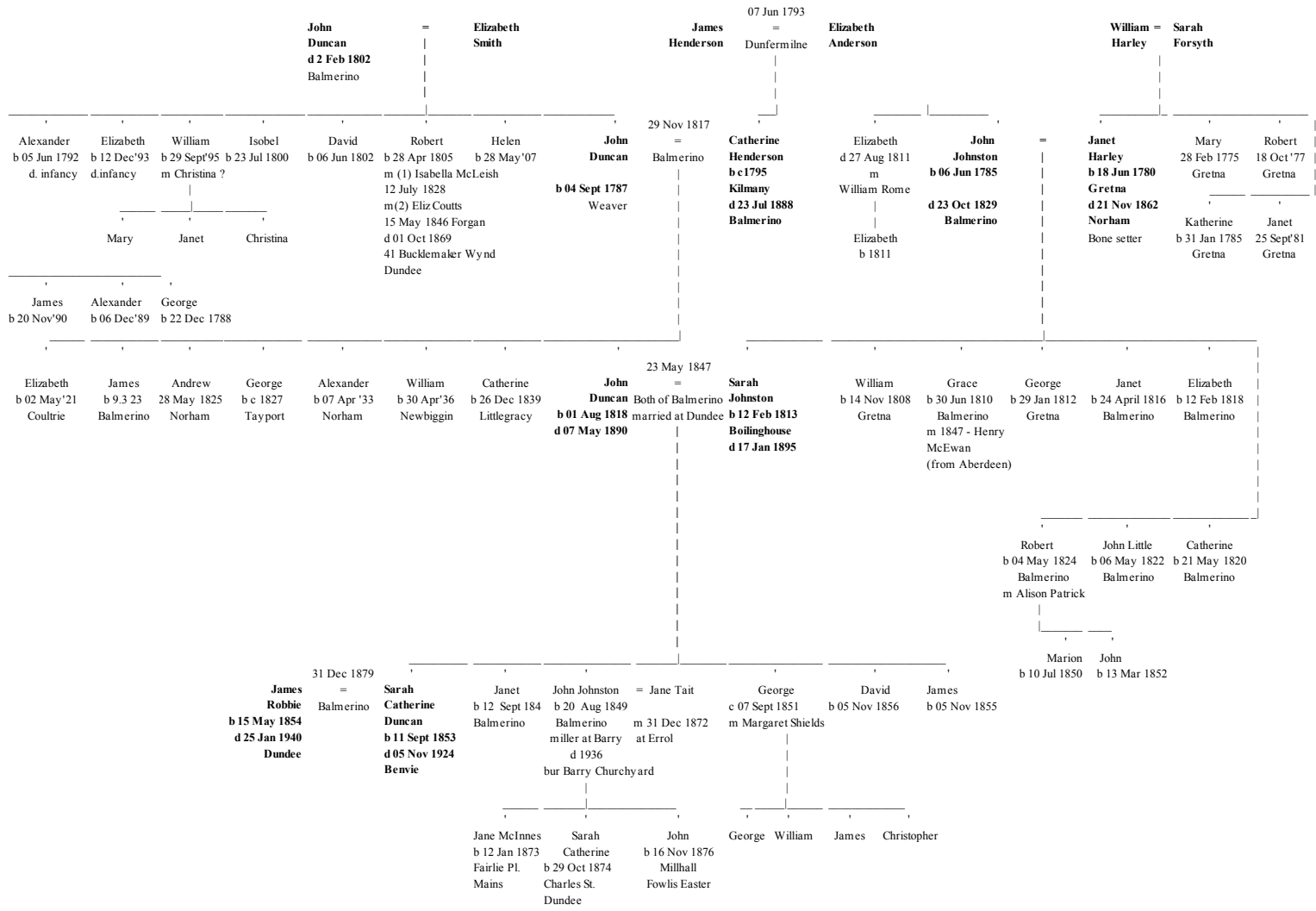


John Johnston and Janet Harley



John Johnston Janet Harley

The first mention of John and Janet is in the Old Parish Registers for Gretna, Dumfries:

O.P.R. Dumfries, Gretna FR284 14 Nov 1808

William a naturel child; son to John Johnston now residing in Balmerino & Janet Harley in Blaaklees

It is likely that the Kirk Session would have censured Jenny (as she was known) for having a child out of wedlock. So far, no search has been made for a record of such a censure in Gretna Session records. Repeated searches have been made in all parts of Scotland for the record of a later marriage between Jenny and John but none has ever been found. It is quite possible that they never married formally and only became married by "habit and repute". (*Habitus et reputatus, held and reputed. In civil law the reputation of being married coupled with cohabitation, constitutes an irregular marriage*).

Their next child, Grace, was born in Balmerino:

O.P.R. Fife, Balmerino (409) FR 462 30 June. 1810

Johnston, Grace dau. of Jn. Johnston & Janet Harley Boilinghouse

George, their third child was born in Gretna:

O.P.R. Dumfries, Graitney FR300 29 Jan 1812

George son to Johnston & Jenny Harley was baptized born 24th inst.

From around this time John, who had worked in the Tay and sometimes the Forth since about 1808, went to work in the Murray Frith area as well. The rest of their children were born in Balmerino where the clerk used a tabular method of recording:

1813. FR 465

Birth	Bapt	Name	
2 Dec		Johnston	Sarah dau. of Jn. Johnston & Janet Harley Boilinghouse

1816 FR 468

April 24		Johnston	Janet, dau ^r of John Johnston and Janet Harley, Boilinghouse.
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1818 FR 470

May 24		Johnston	Elizabeth dau. of Mr. John Johnston and Janet Harley, Boilinghouse.
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About this time John gained experience on the coast of Ireland, the river Bann, Lough Foyle and rivers and the river Bush.

1820 FR 473 and FR 504

21 May	9 June	Johnston	Catherine, dau. of Mr. John Johnston & Janet Harley, Boilinghouse
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1822 FR 516

6 May	22 May	Johnston	John Little, son to John Johnston and Janet Harley.
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(John Little was possibly named after the master to whom John had been apprenticed as a salmon fisher on the Solway in 1799 although the Rentals of Naughton Estate in 1813 list Messrs Littles as paying rent of £72 for Boilinghouse. Could this be the same Little? If so it might explain John's move from the Solway to the Tay).

There are several interesting points about these entries. First, the last five children were all born in late April or in May. It is not known if the fact that Tay salmon-fishing season finished on 25 August had any bearing on this! Second, on occasion, John is referred to as “Mr.” in the parish registers. No one else is referred to in this way. One reason for this could have been that John had at some time matriculated at a university. Indeed Archie Duncan, Professor of History at Glasgow University, regarded this as almost certain. Despite much searching, no record confirming this could be found and it now seems that the “title” was simply recognition of his standing in the community. Thirdly, only the three youngest children seem to have been baptized. It appears that John and Jenny conformed to the conventions of the day as he grew in stature in the community.

In May 1824, John gave evidence to The Select Committee on Salmon Fisheries of the UK. This appears to have been an early example of concern for the environment and much of the questioning was aimed at discovering the life history of the salmon. John’s answers however reveal a great deal about him and his work. Most the following has been gleaned from the report of this committee.

In establishing John’s credentials, the Committee asked:

Be so good as to state what the fisheries are in which you are at present concerned? – Upon the Tay, on the North side there are, in the frith of Tay, the town of Dundee fishery, Mr. Mylne of Mylnefield’s fishery, Mr. Paterson of Castle Huntly’s, Mr. Hunter of Seaside’s fisheries: then on the south side of the Tay there are Lord Dundas and Mr. Wedderburn of Wedderburn and Birk Hills fishings, the Hon. Archibald Stewart of Balmerino, Mrs. Morrison of Naughton and Mr. Wedderburn’s fishings of Wormit: then in the Murray frith there are the property of the Earl of Seafield, along the coast of Banff shire, Sir James Gordon’s, on the same coast, Mrs. Stewart of Tannachie, Mr. Young’s of Burghead: and on the north side of the frith, part of the Marquis of Stafford’s fishings.

Other questions revealed that John had been employed to survey “the friths of Cromarty, Dornock, and Beaully or Inverness” and had, for his own information, surveyed the “sea coast of east Scotland with reference to salmon fishery”.

Throughout the proceedings, John appeared to be very confident and not at all in awe of the Committee. For example:

Can you state the produce now at those stations where the stake nets were formerly placed? – I can state the produce of all those with which I am connected.

State the produce as far as you can? – It must be from my books; I have not the memorandum upon me; I will prepare a statement from my books, and deliver it to the Committee.

Similarly, on another occasion:

You have fished in September and October in the North of Scotland, can you furnish any statement showing the produce of your fishery during these months? – I can furnish a statement by giving me time: I have accounts of them in London. (*This last seems to imply that John had premises in London*).

When asked about fishing out of season, John had no hesitation in naming the Earl of Kinoull and the Earl of Breadalbane as two who, maintaining that they had the right to fish during close season, broke the law.

Some idea of John's business is gained when, on the second day of his evidence, he was asked:

Be so good to state whether, in your opinion, stake nets, if generally established, would furnish employment to a considerable number of persons along the coast? – Yes, to a great number of men, besides women and children; the men would be employed to erect the nets and keep them in repair; the women and children would be employed in the weaving or working of the nets. There would also be a number of coopers employed making boxes and kits; there would be ropemakers employed making the cordage and twine, carpenters employed building and repairing boats, and so on; women would be employed washing the fish when they are kitted; carters would be employed to drive the ice when it could be had. I have paid above 7,000*l.* a year for rent and these purposes.

(A kitt is a circular tub or box. £7000 in 1824 would be worth about £350,000 in 2001).

State the number of persons who were actually employed at one time at the stake net fishery on the Tay, with which you were connected? – To the best of my recollection, we had above 100 men employed in the fishings with which I was connected, at one time on the Tay, besides other places, and we had from four to six coopers constantly; above 20 women and children, besides ropemakers, who were employed. There were above 100 fishermen.

What proportion did that number bear to the whole persons employed in the stake net fishery of the Tay? – It would not be half the number, to the best of my recollection; they would be double. *(It is unclear what John is saying here. He appears to be musing as he speaks, saying that he wouldn't have employed half of those employed on the Tay, perhaps the number others employed would be double what he employed. If this is the correct interpretation, he must have employed somewhere between one third and one half.)*

On other occasions John talks of receiving and in some cases personally bringing cargoes of salmon from as far afield as Ireland to Balmerino then forwarding them to London. How they were preserved is not clear, although the name of his house "Boilinghouse" may give a clue. At other times he makes it clear that he does not think it possible to preserve salmon in ice for several weeks. "It gets into a bad and soft state; I have never done it myself; I should prefer not to keep it one week; it depends on people's tastes". When talking about fish caught out of season, he says "They are generally kippered, sometimes salted, or sold as fresh fish in the country wherever they could be sold; sometimes put into kits and the fish sent to London". He also states that fish can be kept for two or three weeks and sold as fresh fish "but the fish will be soft and of inferior quality". In winter and early spring, the fish were sometimes packed in baskets with straw for insulation but John does not mention this method.

John Ross Jnr. In "Curing and Preserving Fish in Scotland and Its Islands" says that pickling in brine seems to have been the most common method used on the Tay as it was less labour intensive than kippering or smoking. The fish would be headed, gutted, packed in barrels and topped up with brine.

The method of transporting fish from Ireland to Balmerino is not clear but, on one occasion, when he talks of up to 20,000 fish being brought to London he says "They come by smacks from the east of Scotland". A.R.B. Haldane in "The Great Fishmonger of the Tay" says that the voyage from the Tay to London might take as little as 60 hours with good winds and on the other hand easterly gales might prevent boats leaving the Tay for days. In this case, the boats would return to port where the fish would be boiled or cured in salt and vinegar.

John's career was brought to a sudden end when he died on 23rd October 1829 aged forty-four. This event is recorded in the burial register at Balmerino:

Balmerino Death Reg. 1829

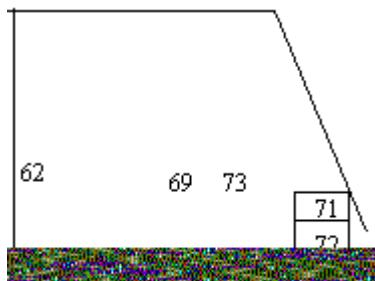
Oct 28 Johnstone John Johnstone Boilinghouse was buried.

The Fife Herald on November 5 1829 (No. 400) carried an announcement:

"Died on the 23rd ultimo, Mr. John Johnston, salmon fisher, Balmerino".

This too must be an indication of his standing as such announcements were rare for all but people of some social standing.

John, Janet and other members of the family are commemorated on a gravestone in Balmerino New Cemetery.



No. 73 1811 Wm Rome, w Eliz Johnston 27.8.1811 (21):
John Johnstone b 6.6.1785 d 23 10.1829, w Janet Harley
b18.6.1780. d 21.11.1862.

da Grace J or McEwan b 30. 6.1810 d 22.6.1884.

da Sarah J or Duncan b 2.12.1813 d 19.1.1895 (w of John
Duncan) b 1.8.1819 d 7.5.1890.

no. 69 John Duncan late tennant Coultrie 2.2.1802 w Elizabeth Smith, chn Alex, Eliz inf.

no 62 (resting against wall) Wm Rome, w Eliz Johnston 27.8.11.

There is also no.70 may or may not be related: 1845 John Duncan shoemaker, Gauldry 5.7.1840 (65), w Eliz Paton 14.7.1838 (56).

After John's death, Janet, who had long enjoyed a great reputation for skill in bone setting continued in this art. People are said to have come to her from far and near and after her death in 1862 the art continued to be practised by her daughter Sarah.

The census for Balmerino for 1841 has been lost so the next known mention of the family is on the occasion of Grace's marriage in 1844:

Augst. 31 McEwan Henry McEwan, Aberdeen & Grace
 & Johnstone Johnstone gave up, their names for proclamation in order to
 marriage: they were regularly proclaimed & no objections
 offered. Married at Norham Sept 1844.

Norham is the house at the shore Balmerino where the family was to remain until well into the 20th century.

Following this wedding, nothing more is known about Janet and her family until the census of 1851.

Census 1851	Balmerino, District 409		book 3	page 1	
	Norham				
Johnston Janet	wid	68	Has as much land as keeps		Dumfries
			a cow.		
Hutton Betsy	serv.	un	12	Cow herd FS.	Fife, Balmerino

Ten years further on and Janet is living with her unmarried son, George

Census 1861	Balmerino (409)	book3	page 1		
Johnston	George	h	un	49	Salmon fisher Dumfries, Gretna
Johnston	Janet	mother	wid	80	Dumfries, Gretna
Duncan	Janet	niece		13	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan	George	nephew		10	scholar Fife, Balmerino

Janet apparently remained there until November 1862 when she died:

Death 1862 Balmerino (409) No. 17

Janet Johnston	F	83	1862	Bronchitis	William Harley	George Johnston
Widow			Nov. 21	10 days	(deceased)	son.
			Norham	Dropsy of the	Sarah Harley	
				Pericardium	(deceased)	
				8 days	M.S. Forsyth	
					(deceased)	

Note.

A brief piece of information claiming to be about John is to be found in the 1899 edition of "Balmerino and Its Abbey" by Rev. J Campbell, which, at page 595 says:

"About thirty years ago 'Boat of Balmerino'- a small packet which sailed every Friday to Dundee and carried merchandise and passengers to-and-fro sank in Dundee harbour during a storm and was never replaced. It was owned and sailed by Mr. Johnstone, who lived at the houses on the shore called Norham".

Everything about this appears to be wrong and it probably refers to John's son-in-law (see John Duncan and Sarah Johnston).

John Johnston's early days.

No record of John's birth has been found. His gravestone says he was born on 6th June 1785 but no recorded birth in Scotland fits in with this. He had at least one sister, Elizabeth who must have been about five years younger than him and who was married to William Rome in Annan on 21 January 1811. John did serve his apprenticeship in salmon fishing in the Solway firth, encompassing the Annan, Nith, Esk and Eden so he might have been born in that area.

John's apprenticeship started from Whitsunday 1799 when he was apprenticed to Mr. John Little and he remained in this area until his move to the Tay at the end of 1807.

When he gave evidence to The Select Committee on Salmon Fishing in the U.K. in 1824 he told of one of the jobs he did as an apprentice:

Do you possess any knowledge of the number of ova in the roe of a salmon? – I do.
Be so good to state what you consider the number contained? – It varies very much with regard to number; it is from 13,000 to 26,000; I have counted them repeatedly; they are from 18,000 to 20,000 upon an average.

Be so good as to state the manner in which you have acquired this information? – By boiling the roe, allowing it to cool till it got hard, counting as many as would fill a certain measure, and then measuring the rest; some of them I have actually counted one by one, every hundred.....

....What was your object in making this investigation? – At that period Mr. John Little of Newby, to whom I was then apprenticed, was writing on the subject, upwards of twenty years ago; and in consequence of writing upon it, he desired me to count them; he wanted to ascertain the number, and he made me count the roe of several salmon, grilse and trouts; he wrote a good deal on the subject, and that was the cause I had occasion to count them; it was by his desire.

The Copyright Libraries and the Ewart Library in Dumfries have been searched for any trace of books by this author but without success.

As no birth has been found for John no parents can be named and no further progress can be made on this line. (A quick count over five pages of the Gretna O.P.R. revealed that 22% of the fathers were called John Johnston. This makes sorting them out very difficult). A possible lead is a christening recorded in Gretna on 27 Apr 1791 at FR216:

1791 Baptized Elizabeth daughter of Robert Johnston
April 27 and Mary Forsyth, Scalemoor. (The first part of this place name is very
 unclear on the original).

Even if this is the correct line, no further trace of Robert and Mary is to be found.

Elizabeth's wedding to William Rome is recorded in Annan (812) on 21 Jan 1811 at FR326:

Rome 21st Jan. William Rome and Elizabeth Johnston were judicially married.

Some Oddments:

From Local Newspaper:

Nov 5th 1829

There will be exposed to public roup within the Town Hall of Dundee on Friday 11th December next at 1 o'clock afternoon.

A lease for three years or fishing seasons of the salmon fishings in the Firth of Tay belonging to the town of Dundee lately possessed by Messrs Johnston and Sim – commencing with next session.

The articles of roup may be seen by applying at the Town Clark's office.

Attempts have been made to make a connection between the salmon fishers & processors, Johnstons of Montrose. This Johnston family has good records but no connection could be found.