

Haymount, Duns

David McLean (2024)



Introduction

Haymount, at the foot of Bridgend in Duns, was one of the earliest of the ‘new’ houses built by more prosperous citizens who wished to live away from the town centre. It was constructed in the early nineteenth century and appears on John Wood’s 1824 map of Dunse; extensions were made to the house in the mid-nineteenth century and it is likely that the coach-house and stable were also added then. It is probably the trickiest property in the town to research, mainly because the name ‘Haymount’ was originally given not to a house but to the tract of land which stretched southwards from Bridgend. Eventually, four villas were built on that land but they were not at first distinguished by individual names. In particular, the houses which came to be called Haymount, Morelands and Blythebank were collectively listed in the early years as ‘Haymount’ (sometimes numbered, sometimes not) by census takers and the compilers of valuation rolls. After serving as a dwelling house for almost a century, the property now known as Haymount became a cottage hospital for much of the twentieth century before reverting to its original purpose. Today, it is Category B listed.

The Logans at Haymount

The 1841 census is the earliest available record for Haymount when we find Ann Logan, single, age 60, living in the house with her niece Anne Logan, age 14 and a servant. Anne Logan (the niece) was born in 1827 at Hassington Mains, Eccles where her father was tenant farmer. However, Anne was very soon an orphan with the death of her mother (Agnes Logan MS Thomson) in 1828 at the age of 40 and her father (John Logan) in 1829 at the age of 53. This will explain why Anne came to live with her aunt in Dunse. Anne and her aunt, together with a servant, were still living in Haymount at the 1851 census. Four years later, in 1855, Anne Logan married a Dunse medical practitioner by the name of Robert Charles MacWatt.

Robert Charles MacWatt at Haymount

At this point, it is necessary to explain that the MacWatts were a fairly extensive local family and records over many years randomly spelled their names as 'McWatt' and 'MacWatt'. Since the 'MacWatt' spelling seemed to become more established with the passage of time, that is the spelling consistently used in this paper, regardless of the records.

Robert Charles MacWatt, born in 1828, was the son of David MacWatt, a writer (solicitor) in Dunse and procurator in the Berwickshire Sheriff Court who married Alice Purves in 1815. Between 1816 and 1835, they had no fewer than twelve children; there is a family tree at the end of this paper. This tree shows the names Archibald William and Charles Purves appearing twice. When a child died at a young age, it was not uncommon at that time for parents to repeat the name for a later child. In this case, Archibald William MacWatt (born in 1821) died at the age of 12 as a result of falling from a horse; the same name was given to a son born three years later in 1835. It has not been possible to establish what happened to the first Charles Purves MacWatt, born in 1823.

At the 1841 census, the family were living in Black Bull Street and Robert Charles MacWatt was 13, presumably still at school. Thereafter, he went to university (probably Edinburgh) to study medicine and, at the 1851 census, he was back living with his parents in Dunse, now in Currie Street; at the age of 22, he was listed as 'physician, surgeon and general practitioner'.

In 1855, Robert Charles MacWatt (26) married Anne Logan (27) of Haymount. The officiating minister at the ceremony in Edinburgh was Robert's older brother, James MacWatt, then minister of Saltoun parish in East Lothian. Robert MacWatt then went to live in Haymount with his wife and her aunt.

As can be seen from the family tree, Robert and Anne MacWatt had five children between 1856 and 1865. Tragedy struck the family the following year, however, when Anne MacWatt died in 1866 at the age of 39 after suffering complications following a miscarriage. Her aunt, Ann Logan, died in Haymount at the age of 87 the following year. Robert MacWatt re-married in 1868; his second wife was Christian Pringle Rutherford, the daughter of a tenant farmer. There was one child from this second marriage – a girl named Mary Alice, usually called May.

MacWatt remained in medical practice in Dunse for almost half a century, a well-liked and much respected country doctor. He was also Medical Officer of Health for Berwickshire. On his death in 1897 at the age of 69, Haymount was sold for conversion to a cottage hospital and Robert MacWatt's widow, Christian MacWatt, moved to Edinburgh. She died suddenly of a heart attack while entering her home in the city's Merchiston Place in 1917, age 77.

Children of Robert Charles MacWatt

David MacWatt went to study medicine at Edinburgh University. In November 1877, at the age of 21, he died in a house in the city's Rose Street from an overdose of laudanum, an addictive opium-based product used at the time mainly as a pain medication. At the subsequent inquest, the procurator-fiscal concluded that the overdose had been taken 'apparently suicidally'.

John MacWatt emulated his father by becoming a doctor and spending his whole career in practice in Duns. He purchased the property now known as Morelands, next door to Haymount, around 1890. He became a much-loved and hugely respected medical practitioner, being one of the first people in the town to have a motor car so that he could travel around a wide area to visit his patients. His Morelands garden became famous far and wide and was featured in Amateur Gardening magazine. He was a renowned botanist, specialising in primulas, developing his own new varieties and winning numerous accolades including at the Chelsea flower show where he was presented to Queen Mary. His book on 'The Primulas of Europe' was published in 1923. He died in his Morelands home in 1938.



*Doctor John MacWatt at Morelands
(Photo by Amy Cameron, Trinity Lodge)*

Annie (Anna) Elizabeth MacWatt married James Hunter of Assam in St Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta in October 1892.

James Stuart MacWatt qualified as a solicitor. In June 1889, at the age of 27, he drowned off Lerwick, Shetland while sailing a yacht.

Robert Charles MacWatt junior (usually known as Charles) had a highly distinguished career. Following his graduation in medicine at Edinburgh University in 1886, he was commissioned into the Indian Medical Service and was decorated a number of times during campaigns on the North-West frontier. By 1918, he had been promoted to colonel and appointed as Inspector-General of Civil Hospitals in the Punjab. Further promotion to major-general quickly followed when he became Director-General of the Indian Medical Service. He was knighted in the New Year honours list in 1925 and retired the following year. He served as honorary surgeon to King George V. Robert Charles MacWatt died in Surrey at the age of 80 in 1945.

In April 1897, in Haymount, **Mary Alice MacWatt** (known as May) married her cousin Hay MacWatt, the son of the senior Robert Charles MacWatt's brother, David. According to the Berwick Advertiser, this marriage 'created more than ordinary interest in Duns and district'. Hay MacWatt was an advocate and sheriff-substitute in Argyll and later in Ross-shire where he died at the age of 65 in 1920; May MacWatt died in Edinburgh, age 71, in 1940.



*Sir (Robert) Charles MacWatt
(National Portrait Gallery)*



*Mary Alice (May) MacWatt
(Private Collection)*

Haymount/Whitchester Hospital

Following the death of Robert Charles MacWatt senior in 1897, Haymount was purchased by Andrew Smith of Whitchester House near Longformacus so that Duns could be provided with its first cottage hospital. Smith was a partner in Youngers, the brewery company, and he purchased Cranshaws estate in the 1890s. He became a generous benefactor to the people of the area – building the village hall at Longformacus, completely rebuilding the church at Cranshaws and purchasing the land for Duns Public Park were only a few of his charitable gestures.

Although Smith bought Haymount in 1897, nothing much seems to have happened until 1901 when he ‘obtained possession’ of the property. It is difficult to explain this hiatus. Robert MacWatt obviously expected his wife and daughter, Mary Alice MacWatt, to continue living in Haymount if he pre-deceased them (as he did); thus, in his will of 1896, he gave them life-rent of the house. However, as we have seen above, Mary Alice MacWatt married in April 1897. MacWatt then changed his will in a codicil of September 1897 (the month before he died), instead leaving Haymount, valued at £800, to his son, John MacWatt, as part of his equal share of the estate; compensatory financial arrangements were made for his wife since she would no longer have life-rent. John MacWatt must have sold the house to Andrew Smith after his father’s death and a condition was perhaps included in the sale allowing time for Christian MacWatt to make other plans; she had moved to Edinburgh by 1901.

By the summer of 1901, Haymount had been renovated and equipped as a cottage hospital. The two main ground floor rooms became public wards with three beds in each; the east ward was for males and the west for females. Two of the largest rooms upstairs were turned into private wards with one bed in each. The rest of the house accommodated the matron and her staff – originally, Miss Lyal from Glasgow and two nursing probationers. The hospital received medical and surgical cases; it did not deal with infectious diseases.

A committee was set up to manage the hospital, consisting of Andrew Smith and his wife Ida, Mrs Baillie Hamilton of Langton House and Doctor John MacWatt; town solicitor George Tweedie acted as secretary and treasurer. While fund-raising events might be held to provide money for the hospital, the bulk of the running costs over the years were met by Andrew Smith. The Berwickshire News predicted for the hospital ‘a most useful career and we are sure that the benefits it will confer will be widely appreciated by a grateful community’.

And so it proved. As well as receiving patients suffering from illness and infirmity, Haymount Hospital became the ‘accident and emergency’ equivalent of its time for those who met with injury at home, at work or on the roads – being ‘conveyed to Haymount’ became a common experience following local accidents. It was also the case that, inevitably, many residents of the town and district lived out their last days in the hospital. Although it was called Haymount Hospital at the outset, its name was changed a few years later to Whitchester Hospital to honour the gift from Andrew and Ida Smith.

The cottage hospital was not the last of the Smiths’ interventions to promote the health of local people. In 1907, they were instrumental in setting up the Berwickshire Nursing Association which provided cottage nurses to help the sick in the countryside, staying over in their patients’ homes if necessary. Andrew Smith purchased Rose Villa on Bridgend to serve

as a home for these cottage nurses. He died in 1914. After Rose Villa became too small, his widow, Ida Smith, was much involved in purchasing the Hermitage in Station Road in the early 1920s for a new base. In 1937, the nurses' home moved along the street to the Knoll which also became a maternity hospital.

The National Health Service was set up in 1948. Whitcheater Cottage Hospital and the Knoll Maternity Hospital then came under the jurisdiction of the East Lothian Hospitals Group Board of Management. With the development of modern consulting and cottage hospital facilities at the Knoll in the 1970s, Whitcheater Hospital closed in 1981 and was converted to a dwelling house once more, reclaiming its original name of Haymount. This work included the demolition of an extension which had been built on to the northern end of the house when it was first turned into a hospital. The coach-house and stable were also later converted into a dwelling.



Dwelling conversion of Haymount coach-house and stable

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

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MacWatt (Haymount, Duns) Family Tree

