

## Maryfield, Duns

David McLean (2026)



### Introduction

Maryfield lies at the foot of Murray Street in Duns; it is one of the earliest of the new properties built around the outskirts of the town in the nineteenth century. Already named 'Maryfield', it appears on John Wood's 1824 map of Dunse and may have been constructed some considerable time before that. It was built by John Henderson, a lawyer in Dunse, as a classical villa with a Tuscan doorway, complete with a decorative pilaster (column) on either side. Its style is very similar to the neighbouring property called the Barniken which was built slightly later; in fact, there are some architectural features which are identical. It has been speculated that both houses (and, perhaps, some other properties in the town) were the work of a respected Haddington architect called James Burn. Burn died in 1816 but his plans were used by a family member who carried on his business. Maryfield was altered in the later nineteenth century by having an extension built on to the rear but this was sensitively done in keeping with the original architectural style. The house is currently category B listed.

It was not uncommon for lawyers to build or purchase substantial properties in the nineteenth century since it was one of the most lucrative professions of the time. With the agricultural and industrial revolutions, there was a steady rise in business, commerce, banking, property

development and the like which all provided regular and financially rewarding work for lawyers who frequently doubled as banking and insurance agents; Dunse was like other prospering places in usually having a number of legal practices operating in the town at any one time.



*Plasterwork ceilings and cornices at Maryfield*

### **The Henderson Family at Maryfield**

John Henderson, writer (lawyer), married Elizabeth Smith in Dunse in 1830; Elizabeth's father was John Smith, a surgeon (doctor) in the town. There is a family tree at the end of this paper. They named their second child James Scot Henderson but he died at the age of ten months in 1834. They repeated the name when their fifth child was born in 1838 – it is for this reason that the name James Scot Henderson appears twice in the same generation of the family tree. At the 1841 census, we find John Henderson, age 54, with his wife Elizabeth, age 44, their four surviving children and two servants, living at Maryfield.

By the time of the 1851 census, John Henderson had retired and the family had moved to a property in Newtown Street. John Henderson junior at the age of 15 was working as a lawyer's apprentice and, even more surprising, their other son, James Scot Henderson, was listed as a banker's apprentice although he was only 12!

However, James Scot Henderson did not remain in the banking business. He developed a highly distinguished literary career, apparently able to speak five languages and being a protege of Thomas Carlyle, the famous Scottish historian and philosopher. James Scot Henderson became editor of the Edinburgh Courant and then moved to London to edit the Globe. Just as his literary talent was beginning to be seriously recognised, his life was cut short in 1883 at the age of 45 – by overwork, some said. His older brother, John Henderson junior, also built a successful career, emigrating to Canada where he eventually became 'town clerk' of the city of Ottawa; he returned to visit his home town of Duns in 1906.

John Henderson, who built Maryfield, died at his Newtown Street home in 1858 after suffering a stroke and his wife Elizabeth also died there in 1879. In the following year, their sons John Henderson and James Scot Henderson commissioned a stained-glass window in

Dunse Parish Church in memory of their parents. It shows Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and is inscribed '*Dedicated in memory of John Henderson, writer Dunse, and Elizabeth Smith, his wife, by their sons. 1880*'.



*Henderson memorial window in Duns Parish Church*

### **The Misses Purves at Maryfield**

As we have seen, the Hendersons moved from Maryfield to a property in Newtown Street at some point between 1841 and 1851. Members of the Purves family were the next to occupy Maryfield and one of them would remain in the house for almost 50 years.

Allan Purves married Christian Watherston in Dunse (both lived in the town) in 1799. Between 1800 and 1822, they had eleven children including twin daughters born in 1814; the Purves family tree can also be found at the end of this paper. At the time of his marriage, Allan Purves was described as a teacher and the same occupation is listed on the birth records of his first three children. But he then had a change of career path when he became factor for William Hay of Dunse Castle and an agent for the Bank of Scotland; he also ran a grocer shop.

Allan Purves died in 1844 around the age of 65. Two of his sons, William and Thomas, succeeded him as bank agents and another son, Archibald, took over the grocer shop. It was

probably around the time of Allan Purves' death that his widow, Christian, and her two oldest daughters, Christiana and Margaret, purchased Maryfield from John Henderson since they are found there at the 1851 census with a servant. Christiana and Margaret never married. Together with their mother, they lived very comfortably from invested money and from renting out a couple of other properties which they owned in the town, in the Market Place and at Blinkbonny.

Christian Purves died in Maryfield in 1869 at the age of 90; her two daughters continued to live together in the house, usually with two servants in the form of a cook and a housemaid. The 'Misses Purves' as they were invariably designated in the Berwickshire News became particularly known for their charitable work. In 1870, they were gathering bandages and other medical supplies to help suffering soldiers and civilians caught up in the Franco-Prussian War. They regularly donated money and vegetables to the Dunse Soup Kitchen and looked after the poor of the town in a variety of other ways.

As well as employing two house servants, the Purves sisters also employed a gardener and coachman called Robert Waite; he lived at Blinkbonny with his wife and children, perhaps in the property owned by his employers. Waite was an enthusiastic supporter of the annual horticultural shows in the town, regularly winning prizes, especially in the flower categories. When his successes were reported in the newspapers, he was invariably referred to as 'Robert Waite, Maryfield'. In 1881, Waite retired from competition and, as a result, a 'considerable blank' was noticed in the entries for the flower and vegetable show that summer; he had supported his local horticultural society for 30 years. Robert Waite died in Duns in 1883 at the age of 62.

Christiana Purves died in Maryfield in 1881 at the age of 81. The health of her sister, Margaret, must have deteriorated at some point over the next ten years since, at the 1891 census, she was living in the house with a medical and surgical nurse and the usual two servants. Margaret Purves died in Maryfield at the age of 87 in 1892. The Berwickshire News reported the death of a 'venerable lady' who had been one of the oldest inhabitants of Duns and the 'last surviving member of an old local family' – the newspaper meant, of course, that she was the last surviving member of her generation. She had 'long manifested a deep interest in not a few deserving poor in our town'.

In her will, Margaret Purves left estate, including properties and extensive share-holdings, worth almost £70,000; in today's values, this would have given her the purchasing power of a multi-millionaire. She left a large number of legacies to various family members, to local doctors and to her servants, including her nurse and gardener. And she did not forget the poor, leaving money to the Parish Church to purchase coals for the needy. The remainder of her estate, including Maryfield and her other Duns properties, was left to her nephew Andrew Lockie who was the son of her sister Janet. In 1831, Janet Purves had married a nurseryman and seedsman from Kelso called Andrew Lockie. In 1833, they had a son whom they named Andrew in turn – this was the Andrew Lockie who, around the age of 60, inherited the bulk of Margaret Purves' estate. Lockie was a tea merchant with an address in Surrey. In the valuation rolls for 1892 through 1895, Andrew Lockie is registered as owner and occupier of Maryfield and owner of the other houses in the Market Place and at Blinkbonny.

## Maryfield and Doctors in the Twentieth Century

There is some evidence that Maryfield lay empty for a few years after 1895 but, for a brief period around 1900, it was the rented home of Alexander Middlemas Laidlaw and his wife Isabella before they purchased Wellfield. He was one of the Laidlaw family who operated the blanket mills at Cumledge. But, in 1902, 'that valuable property in Duns known as Maryfield' was advertised for sale or to let. It was in 'first class condition', consisting of three public rooms, six bedrooms, a bathroom with hot and cold water and the usual kitchen and servants' accommodation. Entry would be possible at Whitsun (late May) 1903, presumably the termination date of the Laidlaws' lease.

Maryfield, however, failed to attract a buyer and so, in July 1903, the property (which had a rental value of £70 per year) was offered for sale at auction in the town hall. It again failed to sell but, shortly afterwards, it was purchased privately by **Dr John Mackenzie**, the first of a series of medical practitioners who would own the house. Mackenzie worked in medical partnership with Dr John MacWatt who lived across the road in Morelands although the two men dissolved their partnership in 1912 to practise individually.

Soon after purchasing Maryfield, Mackenzie was pleading in the local Lands Valuation Appeals Court against the rental value of £70 placed on the property by the assessor and on which figure Mackenzie's rates were calculated. His solicitor pointed out that the house had stood empty for a while, had been let for a considerably lower figure before the Laidlaws became tenants and had recently sold only with difficulty 'after it had been found impossible to sell it by auction'; he argued that £55 would be a fairer annual rental value. As often happened in such cases, the Appeals Court compromised somewhere between the existing valuation and what was being requested by the appellant by setting a figure of £30 for the following six months.

In 1904, Mackenzie proposed a deal with Duns Town Council that, in return for him giving them a strip of his land adjoining the public park, they would move one of the gas lamps in Murray Street to a position just outside his gate. However, when the council discovered that the doctor had also stipulated that the lamp should remain lit throughout the night, the deal fell through. Dr John Mackenzie retired in 1929 and moved to Cumbria where he died at the age of 82 in 1944.

Maryfield was next purchased by another medical practitioner, **Dr Herbert John Davidson** who was born in Melrose in 1892. He qualified as a doctor from Edinburgh University shortly after the start of the Great War and immediately joined up for service with the Royal Army Medical Corps. He served on the Western Front and, in March 1917, was awarded the Military Cross with this citation :

*'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He tended the wounded in a forward area under very heavy fire. He set a splendid example to all ranks.'*

In January 1918, Captain Davidson was reported missing but he had, in fact, been captured as a prisoner of war; he was released in April of the same year and returned to his home town of Melrose.

Following Dr John Mackenzie's retiral in 1929, Davidson came to practise in Duns and appears as owner of Maryfield in the valuation rolls of 1930 through 1934. He did not stay in Duns for very long, however, and was back in Melrose as a medical practitioner, probably in 1935, certainly by 1937. He never married and was found dead in bed as the result of a heart attack at the age of 59 in 1951.



*North-east elevation and driveway of Maryfield*

Around 1935, Maryfield became home to its third medical doctor in succession when it was bought by **Dr Felix Patrick Meehan**. He qualified as a doctor from Glasgow University in the years just after the Great War. He then served for a time in Persia (modern-day Iran), as medical officer to the Anglo-Persian Oil Corporation (later British Petroleum or BP) and it was there, in 1925, that he met Ann Barclay Strathdee who had been appointed to the nursing service in the oilfields, having previously worked at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. They were married in 1928 in St Sylvester's Roman Catholic Church in Elgin. They came to Duns in 1935 when Meehan took over a medical practice in the town (presumably that of Dr Herbert Davidson); he had certainly purchased Maryfield by 1938.

Dr Felix Meehan died of phthisis (a form of tuberculosis) at Maryfield in 1955 at the age of 59, survived by his wife and two sons. A requiem mass was held for him at the chapel in Duns before his funeral at Mount Vernon Cemetery in Edinburgh. His wife, Ann Barclay Meehan, died in Edinburgh in 1972 at the age of 73.

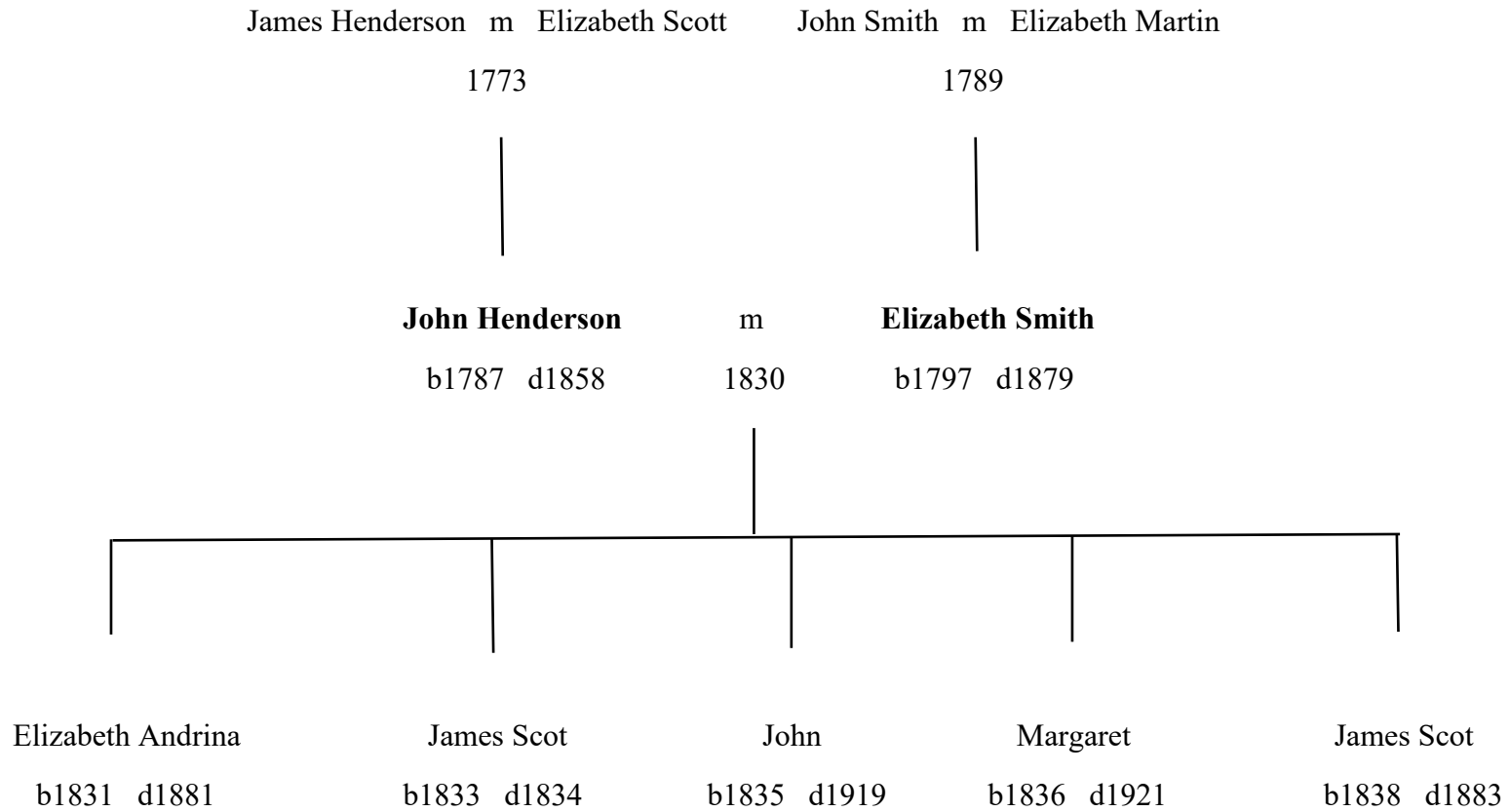
Maryfield received its fourth medical owner in **Dr Herbert Bruce Auld** who was born in Liverpool in 1926 and qualified from Glasgow University in 1949. After serving in Austria with the Devonshire Regiment (his national service with the post-war army of occupation), he

joined a medical practice in Duns in the early 1950s. His two partners died within 18 months of his arrival in the town, one probably being the above Dr Meehan, leaving him as senior partner; it would be around this time that he purchased Maryfield. Originally, he practised from a room in the house – as previous doctors would have done – until moving to the purpose-built surgery at the new Knoll hospital which opened in 1976. In 1956, Dr Bruce Auld and his wife Grizel had a son whom they named Bruce. In turn, **Bruce Auld** junior went on to qualify in medicine and he returned to practise as a GP in his home town of Duns, eventually bringing up his own family in Maryfield. Dr Bruce Auld senior moved in retirement to Perthshire and died in 2000; Dr Bruce Auld junior is retired and lives locally.

*The information in this paper has been researched from various newspapers of the time (especially the Berwickshire News and the Southern Reporter) and from public records – census; valuation rolls; wills and testaments; and birth, marriage and death records.*

**David McLean (2026)**

# Henderson (Maryfield, Duns) Family Tree



**Purves (Maryfield, Duns) Family Tree**

