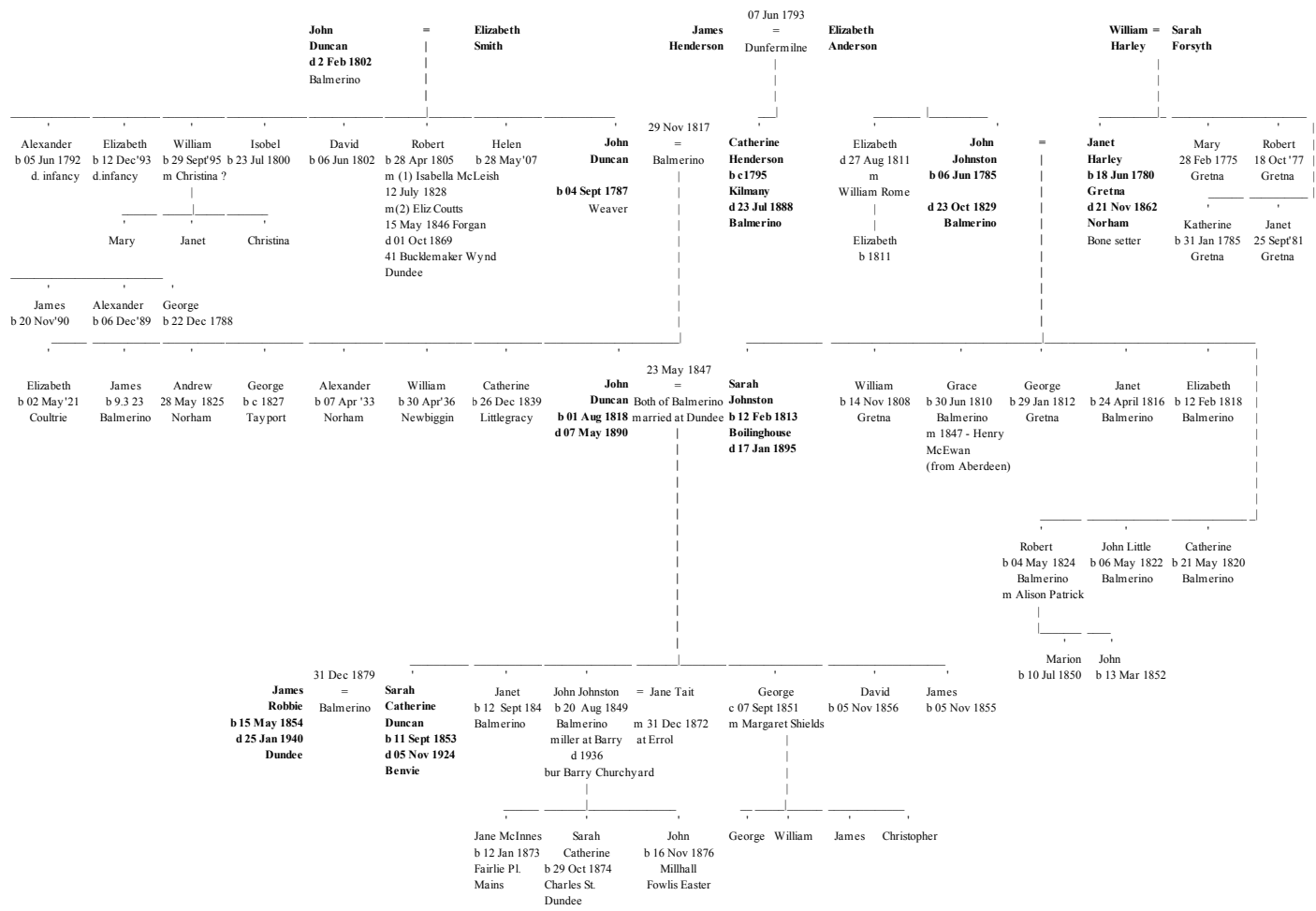


John Duncan and Sarah Johnston



John Duncan Sarah Johnston

The marriage of John and Sarah is recorded in both Balmerino and in Dundee although they were actually married in Dundee. The wedding was on 23 May 1847. John was twenty-eight and Sarah was thirty-four. Both belonged to the parish of Balmerino, John being the son of John Duncan and Catherine Henderson and Sarah the daughter of John Johnston and Janet (Jenny) Harley.

John's occupation is not mentioned in the marriage record but he was to have several different occupations during his lifetime, including fishing and weaving. Several years before the wedding, the local minister had described, for The Statistical Account, the conditions in these jobs:

Of weaving, he said: "A good weaver labouring twelve hours per day will average about 2 shillings". (This compared with labourers 1s 6d and female field labourers 8d per day, female house servants from £5 to £6 per annum and ploughmen £10 to £12 with 6½ bolls oatmeal per annum and a pint Scots of sweet milk per day).

Salmon fishing which had once been very productive was now very restricted in the estuary, being restricted by law to the toot-net method. This method employed a net 50 to 80 yards long attached between the shore and a boat at anchor, the net only being hauled in when the 'toots-man', on the boat saw a fish hit the net. The minister felt that, although the regulations were ostensibly to preserve stocks, the main reason for the restrictions was to ensure monopoly prices for the river fishers and landowners. He also pointed out that "Aged females and others have been deprived of an excellent and healthy employment in the working of nets".

A first daughter, Janet, was born on 12th September 1847 and a son, John nearly two years later on 20th Aug 1849. The 1851 census finds them living at Balmerino shore:

1851	Balmerino		Dist 409	Book 3	page 1
Duncan John	h	m	32	Labourer	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan Sarah	w	m	35	Labourers wife	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan Janet	d	un	3	Labourers dau	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan John	s	un	2	Labourers son	Fife, Balmerino

By the next census, George, Sarah, James and David had been born, George on 7 September 1851, Sarah on 11 September 1853, James on 5 Nov 1855 and David in Nov 1856. Of these, only Sarah and James appear with their parents in the next census. George and Janet were with their granny, Janet Johnston and their Uncle George, two doors along the road. Of David there is no sign, perhaps an infant death?

1861	Balmerino		Dist 409	Book 3	Page 8
Sch 44					
Duncan John	h	m	42	Weaver	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan Sarah	w	m	46		Fife, Balmerino
Duncan John	s		11	scholar	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan Sarah	d		7	scholar	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan James	s		5	scholar	Fife, Balmerino

They had two rooms with windows and there were three children at school.

A few years later in “The Parochial Directory of Fife and Kinross for 1866”. We have, under “Carriers”:

Duncan, John, Balmerino. To Dundee on Friday.

Also under “Salmon Fishers”:

Duncan, John, Norham.

On the occasions of the births of at least three of their children, John is described as a “seaman”- he must have been a man of many parts! It seems reasonable to assume that his carter activities involved not simply the use of a horse and cart but also a boat, presumably the one he would use for fishing at other times but the term “seaman” seems a bit extravagant for these activities.

In the same directory, under “Weavers Agents” appears:

Duncan, Mrs, Norham.

A weavers agent, collected finished cloth from local weavers, transported it to market, sold it, deducted commission and possibly purchased spun yarn to take back to the weavers. As income from weaving depended on the amount of cloth produced, the “agent” system avoided the weaver himself being away from his loom, and unproductive, for long periods, perhaps as much as a whole day. As far as the Duncans were concerned this work would fit in very well with John’s carter business, supplying Sarah with the means of transport between her customers homes (and looms) and Balmerino harbour as well as to and from the Dundee market.

Sarah also acted as a bonesetter for those with broken bones, a skill that she learned from her mother.

By 1871 and 1881, only John and Sarah are listed in the census:

1871 Balmerino Dist. 409 Book 3 Page 9

Sch 52.

Duncan John	h	m	51	fisher	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan Sarah	w	m	56		Fife, Balmerino

Two rooms with windows.

1881 Balmerino Dist. 409 Book 3 Page1

Norham, Balmerino

Duncan John		h	m	61	Salmon fisher	Fife Balmerino
Duncan(m.s. Johnston)	Sarah	w	m	66		Fife, Balmerino

Three rooms with windows.

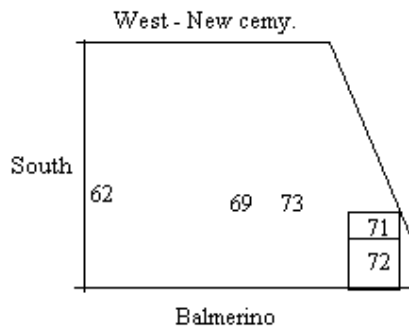
On May 7th 1890, the year before the next census, John died age 71. The cause of death was given as “cerebral degeneration with effusion – several years”. Might this indicate Parkinson’s Disease?

In the 1891 census, Sarah, now described as a crofter, is with her grand-daughter, Sarah who was visiting her granny on census night:

Norham, Balmerino

Duncan Sarah	h	wid	77	Crofter	Fife, Balmerino
Duncan Sarah	g-dau		6		Fife, Balmerino

Sarah died aged 82 in January 1895 by which time she was living with her daughter Sarah and son-in-law James at Benvie Mill near Invergowrie on the north side of the Tay. She is commemorated on her parents' grave stone in Balmerino New Cemetery:



Tombstone Inscriptions: (As abbreviated by Mitchell.)

No. 73 1811 Wm Rome, w Eliz Johnston 27. 8. 1811 (21): John Johnston 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.

The house called Norham is still on the shore at Balmerino to this day although what had been a house, a byre and outhouses is now one house. Hilda Allen and her mother (the six year old listed in the 1891 census above) visited Aunt Maggie (George's widow) and "Uncle Jim", Maggie's son at Norham on several occasions in the 1920's. Hilda remembers the trout in the well, having to wait for her tea until the butter was churned and Aunt Maggie making and selling cool drinks to people walking between Wormit and Balmerino. She also remembers one fragment of conversation when Uncle Jim said to her mother "I wrocht for your faither". (Presumably at the mill at Benvie).



Norham in 1998.

O.P.R. Fife, Balmerino 1818 FR 470
Duncan: John son to John Duncan and Catherine Henderson, Coultrie. Christened 1 Aug 1818.

O.P.R.Fife, Balmerino 1813
02 Dec. Johnston: Sarah dau. of Jn. Johnston & Janet Harley Boilinghouse.

O.P.R. Fife, Balmerino 1847.
22 May: John Duncan & Sarah Johnston, both this parish married at Dundee 23 May 1847.

O.P.R. Fife, Balmerino
Janet, dau to John Duncan, seaman, Balmerino & Sarah Johnston his wife. 12 Sept 1847.

O.P.R. Fife, Balmerino
John Johnston, son of John Duncan, seaman & Sarah Johnston. 20 Aug 1849.

O.P.R. Fife, Balmerino
George Son of John Duncan, seaman & Sarah Johnston 07 Sept 1851.

O.P.R. Fife, Balmerino 1853 FR 555

11 Sep 1853 Sarah, daughter of John Johnston, seaman Balmerino and Sarah Johnston his wife.

05 Nov 1855 Fife Duncan, James son to John Duncan & Sarah Johnston. (Cert seen in NRH).

05 Nov 1856 Fife Duncan, David son to John Duncan & Sarah Johnston. (Cert not seen).

1890 Death Balmerino 409/6

John Duncan Salmon fisher married to Sarah Johnston	1890 07 May 2h 0m a.m.	M 71	John Duncan linen weaver deceased	Cerebral degeneration with effusion several years	GeorgeDuncan son (present)
			Catherine Duncan M.S. Henderson deceased		

1895 Death Liff 301/5

Sarah Duncan Widow of John Duncan crofter	1895 17 Jan 6h 10 m p.m. Benvie Mill Benvie	F 82	John Johnston farmer deceased	Diarrhoea 1 day	James Robbie son-in-law present
			Janet Johnston M.S. Harley		

A Family Tale

There is story passed down by Sarah and John's grand-daughter, Jemima that there were five sons in John Duncan and Sarah Johnston's family, all of whom were



drowned at sea, a tradition which it has not been possible to confirm. No other births to John and Sarah are recorded in Old Parish Registers but these registers should have stopped at the end of 1854 as Statutory Registration began in January 1855. No search of the statutory records at New Register House has been carried out to discover if there were any more children. In any case there is no sign of other children in the censuses. There are, however two indications that the story may have some truth in it, firstly there is, in the family, an Indian shawl, displayed alongside by Hilda Allan, which may have been brought back from foreign parts. Where did it come from? Secondly, there were in the family two strings of amber beads, which are show worn in the photo below by Charlotte Robbie (left) and Sarah Robbie (right) these might indicate some connection

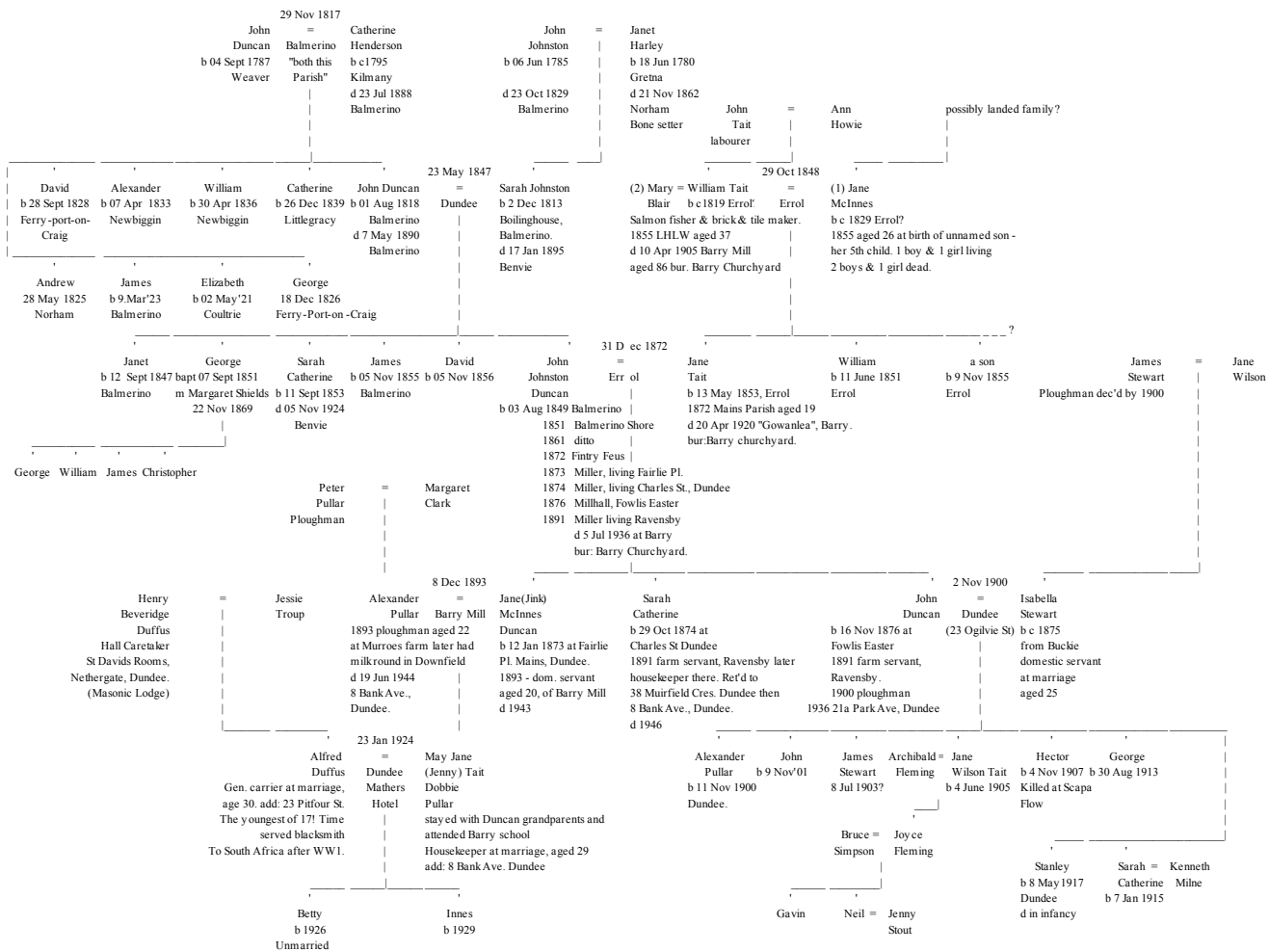
with the Baltic. Only two or three beads from these necklaces survive in 2001.



Charlotte, Kate and Sarah with Andrew in front c1886.

With this generation apparently having insufficient sons to sustain the story, could it be completely untrue or could it belong with an earlier generation of the Duncans?

Some descendants of John and Sarah



Descendants of John & Sarah

On 31st December 1872, John and Sarah's son, John, married Jane Tait from Errol, Perthshire. Jane had been born in Errol about 1835 to William and Jane Tait. Like John's father, William was a labourer and salmon fisher. He later became a brick and tile maker. At the time of their marriage, John and Jane were living in the parish of Mains and Strathmartine where John was working as a miller.



John Duncan miller at Upper Mill, Barry with his daughter Jane (Jink) Pullar,
His grandaughter Jenny Pullar and Gt grandaughter Betty Duffus.

The family settled briefly in Mains where their first child, Jane, was born at Fairlie Place on 12 Jan 1873. A year later, Sarah Catherine was born at Charles Street,

Dundee and in 1876, a son, John was born at Millhall, Fowlis Easter where Henry Jack was miller.

By 1891, John and his family were living at Ravensby, adjacent to Upper Mill Barry. John was employed as miller by James Dargie who leased both Upper and Nether Mill from Ravensby Estate. As for the family, Jane was a domestic servant and both Sarah and John were farm servants at Ravensby. The family later moved into the mill cottage at Upper Mill.

On retiring, John and Jane moved to "Gowanlea" a cottage near Barry Railway Station. She died on 29 April 1920 and John died on 5th July 1936, aged nearly 87, death resulting from a fall. He had been on ladders clearing roof gutters at his house when he fell, breaking his hip. He survived the fall but took pneumonia and died.