

## CURRIE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

### KILBABERTON HOUSE

The earliest mention of Kilbaberton can be found in the Register of the Great Seal where in 1320 it is shown that a Hugonis Cissoris was granted a charter to the lands.

Subsequent owners were Thomas Eschington followed by William de Crafurde. Unfortunately precise dates could not be established for their periods of residence

The Forrester's of Corstorphine became owners in the early part of the fifteenth century and here it is interesting to note that around that time they also owned Bavelaw Castle in Balerno, which is regarded to be the oldest property in the surrounding area.

On 23 February 1492 John Wardlaw is granted a charter to the lands of Kilbaberton in the shire of Edinburgh. With this purchase John becomes a close neighbour to his elder brother James, who resides in Riccarton where he is the Fourth Wardlaw Laird. Their uncle Alexander is another near neighbour, as he owns the adjoining estate of Warriston.

Mention must be made of their kinsman Bishop Henry Wardlaw of St Andrews who founded Scotland's first university in that town in 1411.

Two years after taking up his new home John the First Wardlaw Laird of Kilbaberton *"besmirches the family name"* when we find in the Privy Seal a record which states: -

There is a remission to him and his brother, James of Riccarton, *"for art and part in the murder of William and Duncan Dundas."*

His name appears next when we examine death rolls recording those

slain on 9 September 1513 at the Battle of Flodden.

On the death of his father Henry inherits to become the Second Wardlaw Laird and we find that he is embroiled in a curious legal situation.

On the 4 October 1536 Henry served on an assize in the Court of Justiciary to hear the case against John Pennycuik of that ilk, who was charged with: -

*“Ye Mutilatioune of Roger Tuedy in Lyntoune of his thumb of his right hand.”*

Having heard the evidence and after due deliberation Wardlaw and his fellow jurors found the accused not guilty.

Their verdict however does not seem to have gained the approval of those responsible for the course of justice. For subsequently the seven jurors were served with an indictment: -

*“Although you have seen with your own eyes that Roger’s thumb was cut away and mutilated you have willfully and manifestly erred and gave false witness in declaring a Not Guilty verdict”*

The grand jury then found the counter charge against all seven of them proven and their moveable estate was made escheat to the king and they were imprisoned for a year and a day.

Such then was the law of 16th century Scotland.

Alexander the eldest son inherits Kilbaberton on the death of his father.

However it is his wife – Marion Forrest – known as Lady Kilbaberton who provides the interest, as it is she who can be found in the history pages. She gains indirect publicity through her having, in her sore extremity, resorted to Agnes Sampsonne “the wise wife of Keith.” The Keith here mentioned is near Humbie in East Lothian.

Agnes Sampsonne became famous or should that be infamous though her belonging to a coven known as the North Berwick Witches. She along with three others was tried for treason at a famous trial in Edinburgh attended by no other than King James VI himself. Among the 53 crimes laid to the charge of the notorious sorceress was that of -

*"hailing (healing) by her devilish prayers the Lady Kilbabertoune, whae was disessit of ane heavy diseis."*

What form the malady took we have no way of ascertaining.

James VI not only attended the trial that began on 27 January 1591 but he is said to have personally interrogated the suspects and in particular Agnes Sampsonne.

Sampsonne was found guilty and her fate followed the custom of the day when we learn she was led to the Castle Hill where she was: -

*"Bund to ane staik and wirreit" (strangled), her body afterwards burnt to ashes."*

Robert Wardlaw the eldest son of Alexander had predeceased his father; consequently Robert's son Henry succeeded his grandfather. When grandson Henry was but twenty years old we find from Criminal Trial Records that dastardly deeds occurred at Kilbaberton.

Details found in an old Scots account of this particular incident read as follows: -

*"Patrick Hepburn of Riccarton, Thomas his brother, and various servants came upon the tenth day of February last bipast, about ten hours at evening or thereby, under silence and cloud of night, to the town of Baberton, where lived Alexander Borthwick, and there also lived James Borthwick his friend and kinsman."*

They were lying in their beds, dreading no evil when the said Patrick and his accomplices most cruelly and barbarously raised fire in the houses together with certain other houses adjacent thereto with the set purpose and provision to have bereft them of their lives.

The said Alexander and James, and their families escaping of the said fire, came forth of the said houses, where the said person's most tyrannously set upon them, hurt and wounded sundry of their servants, bairns and wyffis, cruelly and unmercifully murdered and slew the said Alexander and James, and also hurt and wounded Margaret Hoig, spouse to the said Alexander, who is yet in great danger of her life."

From the foregoing you will note there is no mention of Henry Wardlaw and one can but speculate as to his whereabouts on this occasion.

The Presbytery of Edinburgh on hearing of this incident ordered Matthew Lichton, minister of Currie Kirk: -

"To excommunicate all thance quha committit ye lait murthur and raised fire at Kilbaberton."

The Borthwicks could not have been happy with such a lenient outcome. But rather than rely on the law the oppressed of these days seem to have trusted their own right arms. On this occasion their vengeance may be somewhat tardy but exactly six years later it is recorded that: -

"On the 12 February 1599, the laird of Riccarton (aka Patrick Hepburn) was stricken threw the body by the two brothers of the Borthwicks."

In 1597 Henry Wardlaw would appear to have sold Kilbaberton to a John Elphinstoun. Curious events continue to happen at Baberton for in 1601 we notice that John Leslie of Wardes was fined £2000, and William Leslie of Warthill, £1000, not to harm John Elphinstoun of Baberton.

The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland records that William Wardlaw, senior of Riccarton, acquired the lands of Kilbaberton from his kinsman Henry Wardlaw sometime before 26 January 1610; and resigned them together with Whitelaw on 10 July 1612 to James Murray, the King's Architect.

James Murray was responsible for the majority of the construction of the house as we presently see it. The rubble-built house is a traditional Scots mansion. Conveniently the age of the structure is written in several places on the walls. The initials I.M. - for James Murray - and K.V. - for his wife Katherine Weir can still be found.

One early chronicler records that Murray was implicated in the slaughter of a certain David Stewart and goes on to say that this was a likely enough impeachment as early seventeenth century times were far from law-abiding.

Christmas post is always an exciting event and so it must have been for Murray in 1607 when his mail included a royal letter that made him: -

*"Principall Master of all his majesties warkis and buildings within Scotland"*

Murray was undoubtedly an architect of some influence and standing. His works include the north quarter of Linlithgow Palace, additions to the Great Hall at Edinburgh Castle, the design of Parliament House and the reconstruction of Holyrood Abbey for the coronation of King Charles I.

Parliament House like Juniper Green also records a significant Tercentenary event in 2007. Whilst the year 1707 gave birth to the first recorded naming of Juniper Green it also heralded the death of our then Scottish Parliament. It was on 28th April of that year that it ceased to function as a legislative assembly as all such powers were transferred to Westminster following the union of Parliaments.

Royalty must have been well pleased with Murray for we find that in 1633 on the occasion of King Charles's visit to his northern Kingdom with a view to his coronation, Murray was among the elect who "wer **dubed knights**" at Seton on Sunday 14 July.

The foundation stone for Parliament House was laid on 3 August 1632 and it took a further seven years to build. The official opening took place on 31 August 1639. Unfortunately its designer did not live to see its completion he having died five years earlier.

James Murray the second son of Sir James must have been still in his minority when the property fell to him in 1634.

Our next owner appears circa 1657 when Alexander Brand merchant tailor in Edinburgh is shown as Laird of Baberton. Under Brand's ownership Baberton was to lose its individuality. Proud of his status as laird he sought to build up for himself an undying memory by ranking himself with those who call their lands after their own names. In addition to the acres of Whitelaw and Kilbaberton he possessed territory in the neighbouring parish of Colinton - namely Wester Hailes and part of Redhall. Treating his contiguous acquisitions as a single holding he branded the whole "Castlebrand."

Brand of Castlebrand died in August 1691, and was succeeded by his grandson also called Alexander. Grandson Alexander was a successful trader and public-spirited citizen he became a metropolitan bailie, was treasurer of the Merchant Company, and had in time conferred on him the honour of a knighthood.

However it is in local records he figures most prominently. Married to Helen Craig, of the Riccarton family, he and his wife with unfailing regularity make an annual appearance at the baptismal font in Currie Kirk: -

- (1) Margaret baptised 4 February 1694;
- (2) James baptised 21 January 1695:

- (3) Lewis baptised 24 January 1696;
- (4) Robert baptised 24 January 1697;
- (5) Alexander baptised 16 July 1698;
- (6) Elizabeth baptised 29 November 1699

In June 1699 to relieve severe financial pressure Alexander sold Baberton to Mr John Fairholme an Advocate for £18,338 Scots, (£145,000 in today's money.).

Sometime at the beginning of the eighteenth century the next owner Charles Inglis is encountered. Once more not much has been found on this family. Two generations of this family did however occupy the house.

The next family to own Baberton is most interesting mainly because of the many parallels that can be drawn with our present day society.

The Christies must have acquired the property not later than 1749. It was to the State-Lottery that the Christies of Baberton owed in large measure their initial fortunes. Apparently eighteenth century lotteries were very popular.

Christie served in the army as a Captain in the Foot Guards and he was very Persona Grata with his Colonel, the Earl of Berkeley. After he had accompanied his Lordship on his travels in Europe he was presented with a State lottery ticket that by good luck won for him a prize of £10,000 (£1.25M at today's value). With this windfall he was enabled to acquire Baberton.

With his suddenly acquired wealth he set about enlarging Murray's imposing mansion which by now was over a century and a quarter old and no doubt looked upon as behind the times. The semi-octagonal bay to the south was added in 1765. This date appears above the doorway.

John Christie died after 40 years in residence at Baberton and his nephew Alexander then became the Second Christie Laird.

Alexander also acquired great wealth albeit not based on the wheel of fortune. Entering the Navy at the age of twelve he eventually attained the rank of Rear Admiral. The spoils of war were very beneficial to him for when he retired he is said to have borne off £60,000 in prize money. In today's money this equates to £5M and is significantly greater than the earlier lottery winnings won by his uncle.

Archibald Christie the eldest son fell heir to Baberton in 1822 and it is said he led the leisured life of a country laird. This clearly had an impact on the family finances for we next read that after eight years as Laird he begins to suffer the - "pressure of pecuniary embarrassments,"

He quits his ancestral hall; and it is leased to a stranger who acquires it as "shooting quarters." The replenishing of the family purse was to come from an unexpected source and at the same time confer distinction on the family home. Baberton was to be "honoured as a seat of royalty," the sporting tenant being no other than Charles X, the dethroned and exiled King of France.

The 1841 census tells us the Christie's were back in residence at Baberton: -

#### SLIDE

Archibald Christie (50) - Head.

Sophia Christie (15) - Daughter.

Alexander Christie (15) - Son.

Braithwaite Christie (10) - Son.

Magdalen Fisher (35) - Governess

Ann Stewart (25) - Servant

Elizabeth Parrat (15) - Servant

Kirk session records are a great source for social history and on this occasion it is interesting to note that even the sons of lairds could not escape punishment. In 1842 we observe that the poor of the parish benefit to the tune of thirty shillings, being "one half of a fine

imposed on Alexander Christie Esq. Younger of Baberton, for Day Poaching." From the earlier census we can establish Christie junior was 16 years old when this incident occurred.

Our young miscreant Alexander Christie inherits the property on the death of his father in 1861 when he must by now be 35. He himself dies shortly thereafter and being without issue the property falls to his younger brother Braithwaite. The next year, 1862, Braithwaite sells Baberton to Sir James Gibson Craig of Riccarton.

Historical information on the Gibson Craigs in the main concentrates on their occupation of Riccarton and very little could be found about their ownership of Killbaberton or indeed of any tenants who may have leased the property.

Charlotte Dea's memories entitled "Juniper Green in the 1920's" shown on the JG300 website helps to fill in some gaps on tenants at Baberton.

She recounts that Professor Sir Byrom Bramwell at one time leased Baberton House.

Byrom Bramwell was an eminent medical practitioner and by the end of the nineteenth century his name was widely known throughout the world. He was President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh from 1910-12 and received his knighthood from the king in 1924.

His Edinburgh house was at 23, Drumsheugh Gardens but he also used Baberton House as a summer residence. The reason for selecting this location can be established when we find he was a devoted angler and acknowledged as an expert up-stream worm fisherman. His biographer states he spent many days at Thriepmuir pursuing this pastime.

His portraits can be found in The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 9, Queen Street. He died in 1931 in his eighty-fourth year.

Charlotte Dea also remembered that The Graham Watson's also leased Baberton. She recalls -

"Miss Graham Watson was our Brownie and Guide leader and I have happy memories of our meetings especially in the summer months. Then we met on one of the lawns surrounded by rhododendrons and azaleas with our red toadstool in the middle."

Tommy Tweedie is another whose memories can be found on the JG300 website. He says -

"When I left school I served my time and became a painter and decorator. I was apprentice to Donald Matheson in Lanark Road and I eventually took over the business. I painted all around the place in some of the farms and the big houses. I worked down at Baberton House for Sir William and Lady Whyte. He was head of the Royal Bank. His chauffeur would come along in the morning to pick him up for work."

The Archivist at the Royal Bank was able to provide the following background information: -

On 21 September 1940 Mr William Whyte of Baberton House, Juniper Green, was granted a Commission as Deputy Lieutenant of Edinburgh. A conferment of a knighthood occurs three years later in June 1943 and the following year on May 1 he retires from the office of Cashier and General Manager. He died at his home, Baberton House, on 20 April 1945.

In 1951 we find a new owner when Mr Alexander Robertson pays £10,000 to the Trustees of Hermione Dulcie Etta Cumíng or Gibson Craig Alford. (£210K)

An inter-net article submitted by a Mrs Margaret Dakers from Sighthill in Edinburgh gives us an insight into the Robertson ownership. She states that her parents were employed at Baberton from 1952 to 1958 and her family occupied the lower section of the house.

She confirms the people who owned Baberton House at that time were a Mr Robertson and his wife Charlotte who was American.

Mrs Dakers father was Polish and he worked as a gamekeeper, handyman, chauffeur, etc. Her mother, Margaret, was Scottish - originally a Fifer - and she worked as cook. On many occasions she catered single handed for 40 people when Mrs Robertson, a typical American who did things on a large scale, decided to entertain or hold a bazaar.

Of course there were maids in attendance to see to cleaning of the house, laundry, etc. Sometimes Mrs Morrison, the gardener's wife would come in to lend a hand with a variety of tasks, and more so if it was a large dinner party.

After Mrs Robertson died, Mr Robertson remarried and sold the house in 1958. Mrs Dakers recalls that a very large family by the name of Cullen bought Baberton and she remembers they had horses. She also thought one of the girls was called Larch.

A search of the Sasine Register showed that £8,500 (£135K) had indeed been paid for the property by Malcolm Henry Cullen. He and his wife Fay and seven children were to stay at Baberton House for the next 21 years.

John Fisher is another whose memories appear on JG300. He says: -

"Just at the entrance to Baberton Golf Club was a lodge house and that was where my mother and father lived later. My father worked on the Baberton Mains farm down by the golf course and he moved there during the war. Then eventually he got a job as a gardener at Baberton House. Prior to his death he lived in the lodge. It's knocked down now."

The Cullens sell the House and Estate in 1979 to Cruden Investments for £93,000. (£821K) Cruden remain in ownership to this day with Baberton House being used as their headquarters.