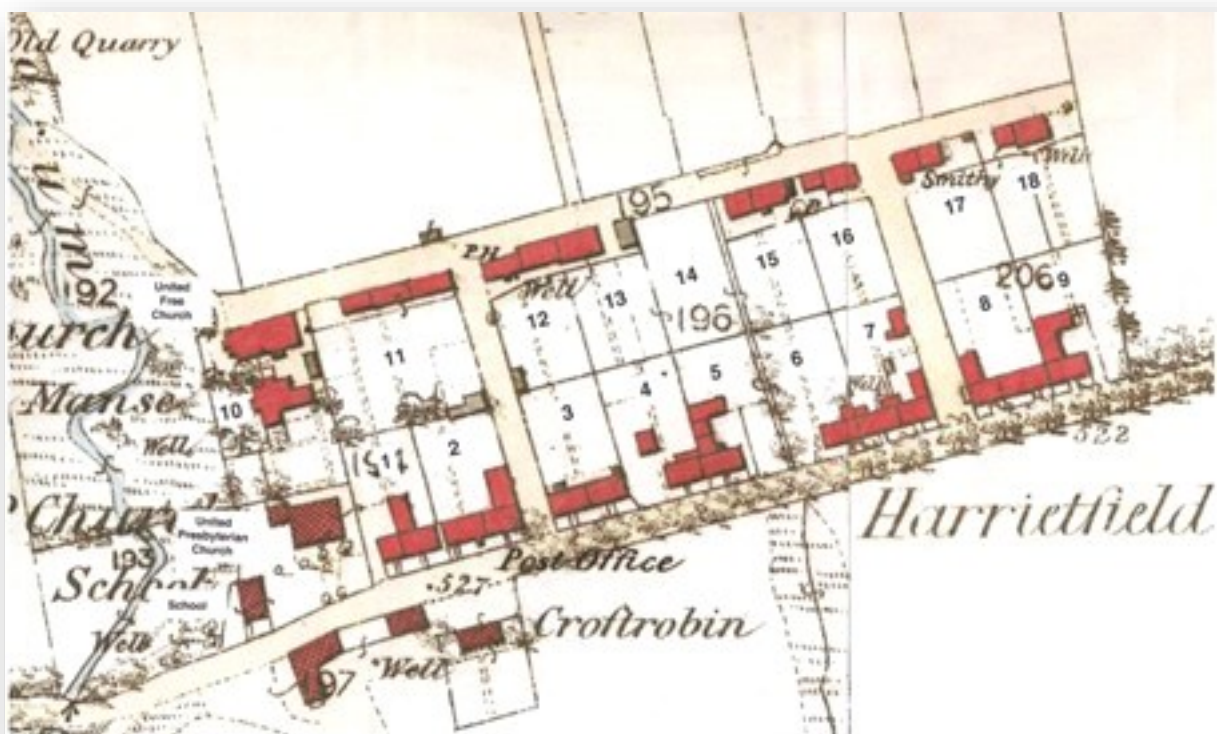
The new village was laid out in two rows of nine plots each, linked by the east and west loans. It was called Harrietfield after the wife of the laird, Sir William Drummond, but was commonly referred to as Heriotfield well into the twentieth century and was known locally as The Feus.

Plot 1



Plot 1 lies opposite Croft Robin and immediately to the east of the Church. On the other side of the church the congregation built a school to serve the area, completed in 1827. Plot 1 was slightly smaller than most of the village plots at a little under a quarter of an acre. This land was taken by John Halley (or Hally, Hallie or Hawley as he is called elsewhere), a mill wright. He had a 99-year building lease from Whit 1823 for a feu of 15 shillings and a penny annually.

Like other plots in the village, it was not registered in the Perth Sheriff Court Records until 1832 when the lessee had met the requirement to build a house with a value of £10 within 10 years, and other specified conditions.



If you took a plot, what did you get?

The plots were let on 99-year building leases and were '25 falls' in area, or just under a quarter of an acre. The leases state that the land in the village would be let to villagers in preference to strangers so long as they paid a fair rent. The estate did not advertise in the papers for their new tenants, and as far as we can tell those who took the leases had local connections. The lease of a pendicle was an optional extra: a strip of land of about 2.5 acres to the north of the village suitable for crops or animals.

Building stone was freely available from the estate, and



'Threshold Gossip', Clifton Johnson, *The Land of Heather*, 1906

the main source was beside the burn west of the village. The house had to be roofed with slates from the Logiealmond quarry. Peats for fuel could be dug on the moor under the direction of the Moss Grieve at a price of between 2 and 3 pence a cartload. These were only for your own use – no selling on to anyone else.

The lease stated that a bleaching green would be provided when several plots had been taken. The date of this is blank on all the leases, though an area to the east of the burn is marked on one of the estate maps. At that time growing, spinning and weaving flax into linen on a handloom in a cottage was a common occupation.

If you took a plot, what were your obligations?

You had to build a house at least one storey high with garrets above, and the outside walls at least 8 feet high, built of stone and mortar, and covered with slate from the Logiealmond quarries. It must be ten foot back from the public road, and the ground in front should be kept neat and clean as a garden or green. For this you paid a yearly tack.

The laird was keen to have a neat, clean, well-maintained and attractive village of which all could be proud. The house must have a back door and all 'nuisances' must be carried out to a dunghill in the ground behind and not left in front. Within three years of starting, a stone dyke or thorn hedge had to be in place round the whole plot, the cost shared with any neighbours.

You had to build a house, but you might not use your plot to 'erect any slaughter houses, candle makers' workshops or any other nuisances upon the grounds'. Public services for road building and repair were minimal so you were required to form and maintain the metal or gravel road outside your property, and keep the adjacent ditches clear by cleaning them out at least annually.

At the end of the 99-year lease it is stipulated that your heirs 'will flit with their wives, bairns, family, servants, goods and gear' without reminder or legal process. In practice in the early twentieth century the leases were replaced with Feu Charters.

John Halley and family

The Halleys had a long history as farmers and millers in the area, both in Logiealmond and south of the river around Cairnies.

The mill at Millhaugh had been let to a John Halley from at least 1749, perhaps longer, and probably through more than one generation, and the family held it until 1812 when the lease was sold by roup to Mr Davidson, another miller and farmer.

Across the footbridge and ford from Harrietfield on the south bank of the Almond was a corn mill at Millhole which is still known as Halley's Mill. (In 1895, Trinity College Glenalmond bought Halley's Mill and adjoining land and altered it to accommodate their Electric Light Generating Station as well as homes for some College staff.)

John Halley must have been a significant man in the local area and probably a welcome contributor to the new village of Harrietfield. In 1832, the Great Reform Act increased the franchise to include men with property valued over £10 or a lease of over £50 a year. This increased the electorate twelve-fold in Scotland, but it was still only a small proportion of the adult male population, a total of 34 in Logiealmond. John Halley of the Cairnies together with four other Halley farmers and millers in that area gained the vote.

In 1833, John Halley, like many other local people, contributed to the building of a Dead House at Chapelhill graveyard to guard burials from body snatchers. Other Halleys listed include David and Alexander farmers from Shannoch, and John the farmer of Rosebank, all in Little Glenshee, and Robert Halley of Ruthvenfield.

What John Halley built

John Halley was among the first to build on his plot. An estate plan of about 1830 shows two semidetached cottages fronting the road. The single storey cottages were not of equal size – the more easterly had the standard layout of two rooms with a central front door and was later extended to the north. The more westerly was smaller, though it also had two rooms.

A younger John Halley, perhaps the son of the lease holder, and his wife Janet Menzies were among the first to

have children in Harrietfield. Margaret was born in 1828, Catherine in 1830 and James in 1832.

Who lived on Plot 1

The first comprehensive records of who lived where are from the first census in 1841. Neither John Halley nor his wife were resident on the plot in Harrietfield. However, three of their children were. Margret Halley aged 13 and James Halley 8 were living in the larger cottage with the schoolteacher, Thomas P. Stewart 30, and Mrs Janet Stewart 65 (his mother?), and Williamina Stewart who was only 2 months old (his daughter?).

Next door in the smaller cottage Margaret Taylor 60 lived with Jess Halley 6, and Mary Crighton an agricultural labourer of 46. It is not clear whether the Halley parents or Williamina's mother were alive and if so where they were living.

The cottages on plot 1 were convenient for the teacher and pupils of the school. David Forrester says in his parish history that some of the teachers in its early days, including T. P. Stewart, were Divinity students. The school was later run for the whole community, not attached to any denomination, and supported by voluntary contributions. It was replaced by the new and current school at Ballandie in 1858, and the old school building became the village hall and much later a house.

In later years

John Halley's oldest son, James, stayed in Harrietfield, but did not follow the family occupations of farming and milling. He became a journeyman tailor and by 1851 was living at the other end of the village, working for John Gorrie on Plot 8.

At this date, three painters lodged in one of the cottages on Plot 1. They were not local. John Stevenson was from Edinburgh, Archibald McArthur from Glasgow and Alexander Hay from Stirling. Could they have been working on the new buildings at Trinity College, which had opened in 1847?

James Halley inherited Plot 1 from his father and in 1858 sold the remaining lease to a retired millwright, George Robertson. George and his wife Christian passed it on to their daughter, Jane, a dressmaker, and she remained here until 1908. As she was the church officer for the north kirk in the village it became known as the Beadle's House.

The Free Church Minister for two years in the 1870s was John Watson. He became famous twenty years later when, under the pen name of Ian Maclaren, he published *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush*, and other stories based on the people and places he had known in Logiealmond. The book starts with 'There grows a bonnie briar bush in our kailyard', which gave rise to a style, also exemplified by James Barry and S R Crockett, known as *Kailyard*.



THE GLACHAN OF DRUMTOCHTY

From *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush* by Ian Maclaren, 1895
illustration by F C Gordon

Drumtochty, as the village was called in the novels, became immensely popular with visitors from Scotland, England, America and further afield in the late 1890s and into the next century. The American publishers Dodd Meade and Co sent Clifton Johnson, an artist and photographer to provide illustrations for the books. The smaller cottage on Plot 1 housed some memorabilia associated with the author, sometimes called the shrine, and the two cottages together became Ian Maclaren Cottage.

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Scone Estate Plan, c.1823 by David Buist, P39

Moneydie Old Parish Records, Baptisms

Perthshire Register of Voters, 1832

List of Inhabitants of Logiealmond subscribing to the erection of a Dead House at Chapelhill Church, 1833

Ian McLaren, *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush*, 1894

Clifton Johnson, *The Land of Heather*, 1906

David Forrester, *Logiealmond*, 1944

Also, Ordnance Survey maps, census returns, British Newspaper Archive

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE

MICHAEL LAWRENCE

John Nicol was last seen in Bankfoot in July 1851. No one in the village heard from him again and, following a hearing at Perth Sheriff Court, it was decreed by Sheriff John Sym that the date of John's death could be officially recorded as 31st July 1858.

On the morning of Friday 8th December 1882, John Nicol was still alive but hanging by a thread to the mortal coil. He died of "decay of nature" that afternoon and a death certificate was issued by C. Novall, Registrar.

John Nicol was born in Bankfoot in 1813, the son of James Nicol and Margaret Duff. James married Margaret at Redgorton Parish Church on 2nd October 1806. They settled in the new village of Bankfoot where James set up a shoe making business. Their first son, James, was born on 20th October 1811, followed by John on 18th October 1813, and a daughter, Margaret, on 19th November 1815.

John trained as a weaver and had his own hand loom in the family home. By the time John was in his late 20s, he was dabbling as a cloth agent but the linen trade was in serious decline. The reason for the slump was obvious – the increased use of steam driven looms in factories, the switch from linen to cotton for basic garments, oversupply of linen cloth combined with declining demand, and competition from cheaper foreign imports.

On Tuesday 11th January 1842, the Northern Warder and General Advertiser reported on the poor state of the linen trade and that "the present rate of weavers' wages is barely sufficient to provide food" and "the great bulk of the families of weavers are in rags". Two days later, the Perthshire Courier reported that Sir William Drummond Stewart of Murthly had been employing many of the idle weavers of Bankfoot upon his estate "which has been a great relief to many families in the neighbourhood".

John's mother and his brother, James, were both dead by January 1842. His sister, Margaret, had married John Crichton some six months earlier and moved out of the family home. And by now John's father, James, was in a

relationship with Isabella Findlay, a Bankfoot woman 36 years his junior. Isabella was also eight years younger than John.

James and Isabella married on Monday 15th July 1844. No doubt now feeling like a cuckoo in the nest and with limited career and income prospects in Bankfoot, John decided to seek pastures new. He booked a cheap berth on a steam ship and headed for London.

John found work as a labourer in a saw mill in Rotherhithe on the south bank of the Thames. The work was hard and poorly paid. Within a year or so, Louisa Dance, the daughter of one of the mill sawyers, had caught his eye. On the 27th January 1847, John married Louisa at St Paul's Church in Deptford. He was 33, she was 32, and they settled into married life with rented rooms at Lower Queen Street in Rotherhithe, looking across to the Isle of Dogs.

In the mid-1840s, Rotherhithe was one of the poorest areas of London. It was a mosaic of docks, wharfs, basins and timber ponds, flanked by endless warehouses and ship repair yards. Every available gap was filled with small, chaotic houses, tiny shops and riotous pubs, all confined to the banks of the Thames, where they sat cheek by jowl with fish smokers, slaughter houses, bone boilers, piggeries, and stables. Open ditches and cesspits received the contents of privies, industrial effluent, rotting carcasses, and the refuse of the houses. All of this flowed into the Thames where it joined the outpouring of thousands of other drains and sewers to create a river flow that was described by John Wright in his pamphlet 'The Dolphin or Grand Junction Nuisance' as "a dilute solution of human, animal and vegetable substances in a state of putrefaction". It was the Thames that supplied the washing, cleaning and cooking water for the Nicol household and their neighbours.



Rotherhithe

Charles Dickens set *Oliver Twist* in Rotherhithe and this is where Fagin's gang of pickpockets is based and where Bill Sykes meets his death. Frederick Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* reported in 1845 that he saw "hundreds of thieves and loafers lounging about the street corners" of Rotherhithe. And a Report by the Medical Officer of Health for Rotherhithe in 1849 described the parish of St Mary's, which included Lower Queen Street, "as a community of ignorance and filth, vice and barbarism" where "almost all the houses are overcrowded with inmates, dilapidated and swarming with myriads of bugs".



Poverty, overcrowding, squalor, vermin, lack of proper sewerage and a polluted water source were the perfect breeding ground for a range of fatal diseases including smallpox, typhus and cholera. It was a cholera outbreak from May to July 1849 that claimed the lives of 13,000 Londoners and amongst the dead were John Friar, a 34-year-old bricklayer, who succumbed on 4th July 1849, and his neighbour, Louisa Nicol, John's wife, who died on 8th July 1849.

The 1851 Census lists Jane Friar as the head of the household at 51 Lower Queen Street and receiving parish relief on behalf of her seven children – John 13, Henry 12, Jean 10, Mary Ann 8, Amelia 6, Richard 4 and Louisa 2. John Nicol is the head of the household next door at 52 Lower Queen Street and is described as a widower and saw mill labourer.

Meanwhile in the parish of Auchtergaven, the 1851 Census lists James Nicoll (note the spelling change), shoemaker 66, as the head of the household at 32 Dunkeld Road, Bankfoot, where he lives with his wife Isabella 30, and children James Nicoll 6, Mary Nicoll 3, and David Nicoll 1. James Snr was not well and John had travelled from London in July 1851 to visit his sick father

and this is the last time he was seen by any relative.

John Nicol married Jane Friar in St Dunstan Church, Stepney, on 1st December 1852 and they moved round the corner to 17 Silver Street in Rotherhithe, still within a hundred yards of the septic Thames. In his study *Life and Labour of the People of London*, Charles Booth categorized Silver Street as "very poor, casual employment and chronic want".

John continued to work at the saw mill while Jane stayed at home to look after the seven children. The 1861 Census has the Nicols still listed at 17 Silver Street with John as head of the family and a wood sawyer 46, Jane 47, John, a dock labourer 24, Henry, a waterman 22, Amelia, a scholar 16, and Richard, a scholar 14. There is no mention of Jean, Mary Ann or Louisa.

John was a sawyer for the rest of his life and by the 1870s he and Jane were living at 112 Guilford Street, in a working-class area near the junction with Gray's Inn Road. John's earnings had improved and he was renting a steam powered circular saw and bench for six shillings a week in a saw mill to cut timber into rough shapes using patterns supplied by the furniture makers around them. Wood turners hiring adjoining lathes and benches then carried out the detailed work to fashion the spindles, legs, rails and arms as required.



By the turn of the 1880s, John's health was failing and he died, aged 69, on 8th December 1882 at 112 Guilford Street. The cause of death was recorded as decay of nature, a phrase commonly used then to mean the natural decline of health, strength and vitality in older age. Jane lived on as a widow at 112 Guilford Street and died in September 1887, aged 74.

Back in Bankfoot, James Nicoll and Isabella Findlay had three children – James Jnr was born in 1845, Mary in 1847 and David in 1850. James Nicoll Snr died at 32 Dunkeld

Road, Bankfoot in November 1851, aged 66, leaving his house, a small amount of cash, some land, and two dwelling houses which were rented out.

James Nicoll Jnr served an apprenticeship in Bankfoot under Thomas Clark, a master shoe maker. On 18th May 1866 he married Elizabeth Cattanach, daughter of William Cattanach who had a well-established saddlery and sporran making business in Bankfoot. James Jnr set up as a shoe maker, which was complementary to his father in law's business but independent.

James and Elizabeth had four sons – William, John, James and David – and a daughter, Isabella. William, James and David followed their father and grandfather into the saddle, shoe and sporran making business, John opened a garage and cycle agency on Main Street in Bankfoot, and Elizabeth was a milliner. After the death of William Cattanach in 1895 and his son William Cattanach Jnr in 1899, the Nicoll and Cattanach businesses were combined and eventually renamed as Nicoll Bros, with William, James and David as partners.



Isabella Findlay died on Friday 23rd January 1903. Since 1851, she had occupied the family home and received rental income from the two properties in Bankfoot. The question of who was the heir in law to this estate and the small piece of land now came into sharp focus.

James Jnr was the oldest child of his father's second marriage but he was well aware that there was also a son, John Nicol, from the first marriage. James Jnr was only six years old when John disappeared and didn't know how old he was, where he had gone, and whether he was dead or alive.

James Jnr took legal counsel and was advised to seek clarification through the Presumption of Life Limitation

(Scotland) Act 1891. The rumour amongst the family was that John had gone to either Dublin or London and, to satisfy the requirements of the law, legal notices were published in the London Standard and the Irish Times on Saturday 26th December 1903 seeking any information on the whereabouts of John Nicol. Following a zero response to the adverts, James Jnr then submitted a petition under the Life Limitation legislation to Perth Sheriff Court to have his brother declared dead.

James Jnr provided the basic information on John's disappearance to Sheriff John Sym but could only say that John Nicol had not been in touch with any member of the family in Bankfoot since just before his father's death in 1851. John Turnbull, a cousin, knew John Nicol as a young man but described him as "a rather worthless character who no one cared to have very much to do with". After 1851, John Turnbull did not hear from John Nicol again.

Catherine Doig, another cousin, had lived in Bankfoot all her life. She had heard that John Nicol had gone to London and that his father had sent for him when he was very ill in 1851. She reckoned that John Nicol would now be over 90 years of age and confirmed that there had been no communication from him with any member of her family for over 50 years.

During February 1904, Sheriff John Sym considered all the evidence and, based on how long he had been missing, the complete absence of any contact and his likely current age, concluded that John Nicol could be presumed to have died and set the official date of John Nicol's death as 31st July 1858, exactly seven years after his last known contact with any member of the Nicol family. The petition was granted and James Nicoll Jnr, therefore, was entitled to inherit his father's property and other assets.

Why John chose estrangement from his family remains a mystery but he did have a full life. What is undeniable is that the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh show his death in the 1858 register while the General Register Office for England and Wales in London document his demise in the 1882 record. John Nicol from Bankfoot is a man who officially died twice.

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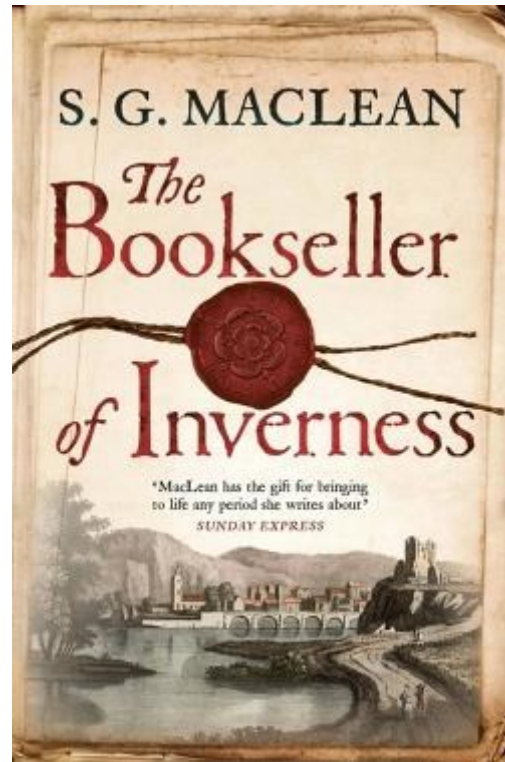
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There were better days . . .



BOOK REVIEWS



Shona MacLean echoed the words of her thriller-writer uncle, Alistair MacLean, (*Guns of Navarone*, *Where Eagles Dare* etc) in an interview, when she said, "I am a story teller". She is a gifted story teller but she is also a trained historian.

The author has a PhD in sixteenth and seventeenth century Scottish history and she takes a professional approach to her research. She extends us the courtesy of providing an introductory note which sets her story in its historical context, with a brief account of the Jacobite cause. She irons out some common misapprehensions – Jacobitism was not confined to the Highlands of Scotland; two clans, the Campbells and the Mackays were Hanoverians and there were Highlanders who changed allegiance as they cynically judged or misjudged the odds. There were Scots who turned Jacobite because they were unhappy with the 1707 Act of Union and she points out that the treaty, which was to have upheld Scottish law, was ignored; Jacobites who committed crimes in Scotland were tried and executed illegally in England after the '15 and '45 risings.

Writers of academic history are duty bound to list their sources. As this book is fiction, there is no call for the

author to oblige but she does better; she comments on the sources she consulted before writing the novel. In a ten-page author's end note, she explains that writing the Bookseller of Inverness was a covid lockdown project and that inspiration had come to her some years earlier during visits to Leakey's second-hand bookshop in Inverness's Church Street. This shop, in the old Gaelic kirk where Jacobite soldiers were imprisoned and executed after Culloden, is a place where you can imagine their ghosts.

The Bookseller of Inverness is marketed as a murder mystery. This does it an injustice: the novel is so much more than that. Yes, there are bodies and murder weapons but this reader barely noticed those as she was carried along on a rising tide of suspicion and feats of derring-do, by a briskly told story embedded in the daily life of post-Culloden Inverness.

The book was warmly recommended to your reviewer by family and friends, yet she hesitated to read it. Why? Because it is about Jacobites. How many Jacobite pieces of writing are there? From the nostalgic songs of West Stormont's very own Lady Carolina Nairne (Charlie is My Darling, Will ye no' come back again? A Hundred Pipers) through letters, diaries, memoirs, histories, romantic novels, all the way to Outlander fantasy, there is an enormous corpus of Jacobite themed material. Your reviewer has long regarded Jacobite stories as an overworked genre. What might a new novel offer?

The story is set in Inverness six years after Culloden, as the local Gaelic-speaking population strive to rebuild their lives under the constant scrutiny and harassment of the occupying Hanoverian army. The main character, the bookseller, Iain Ban MacGillivray, who was badly wounded and permanently disfigured at Culloden, is a man struggling with his demons. He dwells bitterly on the deaths of life-long friends. He lives with the physical pain of his injuries and the psychological pain of his experiences as a defeated combatant, a prisoner in Carlisle and transportee to Virginia as an indentured labourer. In short, he suffers post-traumatic stress disorder and survivors' guilt and barely has the will to go on living.

If this sounds depressing, it is not. The story quickly gathers pace as Iain finds the first body in his shop. There is a cast of engaging characters led by his maternal grandmother, Mairi Farquharson, a formidable grand dame of the Highland Jacobite gentry, Iain's larger than life father, occupying soldiers, slippery spies and informers, Hanoverian and Jacobite, local tradespeople and a bad-tempered cat called Morag.

Bonnie Prince Charlie does not appear in the story except as a very minor aside. Iain's grandmother is entertaining her lifelong friends and Iain plays his fiddle for them.

"The old stories were told again, the favourite poems recited and the loyal toasts openly drunk to the health of King James VIII, far away in the Palazzo del Re in Rome, and of his son, Charles, Prince of Wales, wherever in

Europe he might be."

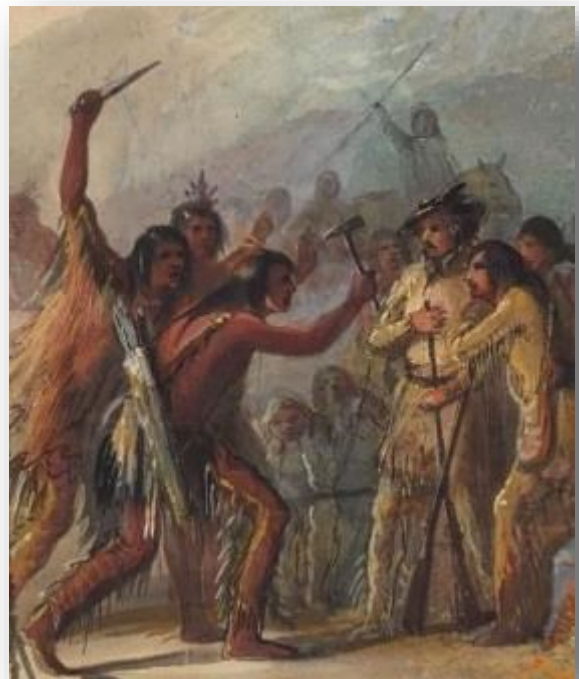
Your reviewer cannot decide if this novel is a thriller which is set in a familiar historical context or a history lesson enlivened by being delivered in the thriller genre. MacLean teaches us history by inserting characters with illuminating back-stories. There is an English Jacobite, a brave young man who has suffered in much the same way as Iain, underlining the point that the Jacobite cause was not exclusive to Scotland. There is a feisty young woman whose story tells how certain clan chiefs betrayed their own people by selling them to be trafficked to the colonies as indentured slaves.

This novel offers insights into the Jacobite psyche: the blind faith in the Stuarts and total devotion to the Cause. MacLean's Jacobite characters are incorrigibly tenacious; they never give up hope on Prince Charlie's return and the possibility of another uprising which will bring them victory. We readers know that by 1752 there will never be another Jacobite uprising; Cumberland's "Final Solution" had changed the Highlands for ever but these Jacobites refuse to accept it.

MacLean, like her uncle, has an easy, flowing, accessible prose style and the story fairly rattles along as we are drawn into the lives of these characters and the suspense inexorably builds. It's a good read!

Publisher : Quercus (August 2022)

Jennifer McKay



The Phantom Indians of Murthly Castle

By Tom F. Cunningham

When arranging his return from North America in 1839 as Murthly's new laird Sir William Drummond Stewart bought souvenirs. As one does. Not content with a few Shoshone, Pawnee and

Lakota nick-nacks Stewart, now proprietor of a couple of castles with several thousand acres across four estates, went big. His shopping list included bison to grace the slopes of Birnam Hill, antelope for his Deer Chase, wild birds and, supposedly, a grizzly bear. In addition, there were bags of Douglas fir and Sequoia seed for his policy woodlands.

He had crossed the Atlantic in 1833 alone with only some letters of introduction but was returning with a close companion, Antoine Clement, a young Metis of mixed French-Canadian/Cree parentage, and two Native Americans. The latter are the ostensible subject of Cunningham's small pamphlet, the 'Phantom Indians' of the title who have perplexed him for decades.

Cunningham is also the author of *'Your Fathers the Ghosts' - Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Scotland* (Black & White Publishing, Edinburgh, 2007). A particular feature of his research into the mania for the Wild West shows that Buffalo Bill Cody toured extensively and very successfully across Britain for nearly two decades from the 1880s is an in-depth concentration on the Native American participants who brought so much colour and excitement, and what happened to them. There were approximately three hundred Lakota men, women and children from Pine Ridge agency participating in these shows and he names thirty-four of them, including Red Shirt, Black Elk, Kicking Bear, Alexandra Standing Bear, Good Robe, Young Elk-Woman, Charging Crow, and William Sitting Bull, and the five who died and were buried here, never making it home. But to his chagrin he never manages to discover what tribe Stewart's Indians belonged to, never mind their names.

The story of this search makes for an interesting read. Always conscious that absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence he chases down every mention of Murthly's Indians getting closer and closer to an inescapable conclusion: they are a myth. Perhaps the tale of them standing forlorn on the Broomielaw, wrapped in blankets from the Hudson Bay Company, was the looky-like evidence that broke an historian's patience. (Stewart travelled home via the steam packet into Liverpool.) Although he names the culprits, for this reader he is awfully lenient on those who perpetuated the myth, and still do today. Along the way he manages to give a good and succinct account of Stewart's adventures with Jim Bridger, Kit Carson and other legends of the American fur trade. Before white settlers, and civilization, disturbed Eden, the Far West.

The booklet is well illustrated, chiefly with some of Alfred Jacob Miller's paintings. Stewart was his patron and encouraged him in 1837 to join that summer's expedition as resident artist. Where many of his contemporaries depended on imagination and fanciful tales for their renderings of the West, Miller travelled all the way to the Rocky Mountains, recording what he saw and felt on the spot. (However, the one on the front cover, and illustrating this review, 'Attempting to Provoke an Attack from the Whites', recreates an incident from a previous expedition. One which cemented Stewart's reputation with the mountain men as a cool unflappable operator.)

Later, Stewart brought Miller over to Murthly, providing time and space to allow him to turn those field sketches into major works of art. Inevitably, Miller's patron is front and centre in many of them. Stewart, long before the advent of the smartphone, had perfected the holiday selfie.

Whatever the memories of that period meant to Stewart, Miller's canvases, drawings, and field sketches are its most significant legacy. More significant than the shenanigans of a couple of displaced Indians. Even if they had been real.

Spoiler alert: there is even less evidence for the grizzly bear .

(The English Westerners' Society, London 2023)

Paul McLennan

