



DUNBAR'S JOHN MUIR ASSOCIATION – NEWSLETTER No.23

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John Muir Interpretative Centre

As reported by our convener, the work on the Centre is on schedule and the exhibition is being put together so that when the house is ready, the exhibition will be ready to put in place and the house will then open on Saturday, 26th July, which by coincidence is Lifeboat day in Dunbar, guaranteeing a lot of visitors to the town. A number of people who had contributed to the exhibition in various ways were invited by David Campbell to a presentation of how the exhibition would look. David was also seeking comment on the content. Some minor adjustments were suggested which David took on board. I can assure you that the exhibition exceeds all expectations. It is informative, exciting and will interest visitors of all ages who I am sure will want to make return visits. A fitting tribute to Dunbar's great son.

Dear Friends

This is a fairly short newsletter, but I thought it was time to be in touch with you all again. Spring in Dunbar as far as DJMA was concerned was fairly quiet. The work on the John Muir Interpretative Centre in the Birthplace is on schedule and hopefully will open in mid-summer. Applications are now being sought for a manager. For those of you with access to the internet there are some good pictures of the work on www.dunbar.org.uk

Your Council meets on a monthly basis and we have taken the opportunity during this time to plan some activities for when the Centre is up and running. We will give you further information at the appropriate times.

A pamphlet giving details of special events in conjunction with the Muir exhibition, "Into the Heart of the Wilderness" in the Writer's Museum is enclosed with the newsletter. It would be a shame if you miss it as it is well worth a visit. The exhibition is open until 19th September.

Have a good summer, visit the Interpretative Centre and let us know what you think of it.

Sincerely
Jim Thompson

The Writers' Museum

Lady Stair's Close where The Writers' Museum is situated is in the Lawnmarket at the top of The Royal Mile. It houses permanent exhibitions to three of Scotland's literary sons, namely Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson and in my opinion, the greatest of them all, Robbie Burns. From time to time space is given to other Scottish writers for their work to be displayed. One of our own members, Don Ledingham, who in his day-time job is Head Teacher at Dunbar Grammar, but with his other hat is no mean poet, had some of his work displayed.

Now thanks to some hard work by the good people at The John Muir Trust and our own Will Collin, quotations and excerpts from John Muir's writings can be seen. If you are in

Edinburgh, please make time to visit it. You will not be disappointed.

John Muir's Aunt Mary (part2)

Besides the Scottish Church, other denominations were present in Scotland during the nineteenth century. Also, marriage laws at that time allowed for civil ceremonies whose records were not preserved as carefully as those of the official church. Thus, not all marriage, birth, baptismal and death documents are in the parish records and frequently, some records are never found. Since it was not uncommon for a couple to be married in a civil ceremony and later have their marriage solemnized by the Scottish Church, the researcher may find a record of their banns being proclaimed for a couple, but no record of their marriage in the church. The proclamation of the banns appears to have been all that was necessary to recognize the validity of a marriage.

The researcher may also become confused by the repetition of the same first names through several generations of the same family. The repetition is the result of adherence to the old Scottish naming pattern. Though a cause for confusion, the pattern is a valuable aid in determining family groups. In its simplest form, the oldest son is named after his father's father, the next son is named after his mother's father, and the third son is named after his father.

Similarly, the oldest daughter is named after her mother's mother, the next daughter is named after her father's mother, and the third daughter is named after her mother.

Since Scottish families were not limited to six children, there were often not enough names of parents and grandparents to go around.

Additional children were given the names of their parents' brothers and sisters and, on occasion, the names of friends. Variations of the pattern occurred, such as the first son being named after the mother's father instead of his father's father.

Those who research the extended family of Mary and Hamilton have an added complication.

Hamilton's surname, spelled here up to this point as "Blakley," is not the spelling found in Scottish Church documents. In fact, members of the family discussed here spelled their surname five different ways, not including Grace's

surname spelled Blakeley in Bade's biography.

Note that Grace did not drop her surname.

Scottish women kept their maiden names. After marriage, a Scottish woman could legally use her maiden name or her husband's surname.

A difference in spelling may sometimes be a family group's attempt to distinguish it from another, nearby family group with similar first names as well as an identical surname. Another reason may be the inability of some churchmen to spell accurately the names of their parishioners. A third reason is the pronunciation of the surname. It is generally pronounced with a long "a". For much of his life, Hamilton spelled his name Blackley. To retain the long "a", some of his descendants dropped the "c" and switched the positions of the "l" and the "e". In some instances, the same person in the course of a lifetime used two or more variations in the spelling of the surname.

A search of the Crawfordjohn parish records does not lead to the identity of the relatives to whom the children, Mary and Daniel Muir were taken. Persons with the surname Muir were found, but none this writer saw with the surname Higgs. The conclusion cannot be drawn, however, that the children went to a relative named Muir. The surname of the elder John Muir's mother and of Sarah Higgs mother are not known. A person with one of these unknown surnames could have provided a home for the children until Mary married Hamilton.

"Hamilton Blackley & Mary Muir both in this Parish began to be proclaimed for Marriage 11 April 1813," the entry reads in the Crawfordjohn Parish Parochial Register, 1639-1854. It is in the filmed entries of this register that, unless otherwise noted, the following information about Mary and Hamilton's family has been found.

Hamilton's family had lived in the parish at least since 1774. On 6 January of that year, Hamilton's oldest sibling, John, was baptized. His parents, Thomas Blacklay and Grizel McLounie, had nine known children: John, Walter, Mary, William, Daniel, Agnes, Hamilton, Stirling Hamilton and Betty. The spelling of the children's surname was Blacklay except for Betty's christening on 23 June 1793. Then it was spelled Blackly.

If Daniel Muir left home in 1825, he was a member of Mary and Hamilton's household for twelve years, from ages nine to twenty-one. The

Parish of Crawfordjohn, in which they lived, included the village of Crawfordjohn and several smaller communities. Besides the village, they lived in several of them. Lettershaws is the only one easily found on a map today.

During those twelve years, Mary and Hamilton had seven or eight children, depending upon whether Daniel left before 11 October 1825 when Betty was born. Each child was baptized in the Scottish Church, most of the eight within a week of their births, and only one unchristened for over ten days.

Their first child was a girl they named Grizel after Hamilton's mother. The second, a daughter, they named Sara after Mary's mother. The third child, also a daughter, was not named Mary after her mother, but was christened Nancy. The family's relationship to the Nancy for whom the child was named is unknown. It is also unknown if the baby Nancy had a middle name that wasn't recorded, but by the time Hamilton passed away, Nancy was called Agnes. Agnes was the name of one of Hamilton's sisters and probably the name of one of their ancestors as well.

Nancy was born in July 1817. In November of that year, Grizel died at the age of four years. In 1817, Daniel was nearly fourteen years old, the age at which Wolfe records he experienced a religious conversion. Perhaps the death of Grizel had nothing to do with Daniel's spiritual journey, but he must have been deeply moved by the loss of the child he would have thought of as his little sister.

In April 1819, a fourth child, another girl, was born to Mary and Hamilton. Once again, they named a daughter Grizel for Hamilton's mother and probably for their first child as well. Within five months, she also died.

Finally, in September 1820, Mary and Hamilton had their first son. They named him Thomas after Hamilton's father. Little Thomas lived twelve days.

Their next child, born in October 1821, was also a son. They named him John, Although Hamilton's older brother was christened John, the naming pattern the parents were following called for the second son to be called after the mother's father.

In April of the following year, old Thomas Blackley died in Crawfordjohn at the age of seventy-seven. Although no specific evidence proves that he was the father of Hamilton, it is

unlikely that there were two Thomas Blackleys in the same small community old enough to be Hamilton's father.

Another girl was born to the couple in September, 1823. She was named Margaret. Like Nancy, Margaret was named for a person whose relationship with Mary and Hamilton is not known.

Betty, the next child, was named after Hamilton's sister, who in turn was probably named after an ancestor. Mary and Hamilton's Betty was born in 1825, the year Mary's brother, Daniel Muir, is believed to have left home.

Assuming he left after Betty was born, there were now five little children in Mary and Hamilton's household, four girls and one boy. The oldest was Sara, aged ten.

In October, 1827, a third son was born. Strict adherence to the naming pattern would have given him the name Hamilton. But just as the third daughter was not named after her mother, the third son was not named after his father. Instead, the couple named him Daniel Muir after Mary's brother. About two years are thought to have elapsed between the time Daniel Muir left home and Mary and Hamilton's naming a son after him. Clearly, the elder Daniel's departure had not broken the family ties.

A seventh daughter was born in December, 1829. So far, none of the daughters had been named Mary. This child would not be named after her mother either. One more time, Mary and Hamilton honored his mother by naming the baby Grizel.

Finally, the eighth daughter was christened Mary. She was born in March, 1832.

Unlike those of the other children, the christening document for Mary records a middle name, Kennedy.

Who was this Kennedy for whom the child Mary was also named? No one with that surname seems to have been closely related to either parent. But in 1829, Daniel Muir had married his first wife, her name alleged to be Helen Kennedy. Mary (Muir) Blackley had no sister, but after he brother married, she had a sister-in-law. If Helen was the Kennedy for whom the baby was also named, it is added evidence of continued good will between the couple in Lanarkshire and the couple in Dunbar. Helen (Kennedy) Muir died in July 1832, some three months after Mary was baptized on 11 April of

that year. Mary and Hamilton's twelfth child, a son, was born in August 1834. Mary was now over forty, so this was probably the last opportunity to name a boy after Hamilton. The couple chose instead to name him Thomas after Hamilton's father. He was their last child. In late September, Mary's brother Daniel and his wife Anne had their first offspring, a girl they named after Anne's mother Margaret.

In the 1840s, many changes occurred in the Blackley family. The first year of the decade, Mary Kennedy died. She was eight years old. The census in 1841, the first in Scotland to list by name the individual members in each household shows Mary and Hamilton residing in the village of Crawfordjohn. Only two of their eight living children were in their household: Daniel, age thirteen and Thomas, age six.

Three years later, the daughter christened Nancy but called Agnes died at the age of twenty-seven. It is not known if Agnes married and had children. Betty, now called Elizabeth, married John Watson and Margaret married Alexander Ferguson. John, the oldest living son and Catherine Brown had a son, also named John. The eventful decade ended with the emigration of Mary's brother and his family to America. Unless Mary and Hamilton were missed, they were not in Lanark County when the census was taken in 1851. Both John, without Catherine, and Elizabeth, with her family, lived in Crawford.. Margaret lived in Culter. Elizabeth and her husband John Watson were listed with three children: Ann, age ten; James, age four; and Mary, age one. The latter was probably named after Margaret's mother.

About 1852, Mary and Hamilton returned to the village of Crawfordjohn where he worked as a carter. Two years later, a grandson was born to Grizel and John Marchbanks. And in 1854, Daniel Muir Blackley married Elizabeth Blackwood.

In February 1855, the youngest son, Thomas married Agnes Baird at Crawford. The next month, Hamilton became ill. Eight days later, March 19, he died at age sixty-six of "disease of the prostate". He was buried in the churchyard in the village of Crawfordjohn. All of his and Mary's children were listed on his death registration. Only data about Sara are unknown. She was not listed as deceased when Hamilton

died in 1855, but where she lived, if she married, and if she had children have not been learned. Mary's thoughts are not recorded, but human experience provides the insight to imagine what may have gone through her mind. Hamilton had gone too soon. He'd been sixty-six, but old Thomas had been eleven years older when he'd died. Now Hamilton was resting in the churchyard where they had laid so many of their bairns. Those of her children who had survived were grown. Elizabeth and John Watson were talking about going to America, as was Grizel. Her little Hamilton was already a year old. And there was John. She knew her oldest son wondered what she would do now that she was alone.

She knew that he wanted his son to live where he could own his own land and work for himself. The boy would be seven in July. Going to America would be an adventure for him. She remembered her own long journey from Manchester to Crawfordjohn when she had been hardly more than twelve. That was fifty years earlier. She was an old woman now, too old to move from one country to another.

She wished Elizabeth, Grizel and John were as content to stay. Thomas, the youngest child, was married now with no thought of emigration. Daniel, the son she had named after her brother, and his wife were living in Angus County. In nearby Culter, Margaret, her husband, and their children seemed happy.

What should she do? Stay in Crawfordjohn? Move to Crawford, Culter, or Angus County? What could she do to help them? The ones who really needed her help wanted to leave Scotland. Would they go if she didn't leave with them? She made up her mind – and wondered what she should take to America.

Just as the details of Mary and Daniel's journey to Scotland are unknown, so are the data concerning Mary's departure. She is believed to have left Scotland in 1855, because John's son, born in July 1848, was seven when he, his father, and his grandmother came to America. Did she know before she left that in May of that year, her son Daniel's wife gave birth to a boy they named Hamilton? Did Elizabeth and Grizel with their families sail on the same ship as their mother and brother? Was their landfall in the United States or Canada? Did they decide to locate in Wisconsin because Daniel and his family were

there? Or was it because other Scots had settled in the Poynette area?

If the meeting of Mary and her brother Daniel was recorded, it would have been in letters to Daniel, Margaret, and Thomas – the children who stayed in Scotland. Perhaps for the first time, Mary saw some of her brother's eight children. Certainly she had not seen Joanne before. Familial names were among them: Margaret, David and Ann, all from the Gilrye side of the family. From the Muir side, there were Sarah, John, Daniel – and Mary. (Final part in the next newsletter)

Mike Muir

Mike Muir is the great-grandson of John Muir, descended through John's oldest daughter, Wanda.

Mike changed his surname to recognise his illustrious forebear.

Mike, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, is to recreate the 1000 mile walk but by horse and carriage. The journey is to be filmed for showing on US TV. However, the film will also show John's origins in Scotland and Mike will come over to Dunbar in May where he will be seen going round John Muir's Dunbar in the company of our convener, Jim Thompson. The film's producer has already been in the town researching locations.

We are hoping that we will be able to get a copy of the film to show locally.

(Jim's hoping he will be discovered as the next Mel Gibson. Sadly, he is about 30 years too late)

The Muir Quarter

The State of California has been running a competition for a new design for the 25 cent coin. A strong campaign was mounted for a design showing John Muir with a view of Yosemite in the background. We are now down to the final four and the Muir Quarter is one of the four. The State Governor will make the decision. Supporters of the Muir Quarter have designed a colourful banner

-10 ft x 3 ft – which they hoped we could hang outside the John Muir Birthplace and then be photographed, the photographs to be publicised

in California. Sadly because of the ongoing work this is not possible. However, the next best thing is for photographs of the banner, held by Muir enthusiasts, to be taken in various Dunbar locations. We are currently awaiting the arrival of the banner.

Robert Wilson

Dunbar has another famous son and in the bicentennial year of his birth, the town is to mark the anniversary by mounting a ship's propeller in the Harbour area.

Robert Wilson was born in the Harbour area, the son of a fisherman. His father was also one of the early lifeboatmen. When Robert was still quite young, his father set out on a rescue mission. He made two successful trips but on the third trip, the lifeboat overturned and his father drowned. Early sketches show that as he grew up, he was showing an interest in ship propulsion. Steam had arrived and paddleboats were popular, but they did not really work in the open sea. As the ship rolled in the waves one of the paddles would come out of the water causing loss of speed and difficulty in steering. Robert experimented with four blades, then two before settling on the three bladed propeller, still in use today, as the most efficient. Sea travel was never the same again and the death knell of the sailing ship in mercantile marine was beginning to toll. Like a lot of inventors Robert Wilson was not properly recognised in his lifetime although he had a successful career in steel works. The monument of a ship's propeller will be a wonderful tribute to this great man.

Excerpts from Muir's Writings

“When I was a boy in Scotland I was fond of everything that was wild, and all of my life I've been growing fonder and fonder of wild places and wild creatures. Fortunately around my native town of Dunbar, by the stormy North Sea, there was no lack of wildness, though most of the land lay in smooth cultivation. With red-blooded playmates, wild as myself, I loved to wander in the fields to hear the birds sing, and along the seashore to gaze and wonder at the shells and seaweeds, eels and crabs in the pools among the rocks when the tide was low; and best of all to watch the waves in awful storms thundering on the black headlands and craggy ruins of the old

Dunbar Castle when the sea and the sky, the waves and the clouds, were mingled together as one.”

“I was sent to school before I had completed my third year. The first schoolday was doubtless full of wonders, but I am not able to recall any of them... But before I was sent to school my grandfather, as I was told, had taught me my letters from the shop across the street. I can remember distinctly how proud I was when I had spelled my way through the little first book into the second, which seemed so large and important, and so on to the third.”

“After attaining the manly belligerent age of five or six years, very few of my school days passed without a fist fight, and a half a dozen was a good number... To be a ‘gude fechter’ was our highest ambition, our dearest aim in life in or out of school. To be a good scholar was a secondary consideration.”

“We had to go up a hill called the Davel Brae that lay between the schoolhouse and the main street. One evening just before dark, as we were running up the hill, one of the boys shouted, ‘A Dandy Doctor! A Dandy Doctor!’ and we all fled pellmell back into the schoolhouse to the astonishment of Mungo Siddons, the teacher. I can remember to this day the amused look on the good dominie’s face as he stared and tried to guess what had got into us, until one of the older boys breathlessly explained that here was an awful big Dandy Doctor on the Brae and we couldna gang hame. Others corroborated the dreadful news. ‘Yes! We saw him. Plain as onything with his lang black cloak to hide us in; and some of us thought we saw a sticken-plaister ready in his hand.’ We were in such a state of fear and trembling that the teacher saw he wasn’t going to get rid of us without going himself as leader. He only went a short distance, however, and turned us over to the care of the two biggest scholars, who led us up to the top of the Brae and then left us to scurry home and dash into the door like pursued squirrels diving into their holes.”

n/b. Dandy Doctors was what the local children called body-snatchers who were also believed to kidnap children. The sticking-plaster was to cover the mouth. Davel Brae is now known as

Victoria Street, running from the High Street to the Harbours.

“One of our best playgrounds was the famous old Dunbar Castle, to which King Edward fled after his defeat at Bannockburn. It was built more than a thousand years ago and though we knew little of its history, we had heard many mysterious stories of the battles fought about its walls, and firmly believed that every bone we found in the ruins belonged to an ancient warrior. We tried to see who could climb the highest on the crumbling peaks and crags, and took chances that no cautious mountaineer would try. That I did not fall and finish my rock-scrambling in those adventurous boyhood days seems now a reasonable wonder.”

“Some fifty years later, when I visited Scotland, I got one of my Dunbar schoolmates to introduce me to the owners of our old home, from whom I obtained permission to go upstairs to examine our bedroom window and judge what sort of adventure getting on to its roof must have been, and with all my experience of mountaineering, I found what I had done in daring boyhood was now beyond my skill.”

n.b. John Muir was then 55 years old.

(All from “*The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*”)