

“Fleeting Lives”: the diary of William Allison of Malletsheugh, Mearns and Thorn, Bearsden, and other farm diaries

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Introduction

Farm diaries may be defined as a personal record of daily events, observations and related text compiled by someone living and / or working on a farm. The purpose of such diaries might be: to record what use fields are put to year by year; what the weather was; the progress of crops under differing conditions; work carried out; income; expenditure; other related matters – and so to plan for the future. On small family farms, the overlap of the work of the farm and

the life of the family can be reflected in the farm diary, and material included that is irrelevant to the work of the farm. This review focuses on nineteenth and early twentieth century diaries produced in west central Scotland, by William Allison of Northfield, Malletsheugh, Mearns and Thorn, Bearsden, Peter Turner of Oxcang, Kirkintilloch, and the Donald family of Sornbeg, Galston. Some extracts from the ‘Journal’ of James Wilson, Banffshire (Hillis 2008), are



Figure 1: Ploughing at Thorn Farm, East Dunbartonshire Libraries.

included, for purposes of comparison.

Peter Turner (1870-1959), of Oxfang Farm, Kirkintilloch, Dunbartonshire, was a grandson of William Allison (1787-1866), and a selection of his diaries (1890-1893, 1895-1899, 1899-1902, and 1902-1908) are in the keeping of East Dunbartonshire Archives (Turner 1897).¹ Turner's diary reads like a series of notes. His daily entries

start with a weather report and continue with a short series of phrases which describe what happened that day, but with no explanation of events. As well as describing what happened in the various fields of the farm, Turner makes reference to business and social matters and often mentions his farming relatives, the Allisons. A comparison of Turner's diary for the week ending 16 November

Turner	Wilson
<p>Teu [Sic] 10th Cold Showery. Dunging stubble Buchanan here with 2 horses.</p>	<p>16th I went to Portsoy on Tuesday last with two loads of corn, and brought home coals etc. The corn weighed 43lbs and I got 23/6. Corn and barley are rising in price almost everyday. I would get 25/ for that same corn now. I am rather afraid however that the prices will not be long maintained. 54 lbs barley is giving 30/.</p>
<p>Wed 11th Stormy & wet. Cleaned 6 bags corn. 10½ cwt cabbage to M Craig. cart to house. Will. Allison here for troughs, 2 bunches straw to Fleming.</p>	<p>Wednesday was Hallow Fair. It was a very bad day. Wind and rain the whole day. I see by the papers that a great deal of damage has been done especially to shipping. It was not a large market but fees were a little up. I would have kept the boy we have, but he was asking too much wages. I engaged a boy, George Gray, for £6.10. Mr. & Mrs. Ross, Hillfolds, came over in the morning, and he came down to the market, but we were home again by twelve o'clock.</p>
<p>Thur 12th Good day. 6 bags corn to Meiklehill. Put in stack & thrashed. T. Curran finishing pits. Commenced to shaw turnips.</p>	<p>Next day was Cornhill market. I had over a calving quey and 16 sheep. I had plenty of merchants but the prices were very small. Mr. Ross bought the quey for £14 and I sold 7 lambs and two ewes.</p>
<p>Fri 13th Very wet day. 2 carts turnips to M. Craig. At Birdston for J. Barr's gig. Sat 14th Dull day. 2 women at turnip 7 carts turnip to M. Craig & 6 to house. Weighed from 19 to 23 cwt. Sun 15th Good day. Eclipse of moon. Mon 16th Good day. Jean shawing. Brought down all that were shawed. Carting out gas lime. T. Curran here.</p>	<p>On Friday afternoon I went down to Glenglassaugh Distillery with a sample of the barley. The manager advised me to go to Portsoy as he thought I would get more for it there than he was giving. I sold it to Mr. Ewing for 27/ and weigh it up to 53 lbs. I got railway bags and had it down to Glassaugh Station today. There was 17 qrs. but there is about 4 or 5 qrs. small barley.</p>

Figure 2: Comparison of Peter Turner's diary and James Wilson's journal.

1891 with the journal of James Wilson (Hillis 2008), demonstrates a difference in approach.

Wilson employed a conversational tone, revealing something of his opinions, and the reasoning behind his actions. Turner's basic, note-like recording makes it difficult to get a sense of his personality, but the sparse details in his diaries can be amplified by recourse to other sources such as census returns, valuation rolls, trade directories, and local newspapers. For example, on 10 June 1897 Turner noted in his diary 'At Farmers trip Loch Lomond and long tour. 16 of us'. Context is found for this in the *Kirkintilloch Herald* for 16 June 1897 to the effect that committee members of the Kirkintilloch Farmers' Dance had a day's outing 'with their lady friends' that week ('Local News' 1897). It transpires that the Turner brothers helped to organise the annual Farmers' Dance.

Another example is a trip Peter Turner took, in June of 1901. On 6 June, Turner took a train from Central Station, in Glasgow, and headed south. He stayed for a couple of days with 'M. Strang', and visited Maidenhead and Beaconsfield. Then he spent a couple of days with the Flemings, and explored Windsor and Kingston. Next, he visited G. Sinclair, followed by Livingston, then Bowie, back to Sinclair's, and, on 17 June, after an 'enjoyable journey by train' Peter arrived back home, and provided no explanation for the trip. Around this time, there was a movement of farmers from the west of Scotland to the south and east of England, where they took leases on arable farms that were difficult to let, following a fall in the price of wheat (Lorrain Smith 1932). The incomers were dairy farmers and continued to work as dairy

farmers. Was Peter Turner considering joining this migration? While at Sinclair's he 'Drove round farm', and commented that the farm was 'Very needful of rain crops very stunted. Potatoes looking well enough 23/ per ac.' He thought that Livingston's place was 'looking very well Cheap farm 24/ per ac.' The 'M. Strang' that Turner stayed with first, may have been Matthew Strang, one of the Strangs of Easter Bedcow, a dairy farm near Kirkintilloch. The Turners socialised with the Strangs, in the 1890s, and Bill Turner attended M. Strang's wedding, in November of 1901. Fleming is also mentioned elsewhere in Peter Turner's diary, mainly as the Turners supplied a Fleming with straw, and a Fleming supplied Oxbang with dung. 'Livingston' is likely to have been James Livingston, who (according to the Census) was resident at Wester Balmuildy Farm, near Summerston, in 1881, when he was described as a nephew of the farmer. In the 1891 Census the twenty-five year old Livingston was described as a 'farm servant' at Wester Balmuildy. In 1895, the *Kirkintilloch Herald* reported on a dinner held at the Buchanan Street (railway) Station Hotel, on the occasion of James Livingston, Balmuildy, leaving the district, to take up the farm of Lawford Hill, near Rugby ('Local News' 1895). If, in June 1901, Peter Turner had been thinking of migrating to England, he had friends there to help him out. However, had Peter been giving serious consideration to joining the migration, he would have looked at more farms than a couple run by his friends. Turner may simply have gone on holiday, and, as a farmer, could not refrain from passing comment on the farms that he saw.

The lease of Oxcgang was held by Peter's father, James Turner. The diaries show that, over the period 1898-1900, Peter made trips to look at specific farms, in areas such as Killearn (16 July, 1898), Bridge of Weir (30 September, 1898). Denny (8 June, 1899), Glassford (25 August, 1899), Clarkston (29 August, 1899). This suggests that Peter was thinking of taking a lease on a farm of his own, and was looking for something suitable. However, he stopped looking before his trip to England. Peter's son, also Peter Turner, maintained that his father, Peter senior, had the running of Oxcgang Farm before his grandfather, James, died. Perhaps James made Peter a joint leaseholder with him, at Oxcgang, so that Peter, with the assurance of being sole leaseholder, after the death of his father, became more settled at Oxcgang. It appears that, by the time he visited England, Peter Turner had changed his mind about leaving Oxcgang. However, his younger brother, Bill had begun to think of a farm of his own, and Peter sometimes went with him to view prospective farms.

'Bill & I at Cardross. Wallacetown farm' (4 October, 1900)

'Bill & I at Linlithgow seeing Farm East Bonhard (2 April, 1901)

When Bill's attention was caught by Loanhead Farm, near Houston, Renfrewshire, Peter's diaries show the family support system in operation. On 5 July, 1901, James Turner accompanied Bill to see the estate factor concerning Loanhead Farm. Presumably Turner senior assisted Bill in the negotiations, following which Bill took a lease on

the farm. Naturally, other members of the family were interested in Bill's endeavours and, even before Bill took over Loanhead, his family visited. On the 22 July, 1901, Bill was accompanied to Loanhead by his father and 'Uncle John' (presumed to be John Allison of Rosebank), and on 23 October, the youngest Turner brother, James junior, and their mother (Mary Allison) were also at Loanhead. With a lease secured, Bill needed the equipment to run the farm. On 21 November, the outgoing tenant of Loanhead held a sale which Bill, Peter, and 'W. Allison'² attended. What, if anything, they bought is not noted. The next day (22 November 1901) the same three men were at a sale in Queenzieburn, near Kilsyth, where a self binder and a set of harrows were purchased. There is no mention of Bill buying any cows, although he might have bought the existing herd, at the Loanhead sale. Another requisite for the successful running of a small, family run dairy farm, at this time, was a capable woman able to manage the dairy. If the farmer was unmarried, he might have with him a sister, or his mother³. M. Strang, working in a part of England not traditionally a dairying area, returned to the Kirkintilloch area to marry. Peter Turner does not supply us with the identity of Strang's bride, so we don't know whether Strang was sweet on her before he went to England, or whether the principal attraction was that she was accustomed to the hard work of a small family run dairy. At the end of 1902 Peter notes Bill's wedding and mentions that five friends stayed overnight. Bill's bride was Jean Chapman, who hailed from Gartshore in the neighbourhood of Kirkintilloch.

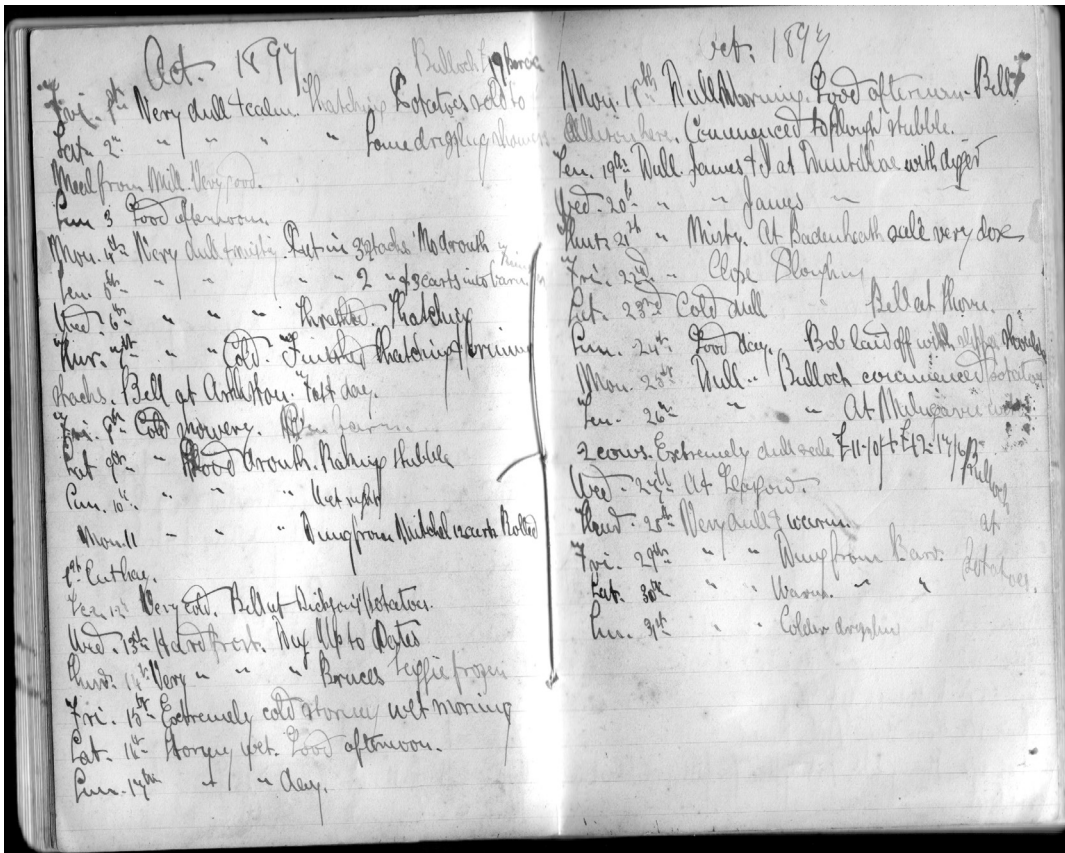


Figure. 3: Sample page of Peter Turner's Diary Turner of Oxgang Collection, East Dunbartonshire Libraries.

By 1904, it was the turn of James junior to look for a farm of his own, assisted by Bill and Peter, and James' friend, Watson. James cast his net as far east as Dunfermline and Edinburgh, but his attention was caught by the farm of Downan, Ballantrae, Ayrshire. Peter junior said that Peter senior had some concerns about this farm, and dissuaded James from taking the lease. James went to Belfast to speak to the owner (September 1906), and took a post as farm manager at Ballantrae. In his diary entry for 14 December 1906, Peter notes 'Farmers ball. Bill & Jas. here. Jas. got clock & roll top desk.' The *Kirkintilloch Herald* generally covered the

annual Farmer's Ball (or Dance), and the report on the 1901 Ball (16 December 1901) noted that William Turner, secretary of the ball since its inception, who had recently left the district for Renfrewshire was presented with a 'marble timepiece with side ornaments'. The report also notes the 'excellent singing of Miss Jeanie Jackson and Mr William Turner'. The report on the 1906 Ball mentions 'conspicuous in the management of these dances for a number of years back Mr. Jas. Turner, formerly of Oxgang, but now manager on Mr. Wright's farm of Downan, near Ballantrae'. James was commended on his organising ability

and, in recognition of his services, was presented with a black marble timepiece and a roll top writing desk.

In his diaries, Peter covered some health matters. Starting in 1901 Peter mentioned experiencing occasional episodes of dizziness, which sometimes led to him passing out. He does not mention any treatment or diagnosis but, after May 1908, no more episodes of dizziness are noted. On 11 May 1907, Peter indicated that there was a problem with one of his hands by writing 'Got hand operated on'. There is no mention of why the hand required to be operated on. The next mention of the hand was six months later, on 11 November, when Peter wrote 'Called in at Infir. to see Dr about hand'. Thereafter there are occasional references to Peter's troublesome

hand and its treatment. Presumably Peter senior wanted to keep track of the treatment by noting it in his diary, but he may have remembered vividly the incident that led to the treatment. In conversation, Peter junior supplied the missing information. Peter senior was building a stack. He was standing on the incomplete stack receiving sheaves forked up to him by a co-worker. He reached for one sheaf a bit too eagerly, and one of the tines of the pitchfork pierced his hand. The wound turned bad, and the doctors recommended amputation. Peter demurred, and suffered years with a festering hand until, in the 1920s, he gave way to medical advice, and the, by this time, useless hand was amputated. Peter junior maintained that his father's general health improved after this. Peter senior mentioned the health of his



Figure 4: Osgang Farmstead, constructed in the mid-nineteenth century, sat at the junction of Waterside Road and Old Aisle Road, Kirkintilloch. Turner of Osgang Collection, East Dunbartonshire Libraries.

own father with characteristic reticence. On Saturday 2 June 1907, he noted 'Father been in bed since Mon'; the following Thursday, 13 June, he reported 'Father no better'; and on Saturday 15 June 'Father died at 8.30p.m.' On Wednesday 19 June, Turner noted 'Cold stormy showers. Painting forenoon. Father's funeral.' It seems that his father had associated Peter with him in the lease, so enabling a smooth transition of the farm from father to son, and the work to continue uninterrupted. Peter Turner noted the time of his father's death, as though marking the passing of a monarch, but the diary contains no words of mourning, and no reflections on the life of James Turner.

A slightly earlier, and more emotionally expressive farm diary (1858-1866) was produced at the farm of Sornbeg, near Galston, Ayrshire (Donald nd). The fate of the original manuscript of this diary is unknown, but a photocopy is in the keeping of Ayrshire Archives. Although the diary has been catalogued as the work of Alexander Donald (1843-1905) and Alexander certainly made contributions, the diary is a work of group authorship, with contributions from various members of the family.⁴ Sometimes visitors to the farm were permitted to add their comments, using the diary as a sort of visitor's book. In November of 1863 one Will Brownlee added:

At Sornbeg my first real introduction to fairm life. Enjoyed it to the full. As long as I live I will remember Sornbeg and its inmates for their kindness and courtesy.

While some of the entries were signed (as Brownlee's was), or at least initialled, for many of

the entries authorship is unknown, so it is difficult to build up a picture of the individual characters. However, as the children left the farm to marry, to take a lease on a farm of their own, or to follow careers outside farming, Nicol Brown Donald (1829-1906), who followed his father as farmer of Sornbeg, became more prominent as an author. The Sornbeg diary contains information on the weather, farm activities, and social engagements, and includes what might have been a slightly more expansive account of a family wedding, but unfortunately some information has been lost through imperfect photocopying.

However, it is clear that, on 24 December 1858, Janet Donald married John Dick, the farmer of Doonholm Farm, Ayr. Nicol and his brother Thomas had taken a train to Ayr the previous May to look over Doonholm Farm, and John Dick may have leased the farm around that time. According to the diary, sixty people were at the wedding breakfast, the fare was excellent, and the subsequent dancing continued until an early hour. With the wedding over, the inhabitants of Sornbeg began to look forward to a visit from the young couple, but were frustrated by the weather. On 12 January 1859, Nicol wrote:

We are expecting Janet up this week or the end of next, weather permitting. they had a day's ploughing on Saturday last at Doonholm there was 19 ploughs and they got a splendid day they farmers all got a fine tea at night which was very kind of the young couple it is three weeks on Friday since they were married and they have entered into a great bustle at first but they are better able and willing to work and have been used to it all their days.

If this was the traditional day's ploughing to welcome a new farmer, it would indicate that John Dick was new to the area, and suggests that he followed the same schedule as Bill Turner – first find a bride, then find a farm, then marry. This is a plan that highlights the importance of women to the management of family-run dairy farms of the time. As appetites among ploughmen on such occasions were legendary, Janet Donald would have been hard worked to provide them with 'a fine tea', and still she was missed at Sornbeg. On 30 January 1859 Alexander Donald wrote:

The ground is lying white with snow & hail As this month is said to be one of the stormiest of our winter months along with its follower February. so it has proved itself to be for the last week. We intend to have a visit from M^r & M^{rs} Dick Doonholm about the end of the week, when the long-wished-for Fancy will be realized.

Hillis, in his preface to Wilson's journal, comments that 'Family letters, diaries and journals often contain detailed comments on religion with the Sunday sermon attracting particular criticism, discussion and debate' (Hillis 2008: vi). In the Oxbang diary, Turner makes no mention of Sunday sermons. The only indication of religion is his noting of fast days in preparation for taking the Sacrament, which suggests that Turner was a regular attendee of the Church of Scotland and took the Sacrament. He also mentions participation in the charitable work of transporting coal for the needy, in association with a local church. In the Donald diary, there was interest expressed in the quality of sermons preached in the local church. However, the family's Christian principles were

sometimes strained by their pride in their prize-winning bull, Lincoln, who in agricultural shows did not always score as highly as the family thought that he should:

17 April, 1863

The annual exhibition of dairy stock in connection with the Kilmarnock farmer's club came off today ... we were successful with the best 3 quey stirks and second with the aged bull, it was but right to yield quietly to the judgement of men whose superior skill and experience in cattle had them pronounce their verdict but it is also in accordance with the strictest rules of morality, and the tastes prejudices of mankind to think as highly of their own as they ought to do, but waiving all prejudice and preconceived opinions despite the cold water spurted from the envy of meanspirited & degeneia[?] neighbours. we do not think that the county can produce as good a three year old bull as is at present in the possession of William Donald of Sornbeg

The Donald diary is a family undertaking, and the family members contributed as often or as little as they liked. They read each other's contributions and occasionally made comments on these. Sometimes one family member wrote things that seem designed to be read by one or all of the others. They could poke fun with impertinent comments:

17 February, 1861

Today is still thaw but I doubt we are to have frost by the end of the year, & it will stop the plough. We have had the plough stopped for the last week.

The subscriber wishes to know how many years there are in the above writers 12 months he also

wishes to know who held the plough when it was stoped a whole week.

The diary provided the siblings with an opportunity to tease each other. On 4 February, 1860, after a social engagement, one of the Donalds wrote, rather coyly:

A large party at Burnann last night. " " brought home Margaret Tom took home " " Alex did not take home " " .

Just as Turner mentioned the activities of various Turners and Allisons in his diary, the comings and goings of Donald family members were noted in their diary, but in more detail. In May 1863 Alexander, a teacher, moved to Muirkirk and Nicol wrote:

28 May 1863. Went to Muirkirk with my brother Alex, yesterday to open a school. and today I feel sad and solitary for I miss his presence among us one feels sorry to part with those who are dear to them even although they are not far away.

From time to time their mother, Janet McWhirter, had occasion to be away from the farm. Sometimes she stayed with one or other of her married daughters, particularly if they were ill or pregnant. Janet McWhirter was missed from Sornbeg and during one of her absences Nicol wrote:

16 Jun 1862 Mother away to stay with Agness again today hope she will not need to stay long as we weary for her at home I am glad that our Affection for her is growing with our years the solemn thought is that she must leave us some time but the joyful thought also is that we all hope to meet again where there is no more seperation. & to rejoice together. Amen. NBD

Clearly Nicol had no difficulty in expressing his feelings, and his love for his family, in the pages of the diary. Another means of expressing emotion is through poetry, and it was not long before the Donalds began to include poetry. Upon its commencement, on 1 April 1858, the Donald diary opened with a weather report before moving on to the progress of the crops and fertility of the animals, but by June 1858 Alexander had added a poem, 'The Trysting Tree':

Deep in the forest was a little dell
High overarched with a leafy sweep
Of a broad oak, through whose gnarled roots
there fell
A slender rill that sang itself a-sleep
Where its continuous toil had scooped a well
To please the fairy folks breathlessly deep
The stillness was save when the dreaming brook
From its small urn a drizzly murmur shook

No author is given for this poem, so it may be Alexander's own, as quotes from Scott's 'Lady of the Lake', an 'Address to Winter' by Cowper, and a translation, by Hood, of 'Tracherous Girl', by Horace, all have their appellation. There are extensive quotes from Tennyson, but perhaps not everyone in the household approved of the Poet Laureate, as someone has included a defence of Tennyson in the diary.

In Tennyson we see the beauty of his ideas by his easiness of expressing, he does not worry you by repetitions in endeavouring to enlarge upon the beauty of any thing he may have brought before you but you have the fullness and the grandeur brought out in one short pithy sentence, he is in no way guilty of Redundancy nor does he leave anything half painted, as when

he says Elaine the Fair the Loveable Elaine the Lily Maid of Astolat, he is a true Poet and sings because he can, and the grand Moral thread of silver that glitters through the whole is virtue and true goodness, bravery and nobleness a mind despising things mean, and endeared and enchanted by things only great and good.

While it might be unusual for farmers to include poetry (either their own or another's) within the body of a diary, verses are sometimes found among their papers. Joseph Thomson, ploughman and later farmer at Springs, Tarbolton, who was exempted from serving in the First World War because it was 'expedient in national interest' that he 'be retained in work habitually engaged in' (Ayr County 1916), wrote a poem 'The Farmers' Lament' (Thomson nd), detailing the trials and tribulations faced by farmers, during the Great War of 1914-18. Hillis included some of James Wilson's verses in the published edition of his journal, including the following, entitled 'Life Aims':

I live for those who love me,
For those who know me true,
For the Heaven that shines above me,
And waits my spirit too.
For the cause that lacks assistance
For the wrongs that need resistance
For the future in the distance
And the good that I can do (Hillis 2008: 351).

This short verse is reminiscent of a poem by Alexander Lamb (1925-2015) who farmed at Crookboat, about five miles south of Lanark, at the confluence of the Clyde, and the Douglas Water. While 'Life Aims' looks forward, with high ideals, and hopes to do well, Lamb's verses

look back with hope that the author has not been found wanting:

I'd like to think, now life is done,
That sometimes, on the road, I've won.
That I have filled a needed post,
With more than idle talk, or boast.
That I did take those gifts divine,
The breath of life and manhood fine,
And used them every way I can,
To help and serve my fellow man (Lamb nd).

In February 1864 a six stanza poem entitled 'The First Snowdrop' was included in the Donald diary. Snowdrops were regularly mentioned in the diary, with references such as 'There is a fine show of snowdrops at present' (2 March, 1860) and 'Snowdrops in flower a very mild winter a little frost but not severe' (6 January, 1862). Traditionally snowdrops are welcomed as harbingers of Spring. However, the Donalds were not always pleased to see them:

11 January 1866

The Snowdrop in bloom today, 6 days earlier than last year, we don't like to see them so early, it is a Sign of too much growth at this season of the year, we would rather see the ground white, or hard with frost.

Despite the serious mention of the effects of the weather upon crops, the impression of the Donald diary is that it is a jollier composition than the Turner diaries. This is not due simply to the youth of the authors, although that is a likely factor. Nicol Brown Donald was about twenty-nine when the Donald diary was begun, and Alexander was about fifteen. Peter Turner was twenty in 1890, but his diaries seem pedestrian

by comparison. The Donald diary seems to derive its warm tone from the group dynamic, with the exchanges between family members imparting a sense of fun. While Nicol's acknowledgement that he was missing his brother and his fear that his mother would eventually die, although sad, speak to a background of familial love. However, Turner's diaries were work diaries primarily. He mentions the different fields by name and details their cultivation, so analysis of the diaries is informative about farming of that period. The livelier Donald diary, while containing a lot of work related information paints a clearer picture of family life.

William Allison

William Allison began his diary in 1817, when he was a young man of about thirty, and stopped only a few months before his death, aged 79. The last eight years of his diary overlap with the writing of the Donald diary. Like the Donald diary, the whereabouts of the original diary of William Allison (1787-1866) is unknown. However, a handwritten copy was made by Allison's grandson, Peter Turner. This copy contains abbreviations, which may or may not have been in the original, but Turner uses the same abbreviations in his own diaries of Oxgang Farm. While the entries in the diaries of Oxgang Farm, are brief, those of William Allison are even more so. Turner devoted a few lines to each day, his grandfather devoted a few lines to each year. In common with the Turner, Wilson, and Donald diaries, Allison provides information on farming matters such as the progress of the crops, the prices of the produce,

and the weather. The following quote, from the Donald diary for 17 January 1861, contains all these elements and, at sixty-four words, is almost half as many words as William Allison used for the whole of 1861 (138 words):

Still frosty today our Colt Dainty went away to beith fair. Marion Bone was buried today in Muchline churchyard. A large Funeral Grain is rather slow of sale this week. the top rather down both in Corn. and. wheat. sold a Calved Cow at 10 Guineas. Potatotes are still high in price. I bought a plough for 4/6 last Monday very cheap.

John Donald

Allison also includes some family information. Unlike Peter Turner, when recording a death he provides a short reflection, through which he manages to convey feelings of love and loss. One gets a sense that he was protective of his brother, Arthur, and it is perhaps significant that the only death he recorded but did not share a reflection upon, was that of his step-mother. When, in 1829, William Allison tells us that his mother died, and eleven days later he fell off a hay rick and broke his collar bone, it is hard not to imagine that grief played a part in the accident. Allison lost two children as infants. For a parent of the nineteenth century this was not an unusual experience, and we may wonder how they bore it. One option was to try to maintain emotional detachment until the children had survived the dangers of babyhood. George, his father tells us, was one year and eight days old, while John was one year ten months and five days old at time of death. The recording of the exact ages of the children suggests affection, and,

with the reflections on these deaths that Allison notes ('He was lovely in life' and 'God plants his flowers when he thinks time and plucks at any age') his grief calls out to us from the pages of the diary. Friction within the family is apparent in the argument William Allison had with his son in 1848 (see below). One can almost hear doors slamming in the farmhouse as James slighted his father's farming methods. However this dispute was put into perspective for William the following year, when he nearly lost James as the result of an accident. It appears that Allison was supported through bereavement by his religious faith. We don't know if he discussed sermons, in the same way as the Donalds, but Allison became a church elder at Mearnskirk in 1830 and attended twenty kirk session meetings during the period 1834-5 (see Mearns 1834 - 1908).

The Farms

When he started writing his diary, William Allison identified the farm he was working on as 'Northfield', which his grandson Peter Turner locates in Malletsheugh, Mearns, Renfrewshire. There was a Northfield in the vicinity of Malletsheugh, which is indicated at a southern edge of Thomas Richardson's 1795 'Map of the town of Glasgow and country seven miles around'. Allison had family in this area. Westfield, where William's father, and afterwards his brother (both James Allison) farmed, is not shown on Richardson's map, but it was marked on mid nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps. Northfield is not marked on the Ordnance Survey maps, but seems to have been just to the

North of Westfield. Possibly William Allison grew up at Westfield but as a young adult moved out to take up a lease, on a farm of his own. His brother John, who is also presumed to have grown up at Westfield, took a lease on the nearby farm of Kirkhouse.

Newspaper reports of the Mearns Cattle Show, in the mid nineteenth century indicate that the type of farming pursued in Mearns at the time was dairying, and in 1848 Mrs Allison, of Westfield, Malletsheugh, came second in the competition for the best sample of fresh butter ('Mearns Cattle Show' 1848). In his diary, William Allison barely mentions livestock but makes constant mention of the crops. Similarly, in his later diary, Peter Turner detailed work with the crops on Oxgang Farm but made little mention of the 20-24 cow dairy herd there, which would have been under the daily management of his mother. In the second half of the nineteenth century, some form of dairying was usual on small family farms across west central Scotland (McGuire 2012). The land was managed through crop rotation and the livestock fed by crops grown on the farms, and bought in feed. Newspaper advertisements from 1850 and 1851 describe Northfield as a dairy farm (see *Glasgow Herald* 1850 - 51).

William Allison does not say why he left Northfield and his connections in Mearns Parish to live in Glasgow. The date he gives (15 May) for the removal, was a term day on which leases began and ended. So William's lease may have ended and not been renewed. The interlude in Glasgow is suggestive of an enforced departure from Mearns. The year 1835 appears as a kind of hiatus

in the diary, in that there is no mention of crops. At this time, the Allison diary was a farm diary without associated farm. The move to Glasgow is mentioned, but not what Allison did there. Allison records the birth of his daughter, Mary, but, apart from this, with no mention of planting, or sowing, or harvesting, the rhythms of life appear to have been in abeyance until the move to Thorn Farm in 1836. Thorn Farm, New Kilpatrick, was also in a dairying area. Like Northfield, Thorn is depicted on Richardson's map, but in the northern part. Although Thorn has disappeared under housing, the farm is commemorated in the Bearsden street names, Thorn Road and Thorn Drive.

The Diary

In the following abridgement of the diary the word-count has been reduced from 4207 to 2228. The commonplace abbreviations have been expanded, substituting 'potatoes' for 'pots', and 'and' for '&'. Punctuation has been added, and a few words, with the intention of improving readability. Not all the diary entries begin with the words 'The year', but where these were absent they have been added, to clarify the structure. Certain parts, sometimes whole years, have been deleted, to focus on the juxtaposition of the births, marriages, and deaths, within the family, with the seasonal renewal, of the earth:

The year 1820 April 10 we began to sow Price of meal 1/5 pot. 1/1 On April 5th the Radicals intended to overturn the Government & consequently raised a great tumult but were disappointed by the treachery of their leaders so little blood was shed at that time.

The year 1821 April 25 we had all the oats sown, and on the 28th we began to plant potatoes and on the 3rd May my brother John departed this life, age 31 years. His lease on the farm of Kirkhouse being nearly expired, his widow and two little daughters removed to Newton on the 15th.⁵ Fleeting and uncertain is human life and all its cares. Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower and is cut down. He flieth also as a shadow and continueth not.⁶ On June 9th we sowed the turnips, and the potatoes began to break through. On June 30th we had most of the Ryegrass cut. On July 10th Ann Bennie⁷ and I were joined in marriage by the Rev. John McFarlan, Minister of the gospel in Glasgow. On August 12th we began to cut the meadow, and on the 28 we stacked the hay. On September 1st we began to shear, and by the end of September we had all shorn. On October 13 we had all in, and we began to dig the potatoes on the 18th On November 6 all the potatoes were pitted.

The year 1822 June 1st the potatoes began to break through, and on June 23, about 6 pm., James Allison was born and, about this time, the oats began to ear. On the 17th July we began to cut the Meadow, and on August 26 we began to reap oats. On the 11th September we had all shorn and, on 22nd we had all in. On October 17 the potatoes were all pitted. A good crop.

The year 1823 July 10, we began to cut hay, and the oats began to ear. On the 18th we began to cut the meadow. On August 9th we stacked the hay, and on September 16, we began to reap oats. On October 20, the oats were all in. On November 13, George Allison was born.

The year 1824 July 2 oats began to ear, and we began to cut hay. On August 10th we began to cut oats, and on September 28 we had all in. On October 27 the potatoes were all pitted, a good crop. On November 21, George Allison departed this life aged 1 year and 8 days. God plants his flowers when he thinks time and plucks at any age.⁸

The year 1825 at the end of June we began to cut hay, and on August 6 we stacked the hay. On August 12th we began to cut barley, and on the 24 we began to cut oats. On September 3rd had all shorn, and on the 13 we had all in. On October 11th Ann Allison was born.

The year 1828 January 2d George Allison was born. June 29 the oats began to ear and we began to cut the hay. On September 9 we began to shear, and had all in on October 17.

The year 1829 June 29, the oats began to ear, and on July 3 we began to cut hay. On August 15 we stacked the hay, and, on September 7, we began to shear. On September 9, my father and mother removed from Westfield Mearns to Newton. On 17 we had all shorn, and on October 16 we had the potatoes pitted. On the 10th December, my mother departed this life, at the age of 67 years. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.⁹ On the 21st I got my collar bone broken, by falling off a hay rick.

The year 1830. Jan 28 John Knox & I were ordained elders of the Presbyterian church by Dr. McLatchie at Mearns Kirk & on 12 March, William Allison was born. On July 9 the oats began to ear, and, on July 28, we began to cut the meadow price 1/8 and on 17 August, we stacked the hay, and on 6th September we began

to reap here. On 5th October we had done shearing, and, on the 19th had all in. On the 22 we had the potatoes pitted but a very small crop.

The year 1832 May 15 We had potatoes planted, and on July 2d we began to cut hay, and, on the 9th, the oats began to ear. On the 1st September we began to reap oats and, on October 1st we had all in. About the end of October, my father was married to Mrs Allison, widow of the deceased James Allison at Waterside. He was aged 71 years, and she was something younger. On November 4th John Allison was born.

The year 1833 July 1st We began to cut hay and on August 6 we stacked the hay the weather very good and upon August 13th Dr. McLatchie Minister of the Gospel at Mearns Kirk departed this life, aged 80 years, having been a Minister there for 47 years. Life like a vain amusement flies as a shadow of a dream. The rich the poor the weak and wise glide softly down the stream.¹⁰ About August 20 we began to shear and on September 10th we had all in and on 22, and 23 we pitted most of the potatoes. The crop was in general deficient. On September 11 my son, John Allison, departed this life aged 1 year 10 months and 5 days. He was lovely in life and at this early period was made meet for the inheritance of the saints in Light. So children are a heritage of the Lord.

The year 1835 May 15th. We removed from Northfield to Glasgow and on October 4 Mary Allison was born.

The year 1836, We removed from Glasgow to Thorn, East Kilpatrick.¹¹ We began to cut oats on September 30 and had done on the 24 October, and on the 28th there was a

considerable fall of snow, and on 7 November we got all in.

The year 1838 Jan 8 The frost set in and continued till March 15th before the plough could go freely. On the 28 March we began to sow, and, on April 2nd had done. On September 20 we began to cut oats, and, on October 5th we began to cut wheat. On the 15th we finished cutting. On December 3d John Allison was born.

The year 1845 In the month of May, my stepmother departed this life, and my father, James Allison, being again a widower, removed from Newton to Westfield. This was a good summer but there was a great loss in the potato crop from disease.

The year 1847 December 7 James Allison, my father, departed this life aged 86 years.¹² The days of our years are three score and ten, or if by reason of more strength, they be fourscore, yet their strength is labour and sorrow for it is soon cut off and we fly away.¹³

The year 1848 My son James for some unreasonable fretfulness left us and engaged with Mr. Robertson, Hillington to learn (as he said) a better system of farming. He continued there for the summer, and, at Martinmas, took a small shop in Williamsburgh,¹⁴ continuing to work occasionally with Mr. Robertson.

The year 1849 Jan. 23 my son, James, married Isabella Scott, daughter to William Scott, East Kilpatrick. In the month of April he met with an accident, from falling off a cart, which was nearly fatal. His head was severely bruised but, luckily, with good management, he

recovered sooner than expected. On August 23rd my brother Arthur departed this life, aged 53 years. He was naturally active, ingenious, and energetic, striving to see everything in its true light and divested of superstition and delusion, but mankind in general are fond of the marvellous, and will not be satisfied with pure simplicity. On 23 November, my son, James, removed from Williamsburgh to Newkirk,¹⁵ William Scott his father in law having given it up and removed to Coltness.

The year 1850 My daughter, Ann, was married to Mr Thomas Dunlop, provision merchant Glasgow, on February 20th. We had the bad disease among the cattle, by which we lost 4 cows and two stirks.¹⁶ It returned again, in the month of April, when we lost 4. The summer was good with an excellent commencement to the harvest, but the end was wet and stormy. On December 5th, our neighbour, Mrs. Logan, departed this life, aged 62 years. She had long been afflicted with a cancer in the eye, which she bore with Christian patience. On the 8 December my daughter (Ann Dunlop) had a daughter, and on the 21d my son, James, had a daughter. The winter was very wet and on the 5 April, we began to sow. The spring was cold and backward, the summer was changeable but genial. On the 12 September we began to shear. On the 1st of October we had done shearing, and on the 15th, we had all in, beans excepted. A good crop, in tolerable condition.

The year 1852 On 7 May my brother-in-law, John Russell,¹⁷ departed this life, aged 53 years. He was a man of persevering diligence, good judgement, and sound principle. On his death bed, he manifested the resignation, faith, and



Figure 5: Thorn Farm Steading, Bearsden, East Dunbartonshire Libraries.

hope of a Christian. The summer was very fine in the months of July and August, despite much thunder and heavy rain, which did considerable damage to the turnips. On 24 August, we began cutting oats, and on September 4, we had done cutting. On September 11 we had all the oats in, and, on the 15th, all the beans in.

The year 1859 April 7 we began to sow oats, and on 28 we began to plant potatoes. On the 30 we finished sowing oats, and had a little rain. From this, till June 22, was very dry. Then there was a considerable rain, which made the turnips braird. On August 13, Mrs Davidson,¹⁸ my oldest sister, departed this life, aged 74. She was disabled with the palsy, and was long confined, under which she bore up with Christian patience. Our life passeth like a shadow or a dream. On August 22 we began to cut wheat, and on the 25, we began to cut oats.

On September 5 we had all cut, and on the 16 had all in, crop deficient with the long drouth.

The year 1863 On December 19, my wife, Ann Bennie, departed this life aged 66 years, after a short and severe illness of a sore throat, which she bore with Christian patience and meekness. She was careful, cleanly, active and faithful, but if we have some virtues, we have all many vices, and it is in the mercy of God alone that we have hope, for with him is forgiveness and plenteous redemption, and he will redeem his penitent children from all their iniquities.¹⁹

The year 1866 On April 6 we began to sow oats, and on the 14 had mostly sown. On May 3 we had the potatoes planted and on 6th July my son, George, was married to Jean Donald, daughter to William Donald,²⁰ Baljaffrey.

What Happened Next

William Allison died at Thorn on 2 October 1866. The Inventory of his estate included 'value of one third share of crop, stock, household furniture and effects at Thorn' ('Allison Inventory' 1866). The other two thirds would have been claimed by his sons, George and William, since they are both described in the documentation as 'farmer Thorn', while their younger brother, John is described as 'also residing with me'. Possibly William Allison had associated two of his sons in the lease with him, as James Turner was later to associate Peter Turner with him, in the lease of Oxcang Farm. At the time of his death William Allison had £57 sixteen shillings in a current account with the Union Bank of Scotland, Maryhill, and £1,494 in deposit with the Union Bank of Scotland, Glasgow.²¹ William had inherited (from his father) a parcel of land in Broomlands of Paisley with the house on it, and a dwelling house or tenement in Newton Mearns, with land at the back to the extent of eight falls. These properties were still in William's possession at the time of his own death, providing an income separate from farming. There were four tenants listed at the property at 11 Broomland, Paisley, and five at the property in Newton Mearns. William Allison's Inventory also mentions a shop and cellar at 43 Frederick Street, Glasgow, which was rented by Thomas Dunlop, William's son-in-law. The valuation of the estate was £1,902 twelve shillings and three pence,²² which includes the rent owing on the various properties, but not the value of the properties themselves.

William Allison drew up his Will in 1846, nominating as executors his sons James, George and William, his wife, and his brothers Arthur and James ('Allison Will' 1846). By the time the Will came into effect, Ann Bennie and Arthur Allison were dead, George and William were farming at Thorn, while their brother James was the farmer of Brickhouse, Old Kilpatrick, and their uncle James was living in retirement in Glasgow. In the event of Ann Bennie surviving her husband, the executors were to:

Secure such a sum on good heritable security or in the purchase of heritable property as will yield her a free yearly annuity of Thirty pounds per annum during all the years of her life [...] Declaring that on the death of my said spouse the sum or property secured for payment of said annuity shall go to and be divided among my children the survivors of them, or the children of the predeceasers in the same way, and under the like conditions as are herein after specified with regard to the remainder of my means and Estate [...] In the third place I direct my said Trustees and Executors [...] to realize the remainder or residue of my said means heritable and moveable [...] and to divide the same into sixteen equal shares and to pay or hand over Three parts or shares thereof to my said son James Allison, Three parts or shares thereof to my said son George Allison, Three parts or shares of to my said son William Allison and Three parts of shares thereof to my son John Allison also residing with me and two parts or shares to my daughter Ann Allison residing with me, and the remaining two parts or shares to my daughter Mary Allison also residing with me.

Thus the daughters were each to receive two thirds of the amount left to each son. The 1851 Census listed William's son, James Allison, at Newkirk but, by the time of the 1861 Census James was farming the ninety-acre farm of Brickhouse. In 1871 Brickhouse was described as 112 acres, and in 1881 the farm was described as 112 acres all arable. James was still the farmer of Brickhouse at the time of his death in 1895, when his estate was valued at £6,720 five shillings and three pence.²³

James' younger brother, George, was farming at Thorn with their father at the time of William Allison's death. As mentioned in his father's diary, George married Jean Donald, daughter of William Donald of Baljaffray. George remained the farmer of Thorn, until his own death in 1927. His Inventory ('G. Allison Inventory' 1927) is much shorter than that of his elder brother, consisting of the household furniture, the stock and implements belonging to the farm of Thorn, and a debt due from Gilbert Thomson, dairyman, Canniesburn Toll. The total estate was valued at £1,024 five shillings and sixpence.

George's younger brothers, William and John, were also at Thorn at the time of their father's death but, by the time of the 1871 Census they were both farming at the ninety-five acre arable farm of Rosebank, Kirkintilloch. In 1871, William was married to Helen Donald, who may have been another of the daughters of William Donald of North Baljaffray. John never married but continued to farm alongside his brother.

In his diary, under 1850, William Allison noted the marriage of his elder daughter, Ann to Thomas Dunlop, a Glasgow provision merchant,

and from his Will it seems that Dunlop rented shop space in Glasgow from his father-in-law. In 1851 the young couple could be found at 28 William Street, Glasgow, which ran between Elderslie Street and North Street, with their infant daughter, and Thomas' twenty-two year old brother, James Dunlop. As stated above, Thomas Dunlop was a 'provision merchant' at the time of his marriage. According to the Post Office Directory for Glasgow, in 1886 Thomas Dunlop was a grain and seed merchant who had business premises at 39 Carron Wharf, Port Dundas. Dunlop appears to have been a successful businessman. When he died, in 1893 his estate was valued at £15,692 twelve shillings and sixpence. After the death of her husband, Ann Allison lived with her son, Thomas Dunlop junior, and died in 1910.

At the time of her father's death William Allison's younger daughter, Mary Allison, was living at Thorn. Later she went to Rosebank, Kirkintilloch with her brothers, William and John, and was resident there at the time of her marriage (November 1868) to James Turner. At the time of the wedding, James Turner was working as a drapery warehouseman in Glasgow, but at the time of the 1861 Census, James Turner was a live-in ploughman at Balvie Farm about three miles distant from Thorn. Mary and James may have met around this time, but would William Allison have been pleased at a marriage between his daughter and a ploughman? The wedding took place after a suitable period of mourning, for the bride's father, at the home of the bride's sister, Ann Allison or Dunlop, so it appears that Mary's family accepted her choice ('Allison Marriage Certificate' 1868).



Figure 6: On the fringe of East Kilpatrick kirkyard, in Bearsden, amidst buttercup and bramble, and mantled with moss, stands the memorial to William Allison and his wife, Ann Bennie.

After the wedding, and with financial support from Thomas Dunlop, James Turner took a lease of Oxgang, Kirkintilloch, a neighbouring farm to Rosebank. Eventually Oxgang was taken over by James and Mary's son, Peter Turner. In Peter's diary there are very many references to his Allison relatives, but very few to his Turner kin. However, by the time the diaries were written, James Turner, and his brother, Peter, inhabited different social strata. James was an employer, who sat on

the Parochial Board of Kirkintilloch²⁴, while Peter took in lodgers, and his daughters worked in factories. The Allison connection was an advantageous one for James Turner, and not just for the backing of Thomas Dunlop's capital. Most of the Allisons were involved in farming and represented a pool of local agricultural knowledge and experience, which could be shared among the group. Whether James Turner deliberately dissociated himself from his brother, or whether there was

a gradually drifting apart as a result of their different life experience, or whether there was some quarrel, is not known. James's son, Peter, bought Oxgang in 1920 and, according to Peter junior, it was Peter senior's wish to hand the farm to one of his sons, but none of them wanted it. The farm was sold around 1934-35 to the Department of Agriculture and divided up into smallholdings. Peter Turner retained one of these, built a house and continued to work the land. With the smallholding experiment a failure, the Department of Agriculture sold the land to Wimpey Homes for considerably more than they had paid for it only a few years earlier. Oxgang Farm was built over and the farm steading demolished. A church has been built on the site of the steading, but a few courses of stones of the farmhouse remain, at the junction of Waterside Road and Old Aisle Road.

Conclusion

'Fleeting and uncertain is human life and all its cares' quoted William Allison, in 1821. Such is the brevity of William's diary that the people mentioned therein, along with Allison himself, seem to rush by, leaving the merest glimpse of their all but forgotten lives behind. All but, but not entirely, forgotten. Through diaries like that of William Allison, Peter Turner, and the Donald family, we are reminded of a way of life that, though hard, was vibrant. We are reminded of people who provided food for the nation, and enjoyed interests such as dancing, poetry, and current affairs. Although William Allison's diary is concise, to the point of terseness, it shares principal concerns of weather, crops, religion, and fam-

ily, with the Turner and Donald diaries, and also hints at the emotional life of the author. There are no poems included in William Allison's diary, either of Allison's own composition, or the work of a recognised poet. Yet William Allison's diary is itself a poem.

References

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Endnotes

- 1 The Turner Diary Database is held on CD Rom located in front inside pocket of M.Phil. dissertation folder, McGuire, D.E. (2004), *Farming in Kirkintilloch district in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* LC630 East Dunbartonshire Libraries Local Studies, Kirkintilloch.
- 2 William Allison of Rosebank, or his son, William, who was the same age as Bill Turner, or William Allison of South Arkleston, or William Allison of Thorn?
- 3 When Robert Park, the farmer of High and Laigh Hatton farms, in Renfrewshire, died in 1870, at the age of 53, his only surviving son, Walter Scott Park, was still a child. Robert's widow, Ann Scott, took over the farms, but employed a farm manager who, under her direction could deal with the traditionally male roles on the farms. Once Walter Park was grown, a farm manager was no longer employed, but his mother continued at the farms, presumably still managing the dairy. In 1885, Walter married, and his mother bought a house in Bishopton, where she spent her remaining years. Ann Scott or Park may have taken the marriage of her son as a signal to retire, and make way for a new mistress of the farm.
- 4 Father, William Donald (1791-1871); mother, Janet McWhirter (1801-1866); other children, Agnes (1825-1882), Janet (1833- ?), Thomas (1834-1904), William (1835-1872), Martha (1837-1906), Mary (1839-1907), Margaret (1844-1907), John (1844-1894).
- 5 John's widow was Jean Russell and, in September of 1821, she gave birth to a son, John Allison (OPR Mearns Parish). In his Will, which was drawn up in 1827 (National Records of Scotland SC55/43/17) William's father, James Allison, remembered the children of his deceased son John Allison, who were identified as John and Mary Allison. There was no mention of the elder daughter, Janet. It is presumed that she was dead by the time her grandfather's Will was drawn up.
- 6 Job, 14.
- 7 Born in Carmunock, 1797.
- 8 'God plants...'The Catechisme, 1552, St. Andrews, page 2.
- 9 Rev.14:13.
- 10 Psalm 90.
- 11 According to Census returns, Thorn Farm consisted of 80 acres in 1851, and 113 acres in 1861.
- 12 James Allison died twenty years after making his Will, and did not leave enough funds to pay any of the legacies therein described. William, as eldest son, may have felt a moral obligation to fulfil his father's Will by paying these sums from his own resources. An entry in the Register of Sasines (National Records of Scotland, Register of Sasines no. 2221), 1849, records that William Allison, Farmer, Thorn was seised with the property left to him in his father's Will, but under burden of a proportion of the sums settled on his sisters, and niece and nephew by his father.
- 13 'The days...' Psalm 90.
- 14 Williamsburgh: a locality of Paisley.
- 15 James was listed as farmer at the sixty acre farm of Newkirk in the 1851 Census.
- 16 Stirk: a young bullock.
- 17 William's sister, Margaret Allison, was married to John Russell, who was a grocer in Paisley in 1849 (Register of Sasines no. 2221).
- 18 William's sister, Mary Allison, was married to Matthew Davidson, a Paisley carter (Register of Sasines no. 2221).
- 19 Psalm 130.
- 20 The 1851 Census describes William Donald as a grazier, with sixty acres in North Baljaffrey, Bearsden, East Dunbartonshire.
- 21 £57.16.0 would, in 1870, have had the approximate buying power of £3,618.80, in 2017. £1,494, in 1870, would have had the approximate buying power of £93,537.85, in 2017, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currencyconverter.
- 22 £119,120.67 of buying power, in 2017, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currencyconverter
- 23 £6,720.5.3, in 1890 gives a buying power of approximately £551,392.83 in 2017, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currencyconverter.
- 24 See *Glasgow Herald*, 28 July 1891.