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BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2013

James McLevy – Edinburgh's Victorian Detective

At our April meeting Alanna Knight's talk was about "James McLevy: Victorian Detective". Amongst the cases he published accounts of are two crimes that took place in our area. Here are extracts from them.

The Ash-Backet

"A watch was amissing one morning from a house in Picardy Place, in 1834... When in the evening I walked down, I did not take credit to myself, nor do I do so now, for supposing I could, merely by walking the street and looking at the door, clear up the mystery. I went only because the place had for me the usual charm of places where secret things have been done. It was dark, and about nine o'clock. I was passing from York Place to Picardy Place, north side, expecting to see nothing thereabouts but those spectres of cinder-women, who have a liking for charred things... they expect something to "turn up" out of what others cast away... shrivelled toys of man's heartlessness, and all their anger burnt out of them by misery ...

"I saw them at their work, shadows of creatures going from backet to backet... But as I was thinking something in this way, I saw a male cinder-wife – excuse the expression; a man went up stealthily to a backet, and bent down, and then left it again... I suspected he had seen me, for he stood in the middle of the street for a time till I had passed. My curiousity was excited... I stood at the corner of Broughton Street, and saw him approach the pavement again. This time he was bolder for his great enterprise, for I saw him lift the backet and carry it off towards Leith Walk ..."

McLevy followed.

The Pleasure Party

"In September 1856, I was in Princes Street on a general survey. It was a fine day for the time of the year, and the street was crowded with that mixed set of people, preponderating so much towards the grand and gay, for which that famous promenade has of late years become remarkable...

"Between St David Street and St Andrew Street, my attention was claimed by two ladies and a gentleman, who appeared to me to be English... It was far more

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Renewed thanks to Eileen Dickie for doing the Desktop Publishing, to Alan McIntosh for proof-reading – and to both of them for their advice.

Ideas or contributions for our next edition? Phone editor John Dickie on 0131-556 0903 or e-mail john.dickie@blueyonder.co.uk



easy for me to mark them than to give you reasons why they had an interest for me. What though I were to say that they appeared a degree too curious about the dresses of the ladypromenaders... they all three went tripping gaily up St Andrew Street, at the top of the northern division of which they met a very little dapper dandy, not over five feet and an inch or two...

"At length he, who, though small, seemed to be leader, pointed north, drawing out the while a watch, and they appeared decided, all setting off along St Andrew Square. I immediately concluded they were for Scotland Street station, for I knew the northern train went about the time, and there is there often a conveniently crowded platform.

"My conjecture was right. The party made direct for Scotland Street... they never hesitated or stopped till they got to the top of the stair leading to the station-house. Being so utterly unknown to our English friends, there was no necessity for my usual caution; and accordingly, the moment they disappeared, Riley and I went forward to the parapet overlooking the station and platform, and placing our elbows upon it, put ourselves in the position of lounging onlookers... A crowd of people were there, among whom a number of likely ladies, with pockets far better filled than those of mere promenaders in Princes Street... Then came the rumble of the train down the tunnel, at the sound of which the passengers began to move, carrying their



The tunnel is on the right. In McLevy's day the platform was where the play equipment is now, and steps down to the station from the street where the grass and trees are.

luggage to the edge of the platform, and all on the tiptoe of expectation. But now I fairly admit that I never more regretted so much the want of half-adozen eyes. The nimble artistes were all at work at the same time – they were, in short, in a hurry of pocket-picking...

Sources: "The Pleasure Party" is in McLevy the Edinburgh Detective (Mercat Press, Edinburgh, 2001), and "The Ash-Backet" in McLevy Returns (Mercat Press, Edinburgh, 2002).

Our original article is in Newsletter 26, Wiinter 2009

The Mysterious William Pearson

Reader John Bibby explains

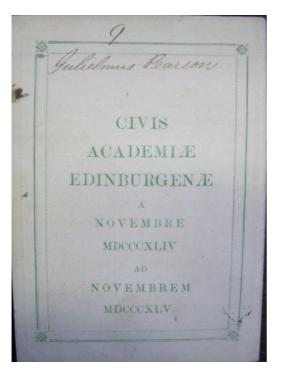
I am researching the family of Karl Pearson (1857-1936), the "founder of modern statistics". His father William (1822-1907) spent the years 1841-1848 in Edinburgh, but little is known about this undoubtedly formative period in his life. He arrived [from Yorkshire] mysteriously; he departed mysteriously; and the next two known events are that (a) he had an illegitimate child in London in 1849, and (b) he then became an eminent and extremely upright barrister for the rest of his life.

This short article relates to William Pearson's time in Edinburgh. It has lots of loose ends and I would welcome assistance from anyone knowledgeable about this place at that time. You can email me at jb43@york.ac.uk

Whatever his reason for leaving Yorkshire, the next record of young William occurs in the Scottish census of June 1841. William, aged 18, is "Writer, Lodger" in Broughton Street. ("Writer" presumably has a legal connotation – perhaps a solicitor's clerk? It would be good to know which solicitor he was with.) William was in the census household of Jane Grant, a 40-year-old "druggist", whose husband Alexander is described elsewhere as "druggist, surgeon, and accoucheur" (midwife). The household consisted solely of Jane, William, and Margaret O'Conner, a 20-year-old "F.S." (female servant) born in Ireland. (Alexander was not there.) The Grant household was exceptional for Broughton Street in that its members were all born outside Scotland. The only other such household nearby was that of William Doherty, a 25-year old physician, who with his wife and F.S. were all Irishborn.

The houses on Broughton Street were not numbered in the census. However, Pigot's 1837 directory lists "Alexander Grant, surgeon and druggist" at 15 Broughton Street, so we may assume that this was where young William was staying.

William is said to have obtained an Edinburgh LL.D. However, that along with other aspects of his recorded history appears to be false – the only Edinburgh LL.D.s in those days were honorary. What is true, however, is that in 1844 William began attending Law classes at the University of Edinburgh. We do not know what led him to study Law: he seems to have been the first in his family to do so. But he was not the last – even today there are firms of solicitors around York with "Pearson" in their title: these date back to William's brother Robert. William won several class prizes: "Prizeman in Roman Civil Law, 1845; in Scots Law, 1847; Gold Medallist, Edinburgh University, 1847".

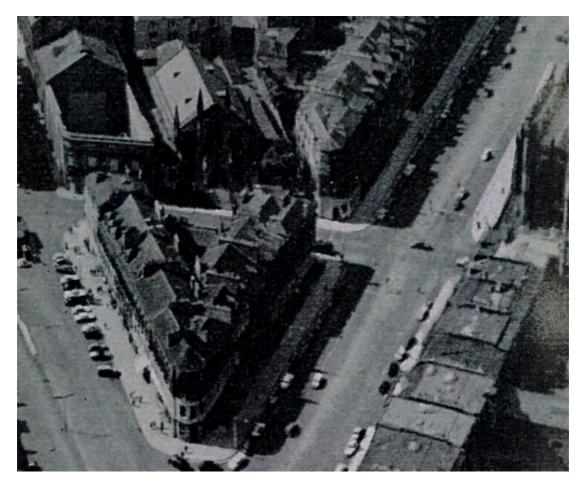


William Pearson's student card, November 1844

(This is according to "Who's Who 1900", where William and his illustrious son Karl both have entries – no doubt self-written some half-century after the events.)

However, after three years of apparent success in Edinburgh, something seems to have gone seriously wrong with William, for his records terminate abruptly with an enigmatic note in the Pearson Archives hand-written by the extremely deaf Professor Allan Menzies: "I certify that Mr Pearson attended with perfect regularity until 28 January 1848, when he left Edinburgh, & that in all the Examinations he was highly distinguished by the extent and accuracy of his knowledge".

One can only speculate what triggered this sudden departure. Was there a crisis of some sort – a scandal perhaps? Was his rapid departure from Edinburgh perhaps linked to the illegitimacy which has already been referred to, or to some other liaison? Answers to these questions are unknown. However, from 1850 William appears to have entered a life of complete Victorian uprightness and respectability.



Editor: Nos 1-17 Broughton Street faced St Mary's Cathedral but disappeared in the 1960s when the triangle at the top of the street was demolished. The photo shows that this was the first side of the triangle to go.

We found the photo in "*In the end the beginning: an account of St. Mary's Cathedral Edinburgh 1814-1964* by J.A.S.Shaw, attributed to the *Scotsman* but undated.

James Ritchie & Son – Clockmakers

Bellevue Place resident David Watt has previously contributed several articles to our Newsletter, including one back in 2001 about Ritchies the clockmakers. Now David has given us more details to fill out the original article – including his own Ritchie connection.

In the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* newspaper of 7th January 1805 it was announced that James Ritchie, watchmaker in Edinburgh, had married Sally Neill in late December. In 1809 he established himself as a clockmaker at 29 Leith Street; and in 1819 took over the neighbouring business of Joseph Durward (established in 1775). James and his wife lived in North St James Place and later moved to 27 St James Square (now part of the Register House complex) where their title deeds allowed them to dry their washing on the green at Moultries Hill. The firm now started to deal in jewellery and pocket watches as well as clocks – the first watch they sold in 1819, a massive turnip watch with only an hour hand, was sold back to them in 1933.

By 1836 the firm had moved to 25 Leith Street and changed its name to James Ritchie & Son. The premises comprised a shop at street level and 3 basement flats under which were the workshops for over 100 years. These exited onto St Ninian's Row.

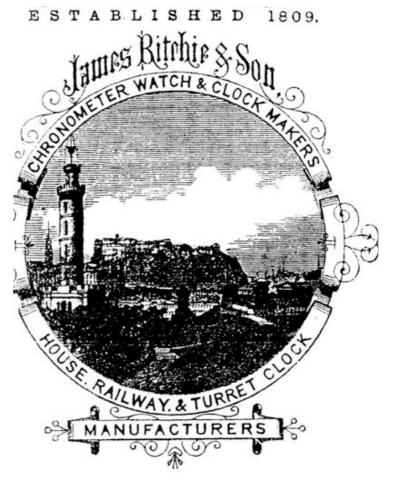
One son was sent to Paris to learn clockmaking, got in with some medical students and became a doctor in England. Another son, Frederick James Ritchie (1828-1906), was to be the driving force behind the firm for most of the 19th century.

In the mid 1840s James Ritchie was asked to fit a lightning conductor to the Scott Monument. The work was not finished by Saturday afternoon. While James was attending church on the following day a violent electrical storm hit Edinburgh and James had to change the direction of his prayers for his own salvation to that of the Scott Monument; they worked!

The mechanical side of clockmaking gave way to the increasing use of electricity and the Ritchies were leaders in this new field. Alex Bain – a genius who started life as a sheperd in Caithness, invented the first electric clock and the principles of telegraphy and faxing machines – and Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone, were among the Ritchies' friends.

Frederick Ritchie succeeded on his father's death in 1849. In 1856 he married Annie Wallace Rose, a member of a shipping family in Leith; they spent their first two years living in Hart Street before moving with the first of their children to 33 London Street. Her brother Lachlan was in business as a ship's chandler at 81 Mitchell Street and he it was who produced the well-known Rose's Lime Juice. In 1869 they moved again, to 6 Brunton Place – which remained the family home until the last of the spinster Ritchie sisters died in 1960. The firm was awarded the prestigious Reid-Auld prize for innovations in clock design. History Society members who attended the recent visit to the City Observatory [in 2001] will recall the part played by the firm, under Frederick's leadership, in the installation of the timeball and gun in 1861. The idea was not new and was in fact a copy of a system used in Paris where they fired the gun at 12 noon. It has been said that the canny Scots decided to fire the Edinburgh gun at 1pm to save 11 rounds of ammunition!

Frederick II, son of Frederick James took over the management of the business when his father retired. Unfortunately Frederick II had social ambitions beyond his means... he sold stock and used the money for his own ends... the firm was heavily overdrawn at the bank. His youngest brother Leone (family name Leo) was forced to surrender his house in Joppa as security to the bank. He was a quiet diffident man, seeking only to tend clocks. It was never intended that he should ever have control of the family business and when it was thrust upon him when his brother Frederick was bought out he was not equipped for the job. Whenever problems arose at work he suffered from an upset stomach.



Meanwhile, he had married Mary Sim Hill in 1897. Their first house was at 25 Dalgety Street, Edinburgh where on 12th November 1898 the present writer's mother Catherine Richardson Ritchie was born (her family name became Cassie). We next find the young Ritchies moving to 77 McDonald Road; Catherine and her two younger sisters all started their education at Broughton School a few hundred yards north of their home. She took after her father in character: shy, diffident, yet holding firmly to her carefully thought out beliefs. She was a bright scholar, particularly in essay writing. She had intended to be a school teacher but her voice was not strong enough for this profession so she became assistant secretary to the Queen's Club in Frederick Street.

In 1919 she met David Watt, newly home from the First World War. Their first meeting was in the social guild of the United Free Presbyterian Church in Portobello. It was seven years after they met before they were able to get married, on 10th July 1926. In those days married women did not work so she resigned on her marriage. They were chronically hard up – this was the period of the Great Depression. And soon they had the additional expense of their son, David Ritchie Watt, born on Friday 13th May 1927!

Though the First World War took its toll on members of staff it was not until the depression of 1930 and following staff dishonesty that the firm had to close the Princes Street branch. In the Second World War the younger staff members were called up and most of the skilled watch and clockmakers were lost to the new Ferranti factory. The firm were still pioneers – in the late 1940s when King George VI was being treated for vein trouble in his legs by Edinburgh University's Professor Learmonth, the firm designed and made a machine to alleviate the trouble. In 1953 the sole remaining partner Leone Ritchie, then in his 80s, retired and the Leith Street premises were sold. The firm was taken over by his



nephew, Robert Mitchell, and based in Little King Street before settling in 56 Broughton Street. After Mr Mitchell's death the business left the family.

It was bought by Mr Frank Pritchard, who had served his apprenticeship with the Ritchies.

Under his leadership the business prospered, an associated firm of precision engineering being established in Livingston.

James Ritchie & Son (Clockmakers) Ltd have two logos. One depicts Edinburgh Castle and Nelson's Column with the time ball (previous page). The other has a picture of a young girl standing on a chair to alter the hands of a grandfather clock. This girl, Catherine Ritchie, was later to be my mother.

Editor: The firm recently moved away from Broughton Street and is now in Dundas Street – "James Ritchie & Son (Clockmakers) Ltd. Retail and Repairs".

Sources:

Watt, David Ritchie (2001) James Ritchie & Son (Clockmakers) Ltd., Broughton History Society Newsletter No.9. Watt, David R. (Spring 2000) The Family Tree of David

R. Watt, compiled at 21 Bellevue Place. Correspondence between David Watt and John Dickie.

THE HISTORY OF ROSSLYN CRESCENT

Neighbouring Pilrig also has an interesting history. Celia and Sam Barron are researching a particular part of it

A number of years ago we were curious to find out who had lived in our house in Rosslyn Crescent since it was built in 1886. As it turned out we didn't find any really interesting past tenants but we did begin to see that the broader history of Rosslyn Crescent, and the adjacent Rosslyn Terrace, was much more fascinating. Thus began our project to research the history of the Crescent and the Terrace.

The detective work became really addictive. Initially we looked at the deeds of our own house then widened our search area to look at the Register of Sasines, Post Office directories, the Valuation roll, newspapers, the *Edinburgh Gazette* and many other sources of information.

Research is still at a very early stage and as yet we have no idea what the final outcome will be. The

following is just a taste of what we have discovered so far.

THE LANDS OF THE LAIRD OF PILRIG

The land on which Rosslyn Crescent and Rosslyn Terrace were built belonged to John Mackintosh Balfour, the 4th Laird of Pilrig, who lived in Pilrig House. It was at the extreme edge of Edinburgh with the boundary between Edinburgh and Leith running up the middle of Pilrig Street. Johnston's 1837 map (Figure 1 overleaf) shows an area of open green space dotted with large houses such as Bowers Hall, Pilrig House, Stewartfield, Rosebank, Powderhall, Blandfield and Shrub House. The population of Edinburgh quadrupled between 1801 and 1901 resulting in an urgent need for housing, so landowners began to feu parcels of land for house building. Barbara Balfour, in her book on the history of the Balfour

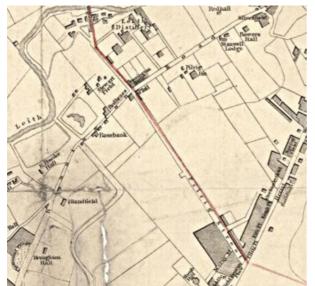


Figure 1 Johnston 1837 Rosslyn Crescent would be built close to the 'P' in Pilrig Street

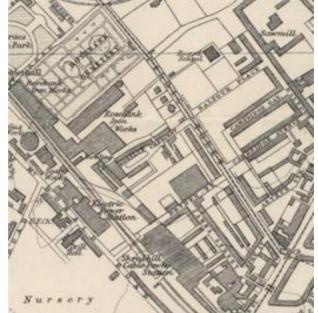


Figure 3 Bartholemew's Post Office Plan 1917-18

family, recounts that her father John Mackintosh Balfour became increasingly concerned at the number of tenement buildings which were changing the appearance of the area. The feu charters for the Crescent and Terrace were verv restrictive, requiring all plans to be approved by Balfour. He was anxious to encourage the building of "houses that well to do artisans could look forward to purchasing". The Cockburn Association recently stated "there is no doubt that the unlisted buildings of Rosslyn Crescent/ Terrace have a distinct character and that they have a wider value in understanding the historic expansion of Edinburgh". This is the heritage of Balfour's vision.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In the early 19th century there were plans for housing on both sides of Pilrig Street. Kirkwood's map dated 1817 (Figure 2) shows an ambitious grid development of three streets – St Cuthbert's Street, Whyte Street (now Rosslyn Crescent) and Melville

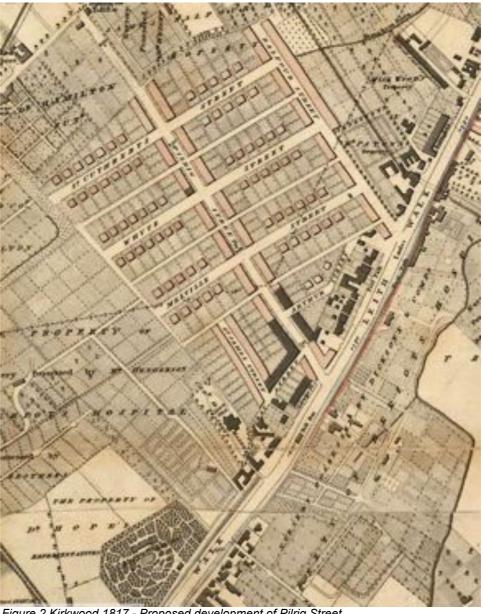


Figure 2 Kirkwood 1817 - Proposed development of Pilrig Street

Street. The demise of this plan was fortunate as there would be no Pilrig Park if it had been completed. Bartholomew's 1917 Post Office map shows the actual development (Figure 3) and includes details of an unfulfilled plan to extend Balfour Place through to Pilrig Street.

Rosslyn Crescent and Rosslyn Terrace were built in six phases.

Phase 1: 1870-71 6-12 Rosslyn Crescent

In 1869 James Cowie, a builder at 38 Haddington Place, borrowed £1200 to build 1-4 Rosslyn Street (later renamed 6-12 Rosslyn Crescent). The street was originally to be called Whyte Street, but was renamed because Cowie was very fond of the Midlothian village of Roslin. These 4 cottage-style houses stood in open countryside, surrounded by nursery gardens belonging to the Pilrig estate. Although advertised for sale in the *Scotsman* on 22nd January 1870, James Cowie retained ownership of all four houses for many years. The 1871 census shows James, his wife Barbara, their 7 children and his mother-in-law living in No 6, originally called lvybank Cottage. A member of the Cowie family lived in there from 1870 to 1949. Initially the other three houses were rented but in July 1899 Cowie gave all four houses to his children William, Jemima, Elizabeth and Mary. Members of the Cowie family are buried in Rosebank Cemetery.

Phase 2: 1875-76 3 Rosslyn Crescent and 5–9 Rosslyn Terrace (formerly Hartington Terrace)

In May 1875, John Mackintosh Balfour feued two parcels of land to architect David Clunas who then subfeued to Henry Harding, a bricklayer and furnace builder in St Stephen's Street, and to architect Charles Sey. Originally the Terrace was planned to run through to Dryden Street, with houses on both sides. The houses were to be of not less than £700 value. Harding borrowed £1750 and built 3 Rosslyn Crescent and 5, 7 and 9 Rosslyn Terrace. Harding, Sey and Clunas went bankrupt soon after, so the grand plans for Rosslyn Terrance were never completed.

Phase 3: 1876-77 1 Rosslyn Crescent

John Mackintosh Balfour feued land at the junction of Rosslyn Street and Pilrig Street to Henry Harding to build two 2-storeyed houses on Pilrig Street with a third dwelling house above them to be entered from Rosslyn Street. The overall value should be at least £2000. The first of the two houses at the corner of Pilrig Street was sold in May 1877.

Phase 4: 1881-1886 11–52 Rosslyn Crescent

In October 1881, John Mackintosh Balfour feued land to William Baird, Alexander Drysdale and George Gilmour to form the new Rosslyn Crescent, with pleasure gardens in the middle.

In Victorian times it was common for builders to buy small tranches of land on which they built and sold two or three houses at a time. As a result developments with an overall cohesive design were difficult to achieve as is evident from the mixture of house designs found in Pilrig Street. Rosslyn

Crescent, however, developed in a much more planned fashion. It was unusual for a small building company to be able to take on what was to be a five-year project. Baird, Drysdale and Gilmour arranged a number of different bonds with interest rates between 4 and 5% to be repaid within 15 years. In total they borrowed £14,400, by today's prices around £1.5 million. They built and sold a small group of houses at a time and discharged the loan before taking on a new one to build more houses. Building started in 1881 and was completed in 1886. Gilmour & Drysdale retained several houses for rental. In 1902, their partnership was dissolved and ownership passed to George Gilmour. Gilmour was later declared bankrupt in 1911. In 1895, Rosslyn Street and Rosslyn Crescent were renamed Rosslyn Crescent and Hartington Terrace became Rosslyn Terrace, and all the houses were renumbered.

The builders or their families all lived in the Crescent. Cowie lived in No 6 and Harding in No 3. Baird bought the house at the corner of Pilrig Street (now 1 Rosslyn Crescent) and also owned No 36 from 1883 to 1888. George Gilmour lived in No 19 from 1887 to 1909 when he moved to No15 to live with his daughter Helen Gilmour. She continued to live there until 1968. The 1901 census shows Drysdale, his wife Helen and their 7 children living in No 38 but he later moved to 70 Pilrig Street.

Phase 5: 1934-1937 5,7 and 9 Rosslyn Crescent and 2, 11–27 Rosslyn Terrace

The planned extension of Rosslyn Terrace through to Dryden Street was never completed. By the late 1920s, the vacant land was managed by Edinburgh Corporation as allotments, but owned by Annie Davy and Vera Geddes, granddaughters of John Mackintosh Balfour. In 1934, the land was feued to Joseph Mellon, a builder from Goldenacre, to build 4 apartments of a value of not less than £600 in Rosslyn Crescent and 9 houses valued at £750 in Rosslyn Terrace.

Phase 6: 1986 4 Rosslyn Crescent

The last site to be developed was 4 Rosslyn Crescent, on land which was previously the garden of the Balfour House Hotel, Pilrig Street.



Figure 4 Bonfire night in Rosslyn Crescent by Frank Robbie

THE PLANNY

An attractive feature of Rosslyn Crescent is the green area in the centre known as the Planny. The deeds of every house refer to the "pleasure gardens" which were surrounded by railings until removal in wartime. It is not known why it became known as the Plantation or Planny. Today the Planny is central to the highly regarded Rosslyn Crescent community spirit. The Planny is not just a place for children to play but also for social gatherings. Frank Dobbie, a resident for many years, captured the spirit of the Planny in his bonfire night painting (Figure 4).

INTERESTING RESIDENTS

As the research develops, information about the people who have lived in the street over the years is growing.

Several residents were involved in army and navy service. Research by Jessie Denholm (a member of Broughton History Society) indicates that 10 young men from the Crescent served in the First World War. Charles Drover from No 21 was killed in action in 1918, aged 20. John Adam Tait, who lived in No 20, served with the 16th Battalion Royal Scots and fell at the Battle of the Somme. The Scott family of No 52 had 5 sons all serving in the armed forces in the First World War. Frank Scott was awarded the Military Cross in 1917 while James Scott died from influenza in November 1918. William Johnstone from No 43 was the paymaster on HMS Russell which struck a mine on 27th April 1916. Johnstone survived and after a number of promotions in the Royal Navy eventually served in the Australian Navy. Kenneth and Alan McBean who lived in 9 Rosslyn Terrace both died in action.

Leslie Alexander Massie, 31 Rosslyn Crescent, was a lieutenant with the Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1945. A solicitor by training, he eventually became President of the Supreme Court in Malaysia and was a judge during the Japanese War Trials. His wife Margot N. Massie donated a banner to St Giles Cathedral in memory of her husband.

There were many maritime associations with the Crescent. In the late 1880s J. M. Clarke from No 30 must have been proud of Rosslyn Crescent as he named a steam trawler he owned *Rosslyn*. Unfortunately in December 1893 the *Rosslyn*

collided with the SS *Bull* in the Forth, causing the *Bull* to sink. A formal investigation found that the skipper of the *Rosslyn* was at fault but not its owner. Andrew Lamb,

who owned 34 Rosslyn Crescent between 1883 and 1892, was an engineer on the SS Woosung, trading in China. Captain Alexander Wilson lived in No 9 and was master of the SS Kirkland which during the Second World War transported petrol to Greece and the Western Desert. frequently coming under heavy air attack. In 1942 Captain Wilson was awarded an OBE for gallantry.



Figure 5 Rev. Gideon Jasper Richard Ouseley

Other residents of

interest include the Rev. Gideon Jasper Richard Ouseley (Figure 5) who was a tenant in No 10, from 1870 to '73. Born in Lisbon, Portugal, he studied at Dublin University and was an Anglican priest in Warrenpoint, N Ireland. He left the Anglican Church and joined the Catholic Apostolic Church. He may have been a priest at the church now the home of the Mansfield Traquair Centre.

Current resident Margaret Kinghorn's family links with the Crescent go back to 1919 and she, her parents, grandparents and great grandparents have lived in Nos 19, 30, 37 and 39.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The research is still at an early stage. There is a huge amount of material still to be trawled from a wide range of readily available databases. Personal recollections of those who have links with Rosslyn Crescent and Terrace are being sought. So far it has been difficult to find photographs of the Crescent pre the 1970s. Any information that would extend the study would be greatly appreciated.

Celia & Sam Barron 0131 554 8610

Recently Published Broughton Records Jessie Denholm reports

The Scottish Genealogy Society has recently published two books of material transcribed from the records of the former Broughton Place Church. These are *Broughton Place Associate Congregation, Edinburgh – Names of Members 1795* (ISBN 1-904060-98-6, price £2.50) and *Broughton Place United Presbyterian Church, Edinburgh, Band of Hope Register 1886-1908* (ISBN 1-904060-96-X, price £3.00). This church went through a number of name changes during its existence – hence the different name.

These books are not being recommended as a 'good read'. They do, however, contain material which any historian of theBroughton area might find useful. Basically what they contain is lists of names and addresses. I have found the *Band of Hope Register* useful in connection with the First World War Project – some of the boys who joined the Band of Hope (a temperance organisation for children) also feature on local war memorials. I could envisage them being useful for a study of a particular street or indeed of Broughton Place Church itself. They can be bought online from <u>www.scotsgenealogy.com</u> or by calling at the Scottish Genealogy Society's Library at 15 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh. (I am normally there on Thursday afternoons and I would be delighted to show Broughton History Society members the facilities available there for research into local as well as family history – Jessie Denholm 0131 552 7598)

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