Dr John Adie, Surgeon, RN

A biography by Chris Adie

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Introduction

The firm of T M Adie & Sons was well known in Shetland up until perhaps 30 years ago. As well as running a shop in Voe, the firm manufactured tweed and knitware for many years.

The firm's founder, Thomas Mountford Adie, was born in Walls in 1815. There's much that could be told of his rise to prominence, but in many ways it is his father, John Adie, who is the more interesting character. John was a surgeon in the Royal Navy around the time of Nelson. His ancestors were from Edinburgh, yet his descendants were all in Shetland. He was the first Adie to be associated with the sea, an association which has continued, in various forms, for seven generations. He seems to be a pivotal figure, and when I was young in the 1960s the dark hints from my elders about his alleged crimes whetted my appetite to know more. Now I'm retired, I've had time to research his life in depth, trying to see if he deserves rehabilitation.

What follows is a tentative biography, based on a wide variety of mainly primary sources. There are of course many openings for further research which might shed new and different light on John Adie's life, so this account is best regarded as a snapshot, out of focus in places, of an ongoing process of story-making.

Early life

John Adie was born in Greyfriars parish, Edinburgh, on 23 May 1782. He was the only child of Janet Sanders and James Adie "of Adiefield". Variously described as a "grocer" or "perfumier", or simply a "merchant", James was based in the Grassmarket in Edinburgh, but his business sometimes took him elsewhere in Scotland. "Adiefield" was a field on the south side of what is now Morrison St in Edinburgh. It had been in the family since at least the early 18th century, and it's likely that James sold the property to invest in his various business activities.

John's mother died in 1794 when he was only 12, and it must have been about

then that his father apprenticed him to a local business - probably “Messrs Bell, Wardrop and Russell, Surgeon Apothecaries”.

As the 1790s drew on, Royal Navy expansion increased the demand for medical personnel. The ship’s surgeon and his assistants were crucial on board the overcrowded and disease-ridden warships on which British sea power depended, and, as a result, even raw apothecaries’ boys were encouraged to join up. All that was required was a fairly perfunctory examination, and young John was not slow to take advantage of this opportunity. In February 1798 he was awarded a certificate by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, stating his fitness to serve as a surgeon’s mate on naval warships of up to the second rate.[1] John immediately joined HMS Leopard, then lying at Leith. He was just 15.

Naval medicine

The period 1793 to 1815 was one of almost constant conflict for Britain. There were three wars with France, wars with various other European countries, and with America. As any fan of Patrick O’Brien will know, the Royal Navy was Britain’s main asset in these conflicts, and was at the peak of its strength, dominating the waters around most of the globe.

Skilled seamen were extremely valuable to the Royal Navy, as evidenced by their attempts over many years to press Shetland’s fishermen into reluctant service. (In fact, a couple of months before John Adie joined HMS Leopard, she had taken on eight Shetland lads as ordinary seamen - presumably press-gang victims.)

Name	Age
George Johnson	19
James Pottinger	20
Thomas Duncan	22
Henry Duncan	20
E Arthurson	22

[1] Naval vessels were rated according to their size and armament, with first-rate ships being the most heavily armed.

William Arthurson	22
James Bolt	20
James Smith	20

Real effort was invested in preserving sailors' health, which was a major factor in the effectiveness of a man-o-war. Ships would be forced to return to port if the sick-list grew too long.

By the 1790s scurvy had largely been conquered, but influenza, typhus and dysentery were rife, due to overcrowding and insanitary conditions. The situation was even more dreadful in enemy navies: a successful attack on an enemy ship, apart from injuries sustained in battle, could lead to the Royal Navy crew contracting disease from prisoners, whose health was often far worse than their captors.

A ship's surgeon would thus be faced not only with seamen seriously wounded in battle and requiring major interventions such as amputation, but also with epidemics - particularly in tropical waters. However, the speed and efficiency of amputations was seen as the measure of a good naval surgeon.

Surgery at the time was distinct from "physic" - the former was a manual task, and the eighteenth-century surgeon did not have the elevated social status of the physician, who diagnosed illness and prescribed remedies. The Navy, however, required both skills, and the ship's surgeon was not only expected to be a physician, but an apothecary and health adviser as well. He and his assistants worked alongside the loblolly boys, partly-trained seamen who served as nursing staff.

Surgeons were of course a mixed lot, with some individuals considered "lazy and drunken - the business being entirely conducted by surgeon's mates". Many, on the other hand, did their best according to medical knowledge at the time, but the lack of understanding about infection and its control meant that most serious wounds were ultimately fatal.

The social hierarchy on board was strict. Surgeons and their mates were "warrant officers" - they were appointed by the Commissioners for Sick and Wounded Seamen (known as the Sick and Hurt Board), but they held a "warrant" rather than the "commission" held by more senior officers. The

surgeon, purser and master were entitled to dine with the commissioned officers in the wardroom. Junior warrant officers, including boatswains, carpenters and surgeons' mates like John Adie, did not enjoy that privilege!

Naval service to 1803

John Adie's first ship, HMS Leopard, was a 50-gun fourth-rate of the Royal Navy, commissioned in 1790. In 1798, she was commanded by Captain Thomas Surridge, and carried a complement of about 350 men and boys. John was appointed to the rank of surgeon's second mate.

The Leopard departed from Leith on 17 February 1798, heading south. By April she was in Madeira, but returned to Spithead (in the Solent) in May.

John's father James Adie died in June 1798 when away on business in Ayr. John was probably unable to obtain leave to return to Scotland to deal with his father's affairs, but nevertheless James's moveable property was sold at auction a few months later. Altogether, John inherited £52 15s 3d Sterling.

At the end of June 1798, Rear Admiral John Blankett raised his flag in the Leopard and took command of a small squadron which included HMSs Daedalus, Fox and Orestes. France had invaded Egypt earlier that year, and Blankett's task was to prevent the French from using the Red Sea.

The voyage south through the Atlantic and round the Cape of Good Hope was relatively uneventful, and by the end of October the squadron was in the northern Mozambique Channel, between the east coast of Africa and the island of Madagascar. There, the Leopard captured the French privateer Apollo, 12 guns, without resistance. The money which the Admiralty paid for captured enemy ships was a significant incentive for sailors, and was one reason the Royal Navy was so successful. A prize crew was put on board the Apollo, and the squadron ventured north, but by December 1798 they were only at Zanzibar.

The climate in these latitudes was very difficult for seamen used to the cold waters around the UK. Disease was rife, and Michael Prichard, surgeon's mate on HMS Daedalus, fell ill. John Adie was transferred to the Daedalus on the 18 December 1798 as surgeon's mate, and Prichard died the following day. John

was to remain on the Daedalus (a 32-gun fifth-rate) for the next two years.

Disease was not the only danger. On 24 December 1798 a shore party sent from the Leopard, including a Swahili-speaking marine from the Daedalus, was attacked by “savages with large spears”. The officer in charge was killed with six of his men, including the interpreter. The remainder of the shore party were rescued by the Daedalus’s boat the next morning. Following this “dreadful accident” (as the Captain’s log has it), just before noon on Christmas Day the Daedalus struck rocks.

As the rest of the squadron made their way to the Red Sea, the Daedalus returned alone to Cape Town, presumably for repair. By May 1799 she was back with the squadron, based partly at Mocha on the west coast of Yemen, and partly at Jeddah in modern Saudi Arabia. In August, Daedalus and Fox bombarded the town of Qoseir on the Red Sea coast of Egypt, then in French hands. When the French surrendered, the Captain’s log notes “down came the colours, the battlements being destroyed and the town in ruins”.

Further action followed, and the Daedalus made her way east to join the fleet led by Vice Admiral Peter Rainier. Rainier was commander-in-chief of the Navy’s East Indies Station - in other words, all the seas between the Cape of Good Hope and the South China Sea. In August 1800 he led an expedition to Batavia, the modern Jakarta, where the Daedalus with three other ships captured five Dutch vessels and destroyed 22 further craft.

On 15 November 1800, the Daedalus’s surgeon died, and John Adie was temporarily promoted to acting surgeon. A few weeks later, the Daedalus arrived in the Malacca Straits, to rendezvous with Rainier’s flagship HMS Victorious. On New Year’s Day 1801, Rainier transferred John to the Victorious as surgeon’s first mate. John was only 18, but lied about his age, claiming to be 23 - probably in order to increase his chances of permanent promotion to surgeon.

Life on the Victorious, a 74-gun third-rate ship of the line, was probably less exciting than on the Leopard or Daedalus. She proceeded from Penang to Colombo, then Bombay (Mumbai), Nagapattinam and Trincomalee, arriving at Madras (Chennai) in September 1801. There, finally, John got his promotion to surgeon on a new ship, HMS Chiffonne.

HMS Chiffonne, from National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

(permission to be sought before publication)

La Chiffonne was a 36-gun frigate, originally French. In August 1801, she had been captured in the Seychelles and taken to Madras, where Rainier appointed Captain Henry Stuart to her command. He took her to Bombay for a refit, where she stayed from January until July 1802. As surgeon, John Adie was not much involved in the refit, so would have had plenty of time to experience the sensual delights of Bombay. The Chiffonne arrived back in Madras in September 1802, where she stayed for a couple of weeks before departing on 9 October 1802 for Trincomalee and then London. After nearly five years of seafaring, John was on his way home.

The mysterious Mary Ann

At this point, into our *Boys' Own* story of ships and battles and admirals, glides a mysterious young English-born lady called Mary Ann Westile. Her origins are obscure, but it seems she might have been a Yorkshire lass. She may have been born in Whitby between about 1780 and 1785, but the day and exact year of her birth were unknown, even to her. Her father was Marmaduke Weatherall or Weathrall, her mother was perhaps Mary Ann Wilkison. Marmadule Weathrall emigrated to India, but I have found no records of his presence there.[2]

Mary Ann Westile

We do not know why Mary Ann had the surname Westile, sometimes spelt Westil, Westal or Westle. It is an uncommon name - in fact there seems no trace of it other than Mary Ann and a few of her descendants with that forename. In later life, Mary Ann stated that her father changed his name from Weathrall to Westile on emigrating to India, for reasons unknown to her. I've so far found no mention of Westile or its variants in India Office records.

Family tradition calls Mary Ann an orphan, and a "ward of court". Such legendary information should be taken with a large pinch of salt, but it at least provides a direction for future investigation.

[2] Captain Michael Thomas Weathrall, (1770-1824), based in Calcutta, may have been a relative - possibly Mary Ann's older brother?

It is likely that John met Mary Ann in Madras, or possibly Bombay, in 1802. Somehow he arranged for her to board the Chiffonne in secret. She does not appear in the Muster Book, meticulously kept by the purser, who was in charge of victuals. Did she impersonate a boy? Did John secrete her in the sick bay? How did she get her food? Where did she sleep? Many years later, John recalled how "happiness and pleasure and comfort seemed to flow through winds & the surges of the tempestuous ocean", and we know of Mary Ann's presence on board only because in December 1802, as the Chiffonne was approaching Cape Town, she and John conceived a child.[3]

In early April 1803, HMS Chiffonne docked at Woolwich. John lost no time in arranging for marriage banns to be proclaimed, and on 25 April 1803 he and Mary Ann were married, in St Katherine Coleman church, just a few streets away from the docks. Mary Ann was evidently illiterate, signing the register with a cross.

The ship's company were paid off and dismissed, and the newlyweds set up house in Kensington, London. Their first child, Amelia, was born there in September 1803.

First visit to Shetland

Some time in 1803 John returned to Scotland, to visit friends in Edinburgh and Falkirk, leaving Mary Ann in London. There was a large barracks and a community of army families in Kensington, and we can surmise that Mary Ann would have made friends there, and perhaps learned to read and write while her husband was away.

In late 1803 or early 1804, John embarked for Shetland. One of the mysteries of John's life is his reason for visiting these remote islands. It was winter, and the voyage north from Leith was certainly not without risk. There must have been a compelling motive. Did he have relatives here? There were Adies in Shetland in the 18th century, but there's no evidence of a family connection. The family legend that he was fleeing the legal consequences of marrying Mary Ann

[3] It is possible that Mary Ann was on one of the other vessels in the homeward-bound convoy, and the child was conceived when they anchored in Table Bay. However, John's words seem to support the assumption that she was on Chiffonne.

without her family's or a guardian's consent is a flight of fancy. A more credible explanation is that the Shetland sailors on the Leopard (and perhaps on other vessels) convinced him that Shetland was a place where he might make a living as a doctor.

It certainly seems John tried his hand as a medical man in Lerwick at this time. He is known to have purchased medicines in 1804 from an apothecary's shop run by another surgeon, Duncan Campbell.

One of the servants at the lodging house in Lerwick where John was staying was Charlotte Ramsay, a Yell lass then in her early thirties. John evidently lost no time in seducing her, in the first (?) of his many extra-marital affairs. In November 1804, Charlotte (having returned to Ulsta) bore a son, whom she named John Adie after his father.

John left Shetland not long after his dalliance with Charlotte. After a year's leave, he had been appointed to a new ship.

Naval service 1804-1806

In June 1804, John joined HMS Pegase at Portsmouth. The Pegase was a 74-gun French ship, captured in 1782 by Captain (later Admiral of the Fleet) John Jervis, and from 1799 she was used as a hospital ship.

Despite his promotion in Madras to the rank of surgeon, John was appointed to the Pegase as a surgeon's second mate and assistant dispenser. There he studied "physic" as well as surgery, completing his medical training. After six months he was promoted to surgeon's first mate and was fully qualified to serve as surgeon on ships of the fifth rate.

John was appointed as surgeon to a new ship, HMS Avenger, on 7 January 1805. The Avenger was an 18-gun sloop, formerly a collier. She sailed in convoy from Portsmouth in January 1805, bound for the Mediterranean, and arrived at Gibraltar in March, returning to the Solent in May 1805 after an uneventful voyage.

The Napoleonic invasion threat was so great, and the need for surgeons so acute, that the Admiralty were forced to reform the naval medical service. While

John was away on the Avenger, significant changes were authorised “to induce well-qualified and respectable persons to enter the service” as surgeons. The major changes included free medicines, a pay rise, eligibility for half-pay when not on active service, and an official uniform - all of which improved the social status of naval surgeons.

John’s next ship, HMS Aurora, was a 28-gun sixth-rate frigate with a complement of roughly 200 officers and men. John joined her in June 1805, under her youthful Captain (later Admiral) George Elliot, described by Nelson as “one of the best officers in the Navy”. Elliot took Aurora to the Mediterranean, where she was involved in a number of actions against enemy ships and towns - not always successfully.[4]

In August and September 1806 there were heavy storms, immediately followed by enemy engagement, and at some point during this excitement John sustained a wound to his right hand. The wound was serious enough for John to be admitted to the naval hospital of Bighi, Malta on 18 September 1806. He was discharged twelve days later, having “lost the use of the thumb of the right hand”, and was deemed “not capable of further service”.

John returned to England on 15 November 1806, on half pay. His naval career was over.

Lerwick 1807-1810

In 1807, John removed himself, Mary Ann and their toddler Amelia from Kensington to Rothesay, Bute,[5] and then on to Shetland. Initially they stayed in Lerwick, where in January 1808 their second child, Jannetta Harriet Adie, was born. Mary Ann from this time onwards was almost constantly pregnant, ultimately giving birth to twelve children.

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[4] The Aurora was not in the battle of Trafalgar. That battle occurred just to the north and west of the straits of Gibraltar, on the 21 October 1805. On that date the Aurora was on her way from Gibraltar to Malta, well to the east.

[5] Why Rothesay? All we know is that in 1807, while staying in Rothesay, Mary Ann encountered Flora MacDonald, the niece of the identically-named heroine of Prince Charlie's escape after Culloden. Mary Ann was given a china bowl which had belonged to the original Flora MacDonald. The bowl is still in the family.

John was expecting to stay in Shetland for several years, and, in May 1808, he took a house in Lerwick on a three-year lease and began his medical practice.

As we've seen, during his first visit to Lerwick, John had obtained medicines from fellow-surgeon and apothecary Duncan Campbell. Now it was John's turn to supply Campbell, possibly from purloined naval stores from the Aurora! A list of some of these medicines has survived: they included Laudanum, Cream of Tartar, Spirit of Ammonia, Basilicon, Peruvian Bark, Bitter Purging Salts and Spirit of Turpentine.

Unfortunately Campbell did not pay for the medical supplies. John pursued him through the Sheriff Court, but, although he won the case because Campbell did not turn up, it's not clear whether he actually was able to collect the debt. This 1808 legal action was the first of many in which John was involved - usually as the debtor.

Mary Ann's third child and their first son, James Mitchell Adie, was born in Lerwick in June 1809. It seems that John was not able to maintain his growing family on his naval half-pay and income from medical practice, for in 1810 his career took a new turn.

Walls in the 1810s

Thomas Smith was a rope-maker, probably English, who in the late 18th century worked at Woolwich in Kent, where there had been a big naval rope-yard, and later in South Shields, making rope for Greenland whaling ships. His wife was Eleanor Cumming, daughter of Daniel Cumming, a Shetland sailor whose ancestors had been landowners. In the late 1780s, the couple moved to Shetland to take up Eleanor's inheritance of lands there, principally Stapness in Walls. From this time, Smith (as "heritable proprietor" of his wife's land - the patriarchy being in its heyday) was known as Thomas Smith of Stapness.

By 1810, Smith was in his mid-fifties, and perhaps no longer had the energy or inclination to manage the estate of Stapness, for in that year he leased the entire estate to a younger man - John Adie. The agreement was for a term of 19 years, at an annual rent of £42 sterling. The estate consisted of:

> *nine merks land in Bardister and nine merks land in Stapness as also the whole of the Island of Linga adjacent to Stapness all lying in the Parish of Walls … with the manor house and Offices of Stapness and … other houses with the yards waste grounds mosses … strands fishings fishing stations seadrift wreck ware kelp and Tang shores profits emoluments & universal righteous pertinents and privileges of every description belonging to the said lands and Island*

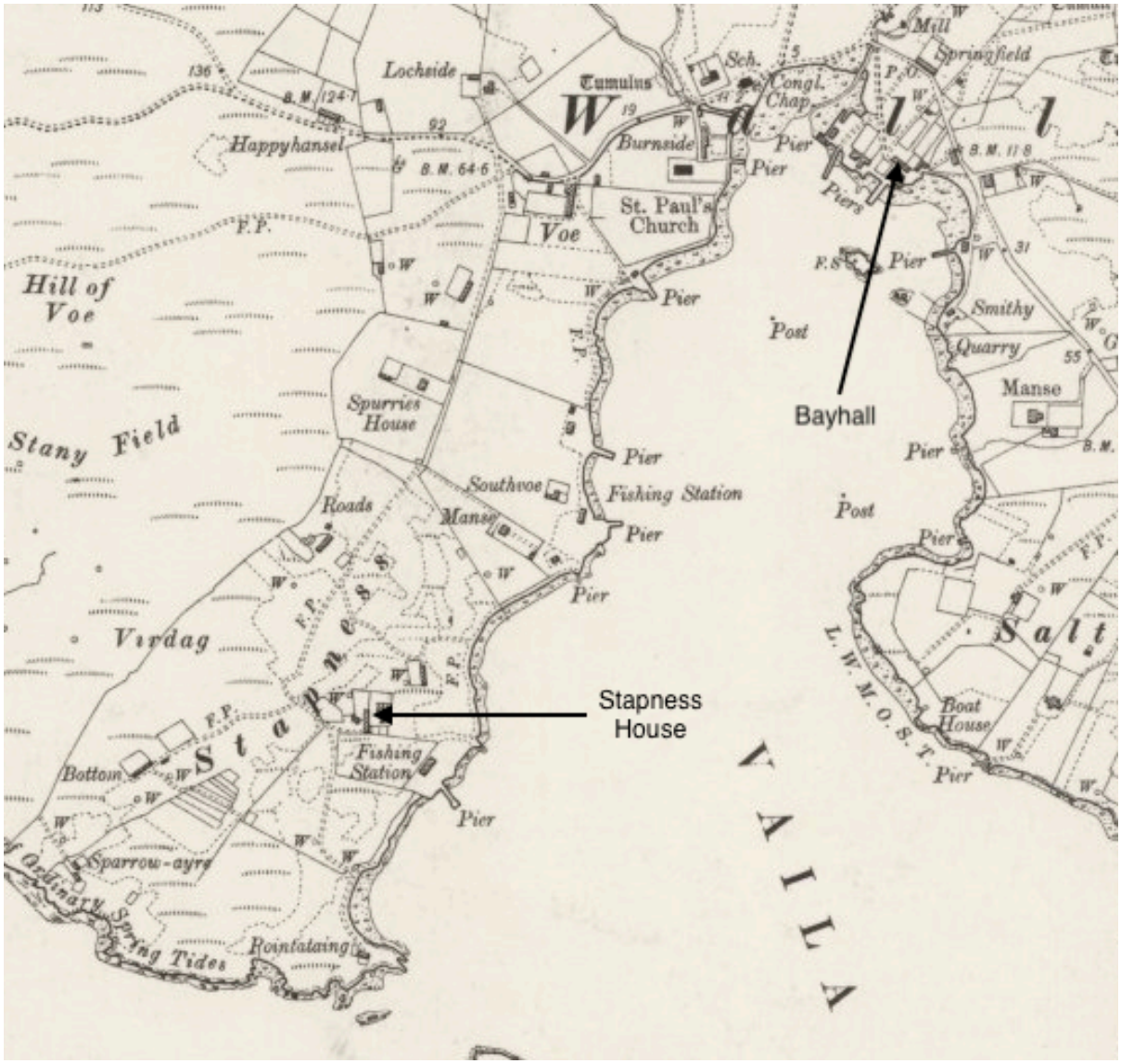
The agreement allowed Smith to retain for his own use

> *the manor house Offices and Cabbage yard thereof together with the Square piece of ground before and behind the said manor house and as much Peat rigs in the Island of Linga as will produce peats sufficient for said house*

For this, Smith was to pay £4 sterling annually back to John Adie.

The agreement was signed “at Voe in Walls” - ie the Voe House now used as a camping böd. Stapness House (presumably the “manor house” above mentioned) has been replaced by a modern dwelling, but the “square piece of ground before and behind” is still evident, enclosed by a stone dyke.

So, where did John and his family live? The answer appears to be that he rented a house at the head of the voe from Thomas Henry of Bayhall. It’s unlikely this was the impressive Haa house of Bayhall, now subdivided into flats - more probably it was a smaller house close by. However, after a few years it seems Thomas Smith moved to Lerwick and John was able to move into Stapness House.



Ordnance Survey six-inch map, surveyed 1900. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Despite being only a “tacksman” and not the “heritor”, having taken full responsibility for the estate, John was now effectively laird of Stapness. As such, his concern would have been to make it pay - and in the early 19th century that meant mainly fishing. Many areas of Shetland were suffering from over-population, with arable land divided up into very small entitlements managed on the runrig system. This situation should have provided plenty of manpower for fishing “to the laird” - ie using boats and equipment provided by the laird, to whom the catch then belonged. I have found no records of how this went at Stapness during the early part of John’s reign, but some years later I find him ordering fishing gear and salt for fish-curing from Hay & Ogilvy in Lerwick

and asking what price they would pay for his salted fish.

John had by this time (1811) accumulated considerable debt, dating not only from his time in Shetland, but also from his naval days. In June 1811 his estate was "sequestrated" - in other words, he was declared bankrupt. His debts amounted to £1,079 18s 0d and three farthings - a huge amount by the standards of the time. Creditors included a Mrs Mitchell Baker in Falkirk, Messrs Hutchison & Co in Edinburgh, various merchants in Lerwick, Messrs Archibald and Johnston in Gibraltar, the family of Scott of Melbie, Sandness, and John's maternal aunt Ann Sanders. He was lucky to avoid a debtor's prison.

It appears that John was in the habit of trying to appease his creditors by the sycophantic and doubtless ineffectual strategy of naming his children after them. His next child, born in August 1811 at Bayhall, Walls, was named Thomas Hutchison Baker Adie, combining the surnames of his two main creditors. Thomas lived only a few days. John continued this policy with the birth of his third daughter Elizabeth Scott Adie at Stapness in May 1813.

Not content with fathering children with Mary Ann, he seduced (or worse) a young servant, Anderina Robertson, who gave birth to John's son in August 1813. John was summoned to appear before the Presbytery, whose theocratic duty was to uphold moral standards. He excused himself from attending, but sent a grovelling letter admitting paternity and vowing to look after the "sickly" child. There is no record of what happened to the baby - presumably he died in infancy, as many babies did. Two years later, Anderina married Magnus Georgeson, of whom more shortly.

Meanwhile, John's possessions had been sold off to pay his creditors. They raised a very small amount, and the creditors had to be satisfied with one shilling and ninepence three farthings in the pound - in other words, only 9% of what they were actually owed. In February 1814, John appeared in court in Edinburgh and was discharged of all his debts contracted before June 1811.

John was evidently discontented with his life in Shetland, for in November 1814 he offered to buy a house in Tobago St, Edinburgh[6], for £105. How he hoped to pay this sum is unclear, and, although he somehow managed a downpayment of

[6] Tobago Street no longer exists. It was part of what is now Morrison St, and was therefore near to the long-vanished Adiefield.

£40, he decided the house was too small for his family (or perhaps used this as an excuse), and resiled the bargain. This led to protracted legal proceedings, and it seems that John lost most of the £40.

Stuck in Shetland, John's family continued to grow throughout the next few years, with his second son Thomas Mountford Adie born at Stapness in 1815, and further children in 1817, 1819 and 1821. The house must have been very crowded - by 1821 there would have been eight children living at home, the oldest (Amelia) then being 18.

John Adie did not get on with some of his tenants. In 1815 he complained under oath of being "in bodily dread" of William Johnson in Bardister and John and Magnus Johnson or Georgeson in Stapness. As we know, Magnus Georgeson was the husband of Anderina Robertson - there must have been threats of violence, perhaps connected with John's treatment of Anderina.

Other tenants were also troublesome. The house John rented in Bayhall was sub-let to multiple tenants, including one William Coutts and his family. Coutts not only built up rent arrears, but also proved to be a "very turbulent neighbour" to other tenants. John strove to evict him, resorting ultimately to court proceedings.

More money troubles

A small estate such as Stapness was never going to provide much profit, and John was struggling to maintain his family. In August 1817 he wrote to the naval authorities complaining that his half-pay was insufficient, and asking to be re-employed. The end of the Napoleonic war in 1815 meant that there were many unemployed naval officers looking for work, and it is not surprising that the Admiralty returned an unequivocal refusal.

In January 1819 John departed Shetland for Leith, for purposes unknown. He wrote to Mary Ann from Fraserburgh, and it is perhaps worth quoting his letter in full:

> *Saltoun Inn, Fraserburgh, 5pm Friday 22 January 1819*

My ever dearest Mary Ann

We by kind fortune got here this forenoon and lucky it was we did so for a very few hours after we came in we were saluted by a very severe passing gale - judging, my darling that you would be exceptionally uneasy on my account from the very unfavourable weather and contrary winds that have prevailed since my departure from Shetland I thought it best to take the first moment to let you know of my getting thus far safe and in tolerable health as perhaps ere we may get to Leith now it is possible the Coldstream may have sailed - and had no news been heard of us doubtless we would have been given up for lost, however my love should we get to Leith previous to that vessels leaving it I shall again write you. My spirits are you may be sure not at the highest in a strange place with only a few shillings and no one to advance me a farthing. I look forward my love, however, with hope for better days, when it may graciously please the Lord out of his infinite mercy and goodness to such an unworthy sinner as I am, as to permit me once more in happiness and worldly content to embrace you and my darling children.

I hope you have been able to get the man for James's boat from Culswick, and I would wish you to secure the whole by arls. The skipper has sufficient arls - he got two pounds sterling J…. and Mitchell each have got sixpence arls. Should any person come to arrest, dare them at their peril to touch an article, as you can instruct that nothing belongs to me, but to Mitchell the children by Mrs Gifford and Mr Gifford, and James by his own cash from the Lottery Ticket four years ago - but I shall write you more fully if the lord spares me to see Leith.

I got Mr Grierson to sign an affidavit in your name, stating you are between thirty and forty, to the best of your knowledge and belief, which I am in hopes will answer in place of the proper register, as I am determined, should I not have a farthing after, to ensure to you and my children every benefit from the surgeon's society possible, for should the lord be pleased out of his will to take me from you, I will have at least the happiness of dying with the fact that I have done all in my power to remunerate your goodness and love to me by leaving you and my children in as comfortable circumstances as my station in life would admit, but I trust t… we will yet meet, and the so…. to secure that our expenses and living must be most penurious, at least until all debts are cleared, and any article that can with any advantage be converted into money, must be done. I hope that you are well and Jessy, As also my sweet children. Accept of my love in the truest feelings of the heart to you, my children and Jessy, and believe me to be, with never ceasing affection, your fond husband

John Adie

Remember me to my servants and neighbours

Apart from the evidently perilous voyage, the main interest in this letter is his instructions to Mary Ann regarding the fishing. It's clear she was expected to be in charge of business while John was away.

To avoid having his possessions impounded by his creditors, the letter shows that John has started to exploit his young children by assigning them ownership of his boat and fishing gear. "James" is likely his eldest son (aged nine). "Mitchell", presumably of a similar age, is unknown. "Mrs Gifford and Mr Gifford" are almost certainly Arthur Gifford of Busta and his wife (or mother), who seem to have subsidised John's purchase of fishing gear. "Arls" was a payment which secured someone's services, binding them to their employer.

"Jessy" might be Jessie Gifford, youngest sister of Arthur Gifford. She and her husband John Scott were living at Sand House, where Jessie was expecting her third child. She was of an age with Mary Ann, and they both had small children, so were perhaps friends despite the distance between Sand and Walls. Such a friendship could conceivably be a factor in Busta's benevolence to John's family.

We can imagine Mary Ann's bemusement as she reads of her husband's desire to pay off his debts while simultaneously looking for an "advance" to add to them. His protestations of affection sit uncomfortably with his past and future infidelity. However, the concern for his penurious family in the event of his death seems genuine.

Around this time, John Adie's son by Charlotte Ramsey (now aged about 15) came to Stapness as a servant to the family. This young man was later to cause problems for Thomas, well after their father's death - but that is a story for another time.

Up until 1820 John seems to have managed to pay £42 annually every Whitsunday for the rent of Stapness. However, in May 1820 he asked Thomas Smith for more time to pay, so he would not have to borrow the money from friends. Smith (knowing John's history of financial dificulties) immediately raised an action in the Sheriff court, demanding immediate payment on pain of instant eviction. John's friends rallied round, and he managed to gather together

enough cash and “good bills” to meet the rent.

John needed to pay back his friends. In March 1820, he had attended the sickbed of Thomas James Thomson, the twelve-year-old son of local minister Reverend David Thomson. Sadly John was unable to save him, and the boy died on 22 March. In August, John wrote to the minister, demanding the substantial - indeed excessive - sum of £30 8s for “eleven days attendance”, and threatening prosecution if not paid within three days. The minister’s wife had to borrow the money from a relative.

In addition to the fishing and the doctoring, John was also involved in trading quoys and stots - female and male cattle - buying them from local crofters and selling on to merchants such as Hay and Ogilvy for slaughter and transport south. However, despite these attempts at turning a profit, he found himself in debt again - not an uncommon problem for small lairds at the time.

In 1822, John’s creditors William Baillie and Gilbert Robertson obtained writs to “arrest” (ie impound as security for debt) some goods which John had arranged to be sent from Leith. These articles (perhaps fishing gear?) were held by Charles Ogilvy (of Hay and Ogilvy), but somehow John managed to have the goods delivered to him. This led in 1823 to a complicated legal action by Robertson and Baillie against Ogilvy, involving also Robert Leslie, vendor of the goods in Leith, and William Taylor, agent for the sloop which transported the goods from Leith to Lerwick. John Adie, who had caused all this trouble, chose this time to vanish from Shetland.

Seafaring 1823-1826

In 1813, the East India Company (EIC) lost its monopoly on trade with the Far East and India (with a few exceptions) and from then on privately-owned ships, known within the EIC as “interlopers”, were able to trade there. Large profits could be made, not only by the shipowners but by individuals on board, trading privately on their own account. As well as the usual deck officers and seamen, the interlopers also required specialist officers such as masters, pursers and carpenters. And surgeons.

As a half-pay naval officer, John was expected to remain in Britain, available

for service should war break out. However, in July 1823 he wrote to the Admiralty requesting two years leave of absence from March 1824, in order to accept a situation as surgeon on board a "private trader" going to the East Indies. Permission was granted, subject to various conditions.

By September 1823, John was in London with his elder son James, then fifteen. Under his father's direction, James signed up as an apprentice with ship owners Thomas and Robert Brown of Church Row, Fenchurch Street, to learn "the Art of a Mariner".

Exactly when and on which ship John and his son departed for the East Indies is unknown. The voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to India could take four months or more, and, if they went to Malaysia, even longer. It's likely that they returned to London in 1825 but departed again on a second voyage. By March 1826 John had run out of Admiralty leave, but it was not until October 1826 that, having asked for a year's extension, he was given two years - but his half-pay was stopped.

Eventually, in November 1826, John and young James returned from Bombay to London. John dispatched their luggage to William Hay at Lerwick, making arrangements to disguise its ownership because "the peasantry are rather inquisitive" and so that his creditors would not impound it. Strangely, he made sure to let Hay know that the trunks contained his soiled underclothes, unwashed since Bombay. Perhaps this was to discourage investigation and pilferage of other, more valuable, contents!

In his letter to William Hay, John boasts that he and "Melbie"[7] had wined and dined the previous day with the Duke of Clarence, younger brother of the then king, George IV. The duke was well known for his informality and dislike of pomp. He had served as a naval captain under Nelson, and he and John had a mutual acquaintance in George Elliot, former captain of HMS Aurora, so the two men would have had more in common than you might think. In 1830 the duke succeeded to the throne as William IV, the "Sailor King".

A few days later, on 10 December 1826, John set off from London for home. For the three and a half years of his absence, Mary Ann had carried on at Stapness, not only looking after the household, but also the estate and the

[7] Presumably John Scott of Melby, Sandness (1760-1850).

fishings. She of course had no tiny babies to nurse during this period, though (as the doctor's wife) she does seem to have been relied on by the local midwife for help. She was careful with money, which she seems to have had enough of, despite pressure from her husband's creditors.

Voe 1827-1837

It seems that John's trading voyages were profitable, for there were no more litigious creditors - presumably he managed to pay off his debts. Disinclined to carry on with estate and fishing business, he resumed his medical work. The north of the islands, particularly Northmavine, seems at the time to have lacked a medical practitioner, and Christopher Sandison of Eshaness got up a petition to persuade Dr Adie to settle at Voe, from where he could reach much of the north mainland by sea.

As a freemason, John would have socialised with many of the local lairds, and Arthur Gifford of Busta (whose estate included much of Northmavine and Delting) also seems to have encouraged John to move.

Arthur Gifford's father Gideon had evicted a number of crofters around Olnafirth some time in the late 18th century and turned the area into a huge sheep farm. A Mr Welch was engaged as the manager or shepherd, and a house was built for him. The "Old House of Voe", as it came to be known, was located immediately west of the present-day house of Brungasta (built 1903), and it survived until the early years of the twentieth century.[8] The sheep farm eventually failed due to disease and, in the summer of 1827, John and his family moved into the Old House of Voe at Gifford's invitation.

[8] Old Voe House was of course a different building, on a different site, from today's Voe House, which was built around 1860 by Thomas Mountford Adie.

The old house of Voe, to the left of Brungasta. This image, taken around 1905-10, belongs to Shetland Museum and Archives. Permission must be sought before publication.

In January 1828 Mary Ann had another boy child. Gifford's patronage (and probable financial support) must have been of great assistance to John, who named his new son Arthur Gifford Adie in Busta's honour.

If you were unwell in 19th century Shetland, you had two options, just like today: either you could go to the doctor, or the doctor could come to you. Unless you lived very close by, the latter option was available only if you had enough money. In practice, only the lairds could afford to send for the doctor. For instance, when John Cheyne, laird of Tangwick, was ill, a boat was sent to Voe for Dr Adie, who arrived the next day and stayed for a couple of days. However, when Christopher Sandison's son Arthur was unwell, he made his own way from Eshaness to Voe one evening to consult the doctor.

In 1827, John inherited over £80 from his maternal aunt, Ann Sanders. This capital must have helped him build a "new house" the following year, part of which was used as a preaching house for visiting ministers and as a Sunday

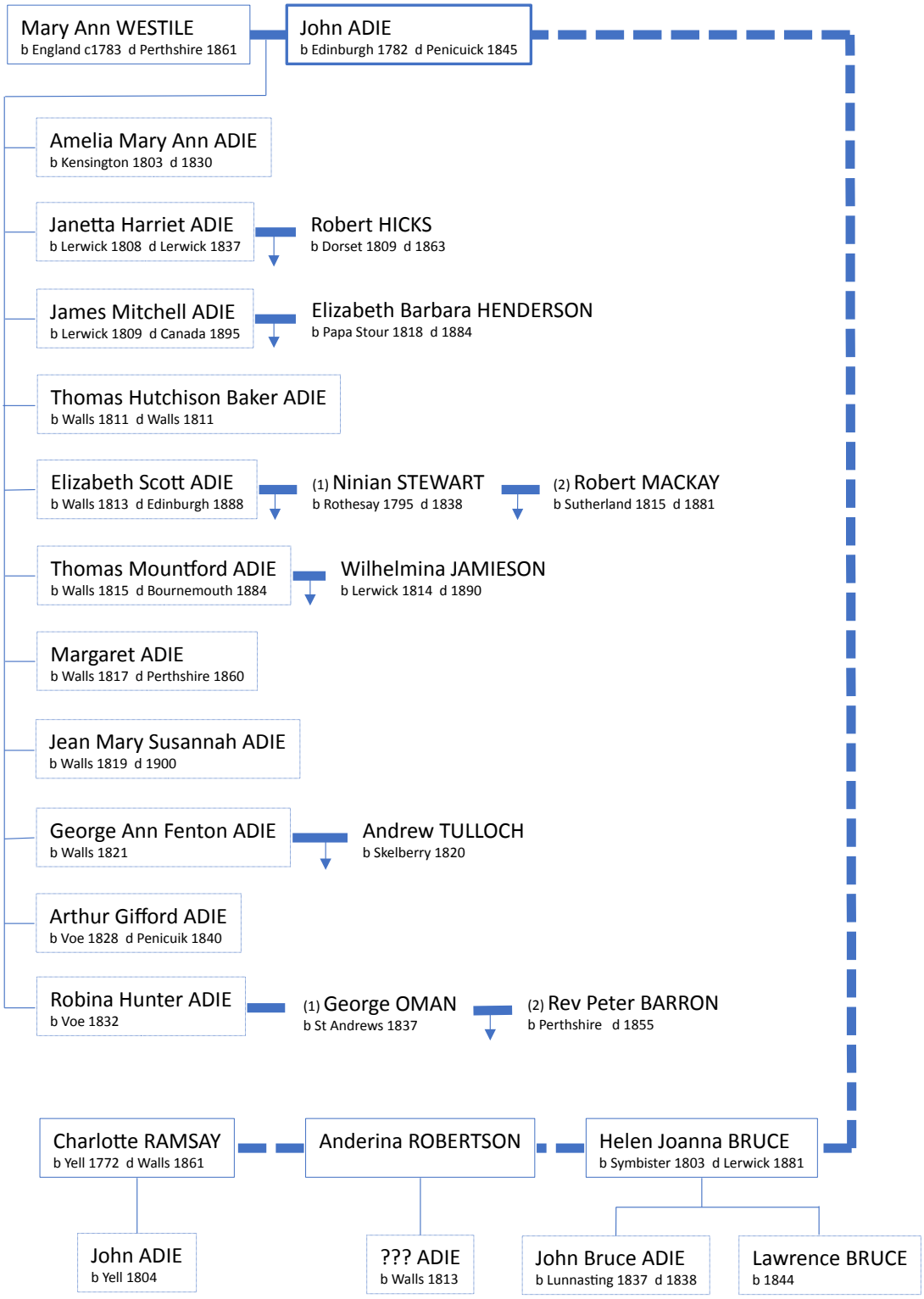
school. This “new house” is likely the smaller building abutting the west gable of the old house, visible in the photograph. Teachers in the Sunday-school included John’s daughters Eliza and Harriet, then aged 15 and 20.

Sadly their eldest sibling Amelia died at Voe in March 1830, aged 27. Born in 1803 when John was still in the navy, we know nothing about her life, nor indeed her death and burial, which went unrecorded in the parish register.

John’s half pay resumed in 1829 and there was enough money to send John and Mary Ann’s second son, Thomas, to school in Ayrshire. Thomas had not done well at school in Lerwick but in Ayrshire he flourished academically. From there he wrote (under the headmaster’s supervision) very carefully composed and neatly handwritten letters to his proud parents. He informed them that, due to poor eyesight, he was disinclined to become a surgeon like his father, and instead had decided to become a merchant.

On leaving school in August 1831, Thomas started in business, in partnership with brother James. They used part of the house - presumably the extension recently built by John - as a shop. There is not space here to record the early days of what eventually became T M Adie & Sons, but it is clear that profit from the brothers’ mercantile activities was an important source of income for the family.

Harriett married in July 1830, and Eliza married in April 1831. Their departure, and the birth of Mary Ann’s last child Robina Hunter Adie in June 1832, made for a household of seven children: James (23), Thomas (17), Margaret (15), Jean (13) George Ann (10), Arthur (4) and baby Robina.



John was no more faithful to his wife than previously. Writing in 1859, Thomas

explains:

> *... how I have tried to guard her* [his mother] *from her troubles she can tell - I have had it all to do there was none else who could - and while my father lived at home my presence in the house was all that made it supportable from the excited state of his mind at times - I have seen him at my mother's feet imploring her forgiveness & still he went on sinning ...*

We shall hear later what came of this infidelity.

Home affairs

One of the most intriguing documents in the Adie family papers is a scroll setting out the descent of John Adie from the Home family of Kello in Berwickshire. The rolled-up document is brownish-yellow and appears to have been varnished after it was written, presumably to stop the ink fading. It is written in a fine and careful hand, not John's. There is significant damage, but it is still quite legible. Internal evidence dates it to between 1825 and 1833. We shall discover shortly the relevance of this document to Shetland and to John Adie's story.

The scroll's intent seems to be, in part, to show how well-connected the Home of Kello family is. It underlines the Homes' relationship to most of the Scottish nobility:

> *The Humes or Homes claim very Ancient and noble descent and the family by several matches intermarried with many of the most considerable families in the Kingdom as well as the Blood Royal*

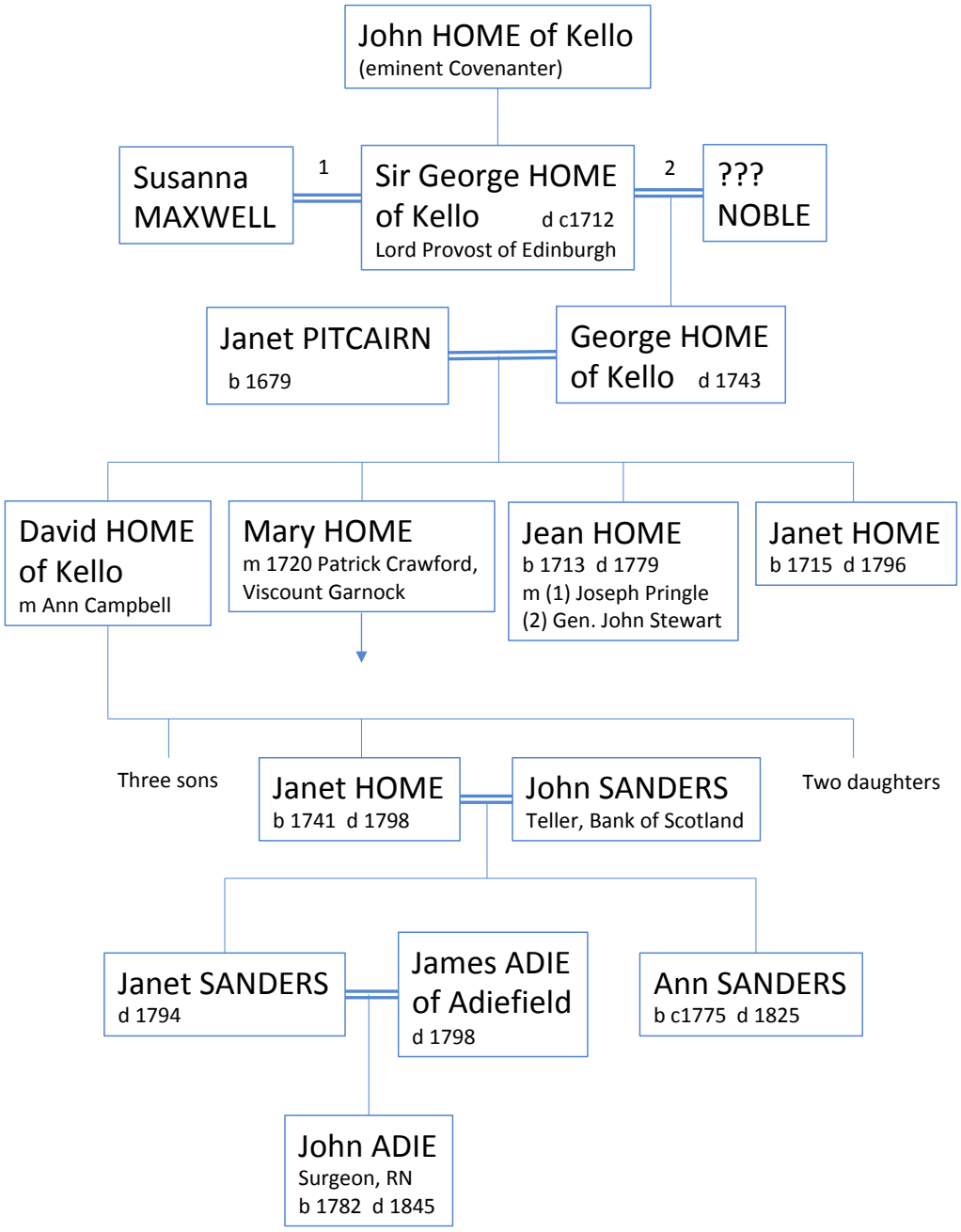
There follows lists of Dukes, Marquesses and Earls with whom relationship is claimed. The descent of the Home of Kello family starts with Sir David Home of Wedderburn, killed at the Battle of Flodden (1513). He had seven sons "who, from their warlike exploits, were styled the Spiers of Wedderburn."

The Homes of Kello were allegedly descended from the fourth "Spier" John Home; however the descent is not spelled out in our scroll until we come to

Sir George Home, married 1st to daughter of Sir James Maxwell, 2nd to daughter of Thomas Noble

To the scroll's author, the Christian names of these mere females were evidently unimportant compared to their fathers' names and title!

From other sources, we know that Sir George Home's father, John Home of Kello, was an eminent Covenanter and an ally of Oliver Cromwell. At the restoration in 1660, he and many others were prosecuted for high treason and had their estates confiscated. However, at the accession of William and Mary in 1688, George Home had most of the family property restored to him. Knighted by King William, Sir George was Lord Provost of Edinburgh from 1698 to 1700, and died about 1712.



Part of the family tree of the Homes of Kello

The descent continues with Sir George's son, George Home of Kello, who

married Janet Pitcairn, daughter of David Pitcairn of Dreghorn near Edinburgh. Four children of George and Janet are shown in the scroll, but we are principally concerned with the eldest son David Home of Kello, and his sister Jean Home, the heiress of Kello.

David Home inherited what remained of his father's and grandfather's estate. However

> *In consequence of a fatal duel with* [Mr] *Belches of Invermay who was courting his sister-in-law Meg Campbell, he* [David] *fled to France - Belches gave the challenge, and when dying spoke so favourably of Home's honourable conduct in the affair that all cognisances were intimated as dropt by Belches family - however he only returned to England* [sic] *when he died.*

Following this murderous incident, David Home's "affairs went to utter ruin" due in part to "folly and extravagance", and "for two generations, five goodly sons perished mostly in foreign lands [Jamaica] in their endeavours to raise the fallen fortunes of their family".

Extravagance was not the only drain on David Home's wealth. His sister Jean (1713-1779) alleged that her brother owed money to her and their sister Janet, and took legal action to take control of his property while David Home was "furth of Scotland" and unable to contest the matter. The legitimacy of these debts is unclear, but the action was successful, and among other assets, the scroll asserts that ownership of substantial lands and rents in Shetland passed to Jean and her sister:

> *96 Merks land in the Fair Isle, 96 in Quendale, 66 in Hellwell, 88 in Garth &c and Island of Moussay, holms called Colsay & all lying within the parochines of Dunrossness, Sandwick, Cunningsburgh & sick like &c and in like manner the hail parsonage and vickarage Tiends of said parochines also umboth Duty of Walls, Sandness, Foula and Papa and umboth Tiends thereto belonging.*

One of David's daughters, Janet Home, married John Sanders, who was a teller at the Bank of Scotland. Their daughter Janet Sanders was John Adie's mother, making John the great-grand-nephew of Jean Home, and direct descendent of her brother David Home of Kello, the murderer of Mr Belches of Invermay.

A card with a painted representation of the Home coat of arms. On the reverse, in John Adie's handwriting, it says "Coat of Arms of my Mother's Family. J. Adie".

In the late 1820s, following the death of a childless second cousin, John arranged to have himself legally recognised as heir to the long-dead Jean Home, and thus inherited what remained of her property. This amounted merely to a tenement in Liberton's Wynd, Edinburgh, which was standing in the way of the construction of George IV Bridge. The legal process took several years, and it was not until 1834, after construction of the new bridge was finished, that the sale of the (presumably by then demolished!) property to the Commissioners for City Improvements was completed. The £140 proceeds from the sale must have been a welcome boost to John's resources.

John would in his youth have known his grandmother Janet Home, who died when John was 16. He was probably well aware of the property in Shetland which her father had owned, and we can speculate whether this knowledge, and

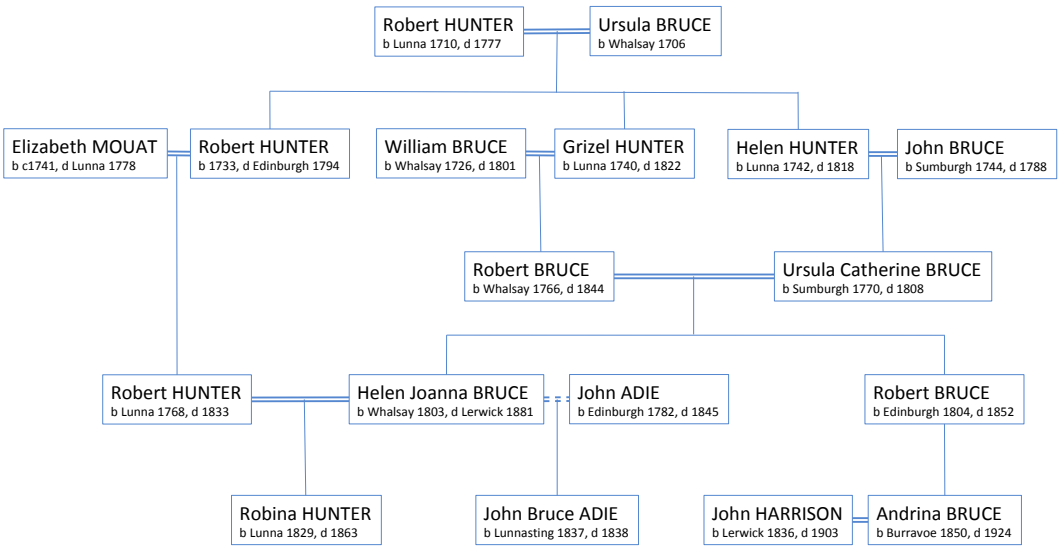
the prospect of an inheritance, influenced his decision to move there. However, the Shetland property must have been disposed of before John was able to inherit it.

Hunters and Bruces

One of the most striking episodes in John Adie's life is his relationship with Helen Joanna Bruce, daughter of Robert Bruce of Symbister, and her husband Robert Hunter of Lunna.

Helen Bruce was born in Symbister in November 1803. Her paternal and maternal grandmothers were sisters, daughters of Robert Hunter of Lunna (1710-1777) and Ursula Bruce. Helen's parents were thus first cousins. In eighteenth-century Shetland, the number of landowning families was relatively small, and it was almost impossible to avoid marrying your cousin. There had been much intermarriage between the Bruce and Hunter families, and Helen's antecedents included Bruce landowners in Sumburgh as well as Whalsay.

Another first cousin of Helen's parents was Robert Hunter of Lunna (1768-1833), the third of his name. He lived for several years in England, and on his return home to Lunna he married, in August 1824, the twenty-year-old Helen Bruce, 35 years his junior. According to rumour at the time, Hunter believed his young wife was to inherit (or be given) about £10,000 from her father and, presumably in expectation of this, the marriage settlement provided for an annuity of £200 to Helen in the (likely) event of Robert predeceasing her. This was quite a large sum, roughly half the annual income which Robert was believed to derive from the estate of Lunna. The expected £10,000 did not materialise, and the relationship between Robert Hunter and his father-in-law (and first cousin) Robert Bruce of Symbister was rumoured to be consequently somewhat cool.



A portion of the family tree of the Bruce and Hunter families. Many family members are omitted for clarity. The intricacy of the inter-relationships defeats two-dimensional portrayal and almost overwhelms mental capacity.

Robert Hunter was, "though eccentric in some things, of a very benevolent and mild disposition", while his wife had a very different character; their marriage was not thought to be "so happy as could be wished". Nevertheless, the couple had four children, though their three sons died in infancy, only their daughter, Robina (born 1829) surviving into adulthood.

Robert Hunter was "occasionally subject to severe attacks of illness in his head". He would send word to Lerwick for Dr Arthur Edmonton to attend him at Lunna, and the good doctor would reside at Lunna for a few days to administer treatment and monitor his patient's recovery. However, as travel to and from Lerwick was slow and difficult, particularly if weather prevented sailing, sometimes Dr John Adie at Voe would be sent for instead.

John seems to have spent much time at Lunna. He was only 14 years younger than Robert, so the two men would have had more in common than John had

with Helen, 21 years younger than him. In fact, John named his youngest daughter (born in 1832) Robina Hunter Adie, after his friend (and likely creditor).

In late summer 1833, Robert was unwell, and called for Dr Edmonton, who attended for a short time. About a fortnight later, he was again ill, and John Adie was either sent for, or happened to be in the house. After a few days confinement to bed, Robert Hunter of Lunna died on the 26th September 1833, aged 65.

Then the rumours started. After only a few days, placards were posted up in Lerwick on window shutters and doors, insinuating that Robert Hunter had met his death by foul means. The placards did not specify who the murderer might be, but suspicion had fallen on John Adie.

John was devastated by these rumours. About four weeks after Robert's death, he wrote in great agitation a Will, in which he expressed his feelings at length, with little regard to sentence construction. Here is an extract:

> *In the name of God, Amen - I, John Adie, Surgeon in the Royal Navy, finding my bodily health and strength becoming impaired in consequence of diseased action of my System excited by fatigue of Body and Mind, from want of rest, and anxiety in the performance of my professional duty and which I feel is becoming still more so through the very base and most malignant insinuations of sanguinary and diabolical malice invented and published by some Hell-hound of an Enemy or Enemies for the evident purpose, if possible, of for ever destroying my heretofore untainted Medical Reputation for assiduity of attention tenderness of care and sympathy of affection, which has been co-existant for ever with my nature, and manifested by my conduct to all and Sundry, High and low, Rich and poor, who favoured my humble pretensions or regarded by Medical Skill…*

Etcetera for several paragraphs (or what might have been paragraphs if composed in a calmer state of mind).

Meanwhile, the Procurator Fiscal in Lerwick had taken notice of these placards. Although reluctant to proceed on the basis of an anonymous and unsubstantiated rumour, he enclosed one of the placards in a letter to John Bruce of Sumburgh, Robert Hunter's nephew and first cousin of his widow. John Bruce was then at Lunna, with Helen's father and brother from Whalsay, comforting the (presumably) sorrowing Helen. Bruce's response conveyed no

suspicions, and the Fiscal (bearing in mind that the Bruce men were all Justices of the Peace) let things be.

It is possible that the Bruce family may not have been excessively sorry at Robert's death. As we've seen, there was some antipathy between him and the Whalsay Bruces and, given that young Helen was inheriting a substantial income, they may well have been quite satisfied with how things had turned out. Perhaps there was no incentive to look too closely into who in the household might have had the opportunity to hurry Robert out of the world.

Elopement

John Adie continued to visit Lunna after Robert's death. Helen Bruce perhaps required medical attention. While Dr Adie was by some accounts "without any bodily or mental attractions to recommend him to the notice of women", she nevertheless found him a charming and engaging companion. Despite their substantial age difference, friendship seems to have blossomed into love, and Helen fell pregnant.

This occasioned much social opprobrium, and some sniggering among the young. A relation of Helen's wrote to an acquaintance:

> *I have just heard a nice little bit of Scandal, which is almost too good for vulgar ears, that Mrs Hunter of Lunna … is near her confinement - it must be a wondrous babe, since it has been at least three years in forming, her husband being dead at least that time*

John Bruce Adie was born in February 1837, and John Adie acknowledged paternity. A great deal of stigma was attached to women who were not married to their child's father, and there is little doubt that Helen would have been seriously affected by the disapprobation of Shetland's gentry, to an extent that is difficult to appreciate fully from today's perspective. John Adie came in for severe criticism and probable ostracism, given that he was already married. Chief among the sufferers from his adultery was, of course, Mary Ann.

The rumours of foul play which had circulated in 1833 now returned with much greater force. Was it possible that Helen and John had conspired to poison her

husband, to conduct more readily their illicit relationship? Captain William Cameron of Belmont, Unst certainly thought so. His wife Margaret Mouat was yet another first cousin to the deceased Robert Hunter, and he wrote to the Procurator Fiscal, sternly demanding to know what action had been taken to investigate the rumours. Dissatisfied with the Fiscal's reply, Captain Cameron wrote to his Edinburgh lawyer setting out the circumstances, accusing the "monster" John Adie, and seeking advice. The cautious lawyer, aware of the possible financial consequences of slander, advised that no action be taken, and Cameron seems to have dropped the matter. It is through their exchange of letters in 1837 that we know so much about what happened.

The social pressure on both Helen and John must have been enormous, and they fled Shetland together, taking their baby son. Helen left behind her seven-year-old daughter Robina, while John abandoned his wife and large family. He was never to return to Shetland.

By August 1837 they were established in Gardners Crescent, Edinburgh. They seem to have lived off Helen's £200 annuity from her late husband's estate, and John's meagre naval surgeon's half-pay. John maintained communication with his family in Voe, and there survives a brief and pathetic letter to his five-year-old daughter Robina, who was fretting for her father. In January 1838, Helen and John's baby died, and it was probably after this that John's young son Arthur Gifford Adie joined his father in Scotland.

In early 1839, John bought South Bank House, in the grounds of an old brewery between Auchendinny and Penicuik, south of Edinburgh. The purchase price of £370 was paid in three annual instalments, funded by Helen's annuity.

It appears that John and Helen initially pretended to be father and daughter - the difference in their ages made the deception quite credible. Helen seems to have used her middle name Joanna at this time, to avoid being linked to the Shetland scandal. Unfortunately for them, suspicions were aroused despite these precautions. John found it necessary in August 1840 to arrange a sham marriage between "my daughter Joanna Adie and Richard Bell, solicitor-at-law, Bowchurch Yard, London". He paid the Session Clerk £1 (rather an excessive amount, so probably a bribe) to have the banns proclaimed at the parish church, and to enter the marriage into the register. There is no independent evidence of

the existence of Richard Bell.

Sadly, the young Arthur Adie died in October 1840, aged 12, leaving John and Helen alone in the house apart from a teenage servant girl (whose virtue, we are obliged to assume, was undoubtedly at risk from her employer).

In November 1840, John wrote to Thomas at Voe, and his letter reveals some of his feelings about his family. He laments the death of his son Arthur, who "was the only child … that paid the deferential love to me as a father". He contrasts Arthur's love for him with another, unnamed, child (not Thomas) who had written a stinging letter of rebuke, and describes the estrangement he felt from family life even when living at Voe. He writes:

> *the moment a meal was swallowed I would be left alone when at home and not infrequently my family assembled in convivial enjoyment in a separate apartment above when I was never invited or asked to participate*

As an afterthought on the outside of the letter, he bemoans the heavy pressure from his creditors and ingratiatingly asks his son for a loan of £30 to £40, promising to repay with interest the following July. My initial hope that Thomas ignored this outrageous plea was dashed by the discovery that he lent his father several sums of money over the next few years, at least some of which loans were repaid using Helen's money.

Death

By 1844 John was in failing health. On 22 January 1845, Helen Bruce composed a letter, as from John to Thomas his son, informing the latter that John wished to leave all his property to their four-month-old son Lawrence (surnamed Bruce not Adie), or to Helen Bruce herself, should Lawrence predecease her. At the foot of the letter, a clearly very ill John scrawled his signature, perhaps under duress, or in ignorance of its content. One week later, on Wednesday 29 January 1845, John Adie died aged 62.

On John's death, Helen cleared South Bank House of furniture and most other moveable property, but the house itself was held in John's name, so she could not sell it. At that time, "heritable property" such as a house could not be

bequeathed in a will - it passed to the heir of the deceased, usually his oldest son. Helen therefore raised a summons against James Mitchell Adie for the cost of the house, and for some money which she had given John. There was an out-of-court settlement (negotiated it seems by Thomas), and James got about £100 from the proceeds of the house sale. Thomas recovered about £40 from John's account in the Commercial Bank of Scotland, which was distributed among Mary Ann and John's other children.

In September 1846, Helen Bruce (or Hunter or Bell - take your pick) married Dr Thomas Richmond, a surgeon from Paisley, thus adding another surname to her collection. (Baby Lawrence had apparently died by this time.) After a spell in Campbeltown, Argyll, the couple emigrated to Ontario in 1848, where Dr Richmond worked in Gananoque on the St Lawrence river. Following her disgrace and adventures with John Adie, this Canadian period must have been a welcome era of respectability and prosperity for Helen.

Thomas Richmond died in Gananoque in 1870. Helen stayed on in Canada, where she was soon joined by her niece Andrina Bruce and husband John Harrison of Lerwick. Their first child was born there in 1875. Shortly afterwards, the Harrisons, together with Helen, moved back to Lerwick, where Helen used her accumulated capital to establish John Harrison as manager in a fish-curing business under the name of Richmond and Company.

My great aunt Mona, who died in 1965, remembered seeing Mrs Richmond in a black cloak and red bonnet at church in Lerwick when she was a child - this must have been about 1880. Mona's parents were scandalised that "that woman" was bold enough to drive around town in her carriage, instead of hiding herself in shame!

Helen Joanna Bruce died in the Harrison family home at 89 Commercial Street, Lerwick on the 6th of May 1881, in her late seventies. Her estate was valued at over £3,000, mostly invested in ownership or part-ownership of fish-curing stock and fishing vessels. She had led a life almost as erratic and eventful as her erstwhile paramour, John Adie.

Epilogue

This account of John Adie's life is seamed through with "it seems that …", "perhaps …" and "we can surmise that …". There is much we still don't know for sure. Why did John really come to Shetland? Did he and Helen really conspire to poison her husband?

What we do know of his life comes from a diverse assortment of sources, mostly in faint brown handwriting, which have somehow survived down the years. Some sources (eg the naval records) are meticulous, factual and presumably unbiased; to rely too heavily on some others, however, is to accept a possibly skewed perspective. For instance, some of our knowledge rests on scrupulously preserved legal documents, which give undue prominence to dispute and conflict. The Adie family papers comprise documents which John's immediate descendants thought worth keeping, and which perhaps tend to support a less-than-charitable view of his life.

Although it is rather difficult to find evidence in any of these sources of John's good character, we can perhaps rely on visitors' accounts of Dr Adie's hospitality. Robert Dunn, an ornithologist[9] who visited Shetland in the early 1830s, wrote regarding Olnafirth:

> *anyone visiting the place must be indebted to the kindness and liberality of Dr Addy, who has a neat comfortable house near the town, and whose door is always open to strangers visiting the country. Many others along with myself can bear testimony to his hospitality.*

Similarly, Mr McIntosh, an itinerant Methodist preacher, writes in 1828:

> *Near three miles, in an easterly direction from Grobsness, a little from the head of Olnasfirth - Voe, the residence of Dr Adie. I often call at this gentleman's house, and always meet with a hearty reception, and a comfortable home; so do all the preachers when passing this way. There we have a fine society.*

From these accounts, John comes across (at this time in his life) as an outgoing, sociable individual, well able to command the confidence of his friends and

[9] His "ornithology" seems to have consisted of shooting birds and skinning them for later stuffing.

patients, despite the ineffective and sometimes dangerous remedies he administered.

In contrast, plenty of evidence of John's bad behaviour is available - his chronic infidelity, his indebtedness and disdain for his creditors, and even grossly overcharging his patients. It does seem that the embarrassment his family felt was justified.

Perhaps the real hero of this lengthy and somewhat subjective chronicle is not John but his mysterious wife, Mary Ann Westile. Born somewhere in England in the early 1780s, she was shipped out to India at a very early age. Her education was evidently neglected and she remained illiterate. Her parents may have died, and the teenage girl was sent (or escaped) back to a homeland she hardly knew. Pregnant, she was fortunate that her young lover married her. After a few years in London, Mary Ann and her daughter were uprooted by her frequently-absent husband and transported to remote and chilly Lerwick. The contrast with India could hardly be greater.

For the next fifteen years, she was constantly either pregnant or nursing a baby, and while her children and the household economy would have been her main concerns, she was also expected to look after business when her husband was away. His prolonged absence at sea in the mid 1820s must nevertheless have been a welcome relief in some ways. One can only wonder what her true feelings were on receiving news of John's return.

In the 1830s, having endured the death of her eldest child, and subsequently the birth of her youngest, Mary Ann's other children gradually married and left home - the exception of course being Thomas who, with his wife Willa, was clearly a great support to her. That support must have helped Mary Ann to cope with her husband's ongoing adultery and eventual flight in 1837, but the death of her second child Harriet later that same year must have been another devastating blow. Five of her eleven children predeceased her.

After her husband's death, as his widow Mary Ann was entitled to a small pension of about £27 per annum from the Admiralty, meaning she no longer had to depend quite so much on Thomas. Towards the end of her life she moved with her two remaining unmarried daughters to Dunning in Perthshire, to live with her youngest daughter Robina, the young widow of the local minister.

There Mary Ann died in 1861, much lamented and loved by her family, unlike her despicable husband.