

The Barniken, Duns and the Weatherhead and Veitch Families

David McLean (2022)



The Barniken in 2022

Introduction

The house known as the Barniken sits towards the foot of Murray Street in Duns. For its first hundred years (the main period covered by this paper), it was home to two families by the name of Weatherhead and Veitch. It is difficult to date the property. British Listed Buildings sets it as ‘earlier nineteenth century’ but the date can be narrowed further. John Wood’s Dunse map of 1824 shows the neighbouring property called Maryfield but the Barniken does not appear. The Barniken was, however, named and occupied at the time of the 1851 census and the Ordnance Survey map of 1857 shows the property and its accompanying coach house. So, the best we can do on present evidence is date the Barniken’s construction to somewhere between the mid-1820s and 1850.

The term ‘barniken’ refers to a defensive structure like a stockade or tower. In the Middle Ages, a long bog lay to the south of Dunse, stretching from beyond the east of the town through what is now the public park and westward beyond Clockmill. It was a convenient

form of protection for the townspeople and the single causeway path through this marsh would have been guarded at one time by a 'barniken'. The present house was built at or near this location, hence the name.

The building's exterior is largely original apart from the ground floor bay windows which were changed later – evidenced by the large plate-glass panes in these windows as opposed to the 12-pane traditional sash and case windows elsewhere around the house. Particularly interesting is the main entrance, built in Tuscan style with a pair of decorative stone columns known as 'pilasters'. The Barniken is B-listed today although numerous changes were made to the inside of the building in the second half of the twentieth century when it was converted into a hotel.

It has been claimed that the architectural style of the Barniken (which has many similarities to next-door Maryfield) is very characteristic of the work of a respected Haddington architect and builder called James Burn. However, Burn died in 1816 and, as we have seen, the Barniken cannot have been built before 1824. So, it was not built by James Burn although it is possible that his plans were used or adapted by a relative who seems to have carried on the business after James Burn's death.

The Weatherhead Family at the Barniken

At the 1851 census, the Barniken was home to the family of Alexander Weatherhead, a writer (solicitor) and procurator in the county sheriff court. The family tree at the end of this paper will help to follow their story. Alexander's early life in Dunse was perhaps not easy. His father, William, worked as a carrier, delivering goods around the local area with his horse and cart. But William Weatherhead died at the age of 39 in 1831, leaving his wife Isabella with five children ranging in age from 13 (Alexander) down to 18 months. Ten years later, the 1841 census shows Isabella Weatherhead and her children living in North Street.

In 1847, Alexander Weatherhead married local woman Agnes Jameson; her father was Archibald Jameson, the landlord of the town's White Swan Inn and also a licensed auctioneer. The Barniken may have been the Weatherheads' first home since they were there by the time of the census four years later. Weatherhead would have worked in the legal profession for some ten years before he married and must have had sufficient resources by then to afford the Barniken. They went on to have five children although two died very young – Archibald who died at 22 months in 1853 and Agnes who died at 6 months in 1857.

As well as carrying out all the normal work associated with a solicitor, in and out of court, Alexander Weatherhead was frequently to be found in the registration courts which were very much a quirk of the political times. The ability to vote in the nineteenth century depended on ownership or occupation of property above a certain value and, as today, prospective voters had to register to be able to cast their vote on election days. Both political parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, were not averse to encouraging their supporters to make dubious claims regarding their qualifications to become electors; indeed, downright corruption was not unknown. The registration courts provided a regular opportunity for prospective voters' claims to be checked and both parties appointed professional men, often

lawyers, to scrutinise and challenge claims before a sheriff took a final decision on each case. Being a Liberal supporter, Alexander Weatherhead was often in these courts in the Greenlaw county buildings, supporting the claims of Liberal electors or challenging those of Conservatives.

He contributed substantially to the life of his home town, acting as secretary to the Dunse Gaslight Company and chair of the Dunse Water Company. He was also president of the Dunse Curling Club when as many as 500 curlers and skaters might be found on Dunse Castle Lake on a frosty winter Saturday. His legal career was further boosted in 1881 when he was appointed to the office of Sheriff-Clerk for Berwickshire. He was not destined to live much longer, however, suffering a stroke while at work in September, 1885; he died in the Barniken at the age of 67 a few days later. A pink granite obelisk marks the grave of Alexander Weatherhead and his wife, Agnes in Duns Parish Churchyard – in the farthest south-west corner, just across the street from their Barniken home.



Weatherhead obelisk in Duns Churchyard

Weatherhead's only surviving son, William, might have followed his father into the legal profession. Born in 1850, he was educated at Dunse parish school and Wellfield Academy before entering his father's office as an apprentice solicitor. But he had always wanted to be a farmer and, as soon as he finished his apprenticeship, he took a joint lease with his father on the farm at Bogangreen near Coldingham. He was a successful farmer and his legal training meant that he applied sound business methods in his work.

In 1891, he left Coldingham to become tenant of the larger 1200-acre farm at Preston. At least one aspect did not impress him since he was soon advertising for a man to kill rats on the farm. He lived in Preston Farmhouse where he was joined by his widowed mother, Agnes

and his sister, Helen; neither William nor Helen ever married. William's other sister, Isabella, had married William Laidlaw, blanket manufacturer of Cumledge Mill, in 1883; they afterwards lived at Hillside, a property on Teindhillgreen in Duns.

Like his father, William Weatherhead became a much-respected figure in the community, being elected to Berwickshire County Council and becoming a Justice of the Peace. He contributed much to Berwickshire Agricultural Association and the Lammermoor Pastoral Society. William Weatherhead died at the age of 52 in 1903. He was not in especially good health and had travelled to Brighton, hoping that a short break might do some good. On his return, he got off the London train at Berwick Station and climbed into a carriage of the local train for Duns. Before it set off, he slumped forward in his seat and died of a heart attack. By one of life's coincidences, his travelling companion, to and from Brighton, was David Veitch, the new occupier of the Barniken.

Agnes Weatherhead (wife of Alexander and mother of William) died four years after her son at the age of 90 in 1907, reported to be the oldest lady in Preston district.

The Veitch Family at the Barniken

The Veitch family tree can also be found at the end of this paper. David Veitch was born in 1853 in Slateford, then a village outside Edinburgh. When his father died at a young age, David was apprenticed to a grocer in the city at the age of 13, spending long hours in the shop and delivering parcels all over Edinburgh. He was then offered an assistant post in a grocer shop in Greenlaw (he needed a map to identify the town) where he stayed for a few years before moving to a job in Kelso. In 1877, still only 24, he took the opportunity of acquiring his own grocery business in the north-east corner of the Market Place in Dunse following the death of its previous owner, a shopkeeper called Waddell. He came to the town as a single man but married in 1878.

At the 1881 census, we find David Veitch, grocer, living with his wife, Grace and their first child in Bridgend. Ten years later, they had moved to West Cottage in Langtongate and now had three children. As we have seen, Agnes Weatherhead's husband died in 1885 and she left the Barniken in the 1890s to live with her son in Preston. The 1894 valuation roll shows David Veitch as tenant of the Barniken by which time his family had increased to five children. Tragically, that was also the year when his wife, Grace, died of breast cancer; their youngest child, named after her mother, was only four years old.

The 1901 census shows all five children still living at home with their father in the Barniken from the oldest, Katherine, at age 20 to the youngest, Grace, at age 10. The middle child, also called David, was 16 and already employed in his father's grocery business where he would remain for the rest of his life. As well as a servant, David Veitch's sister-in-law, Hannah Martin, was living in the house and listed as 'housekeeper'; she had presumably come to live in the Barniken to help look after the children following the death of their mother; Hannah Martin died at the Barniken in the summer of 1902. David Veitch re-married in 1904.

In 1883, Veitch also acquired the Greenlaw shop where he had once worked although he later moved to another premises in the town. So, he now had two grocer shops, one in Duns and

one in Greenlaw. The latter only left the family in 1938 while the Duns shop stayed in Veitch ownership until 1949. This means that a Veitch ran the grocer shop in Greenlaw for some 55 years and the one in Duns for over 70 years! David Veitch's son, David Alexander Veitch, eventually became manager of the Greenlaw shop and lived with his wife and family in Lochiel House at the end of Wester Row. When his father died of heart failure in 1927, he moved from Greenlaw back to the family home at the Barniken, again as tenant, and continued to run the two businesses until he disposed of the Greenlaw shop in 1938. David Veitch junior died in 1945 after which his wife, Mary Ellen Veitch, ran the Duns grocer shop herself although only until 1949.

Veitch the Grocer



Veitch's shop in the Market Place, later demolished, now 'Number 18'

It is fair to say that David Veitch senior was no ordinary grocer. He knew the trade inside out, of course, having started on the very bottom rung at the age of 13 in Edinburgh. But he was never content to just let well alone – he was always watching trends, looking for new products to sell and working out how he could expand his business. He expected his employees to work as hard as he did himself but he was clearly a much-respected employer, given the long years of service which many of his staff completed. A notable example was Robert Jackson who came to Duns from Jedburgh to work for David Veitch and retired after 44 years in the family's service!

In 1912, Veitch saw the opportunity to expand his business using motor vehicles. He was among the first traders in Berwickshire to acquire a van (a 12 horse-power Ford, probably a Model T, from Luke's garage in Murray Street) so that his grocery goods could be sold more

easily out in the countryside. Eventually, he had a small fleet of vans, capable of covering almost every corner of Berwickshire.

Around the same time, he saw the merits of another technology although it was not associated directly with the grocery trade. He became an agent for Zorst vacuum cleaners, ‘the most effective and reliable method of cleaning ever invented’ – although not yet electric but utilising hand-operated bellows. And, keenly aware that not everyone could afford one of these new-fangled machines, he kept some which were available for hire.

During the Great War, he managed to combine a patriotic duty with selling groceries when he advertised ‘comforts for our troops’. The list included soup tablets, each of which cost tuppence and which could be made up into a pint of soup; similar tablets produced beef tea. There were also tins of tea, coffee, meat, biscuits and sweets. And, to avoid customers having to go to the trouble of packing up any such items before sending them off to soldiers in the trenches, Veitch declared ‘boxes packed and dispatched with pleasure’.

Given how hard he worked in his business, it is hard to imagine that Veitch had much free time but he certainly made other contributions to the life of the town. He acted as congregational treasurer for the South Church in Currie Street. In 1914, he was sworn in as a special constable and given a whistle, baton and armband with his number on it. Once conscription was introduced in 1916, military tribunals had to decide on the cases of men who claimed exemption; David Veitch was a member of the advisory committee for the Berwickshire tribunal. He was made a Justice of the Peace in 1917. He also acted as a director of the Duns Gas Company and was a member of the Berwickshire Naturalists Club.



The Barniken's coach house, converted into a modern dwelling

Summary

It is not known who built the Barniken but the Weatherheads certainly owned and occupied it by the time of the 1851 census. Following the death of Alexander Weatherhead in 1885, his widow Agnes continued to live at the Barniken until the early 1890s when she went, together with her unmarried daughter Helen, to live with her son in Preston Farmhouse. In an addition to her will in 1894, Agnes Weatherhead specified that her son, William, was to inherit the Barniken on her death – but he, of course, pre-deceased her. Where ownership of the property went after Agnes Weatherhead's death in 1907 is unclear; logically, it would be inherited by her two daughters, Helen and Isabella.

David Veitch senior took the tenancy of the Barniken about 1894 and lived there for over 30 years until his death in 1927. Then, his son, David Alexander Veitch, brought his family from Greenlaw to live in the Barniken, still as tenants. David Veitch junior died in 1945 but his wife, Mary Ellen Veitch, was still living in the house when she finally sold the grocery business in 1949. The Barniken was advertised for sale in 1953. On the ground floor, it was described as having two public rooms, cloakroom, kitchen and scullery. Upstairs were five bedrooms, dressing room, box-room and separate bathroom and WC. There was a garage, wash-house and good garden.



Barniken House Hotel in 2007; photo by Kenneth J Gill (Gillfoto)

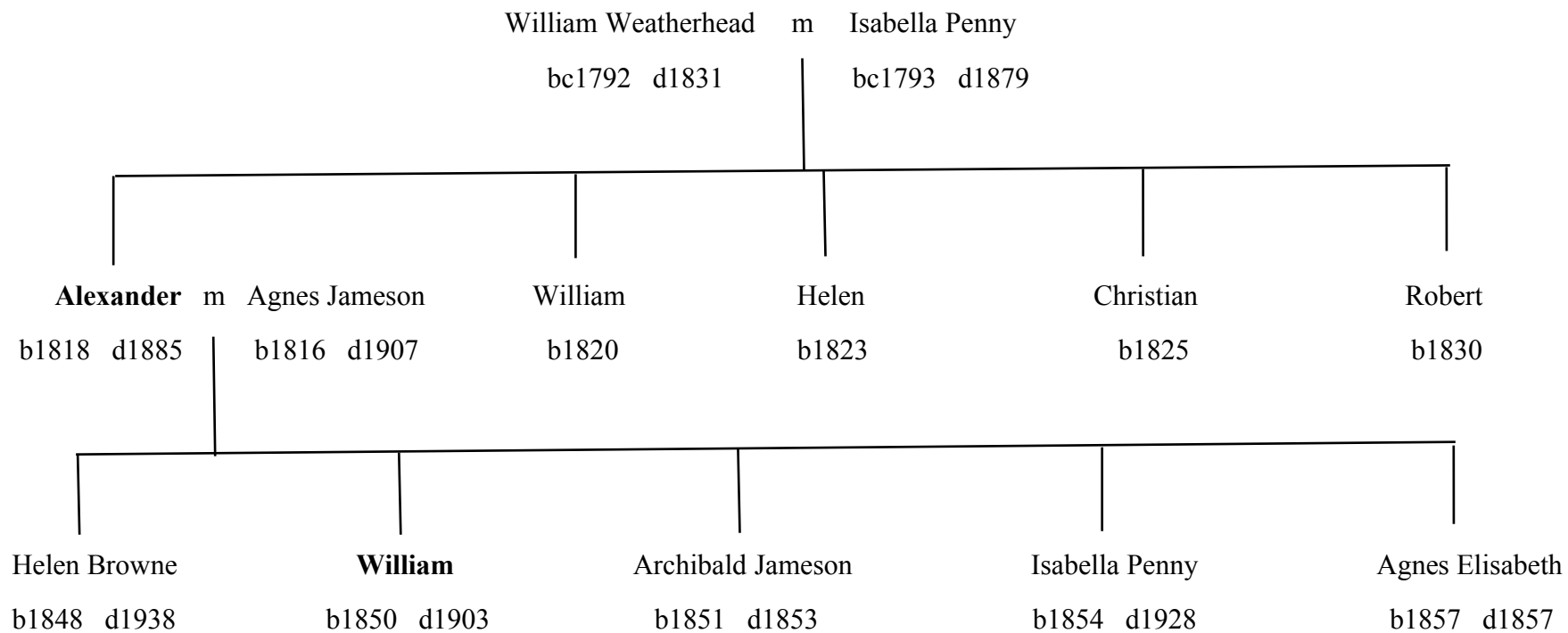
By the 1970s, the property had become the Barniken House Hotel which necessitated a number of internal changes. The two public rooms downstairs became a lounge bar and a restaurant dining room. In 2010, a new owner changed its name to 'Hotel Stuart' but the

business did not survive for much longer – and, in any case, local people would always have thought of it as ‘the Barniken’. The property has now returned to being a domestic dwelling although still showing the word ‘hotel’ which, unfortunately, was painted in large white letters directly on to its stonework many years ago.

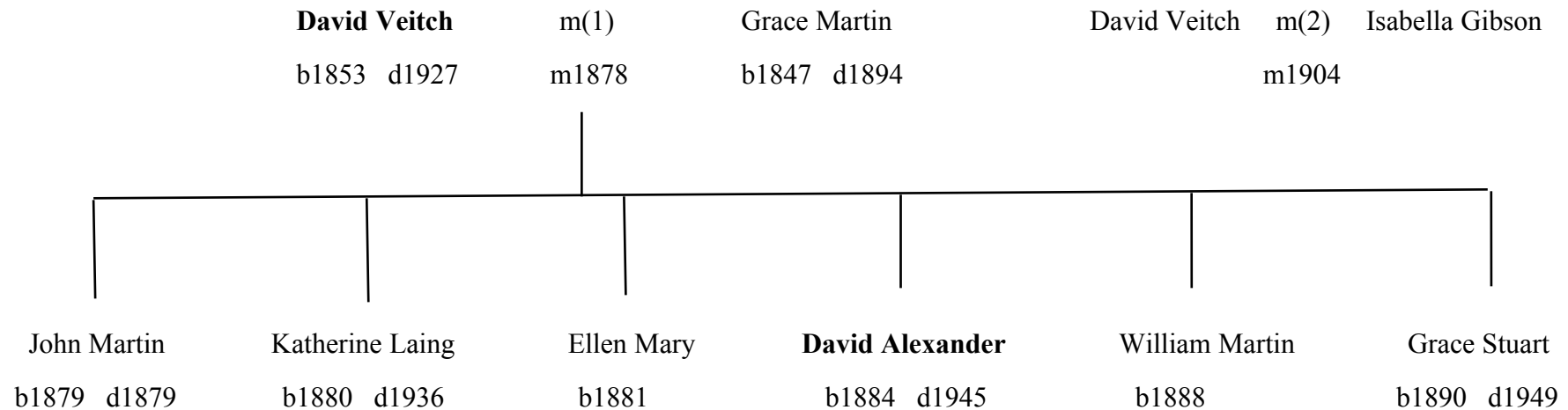
The information in this paper has been researched from various newspapers of the time (but especially the Berwickshire News) and from public records – census; valuation roll; wills and testaments; and birth, marriage and death records.

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WEATHERHEAD (BARNIKEN, DUNS) FAMILY TREE



VEITCH (BARNIKEN, DUNS) FAMILY TREE



John Martin Veitch died aged 7 weeks of erysipelas, a bacterial infection of the skin.

Katherine Laing Veitch married Cyril K Pope of Southampton in 1908 and went to live in the south of England.

Ellen Mary Veitch married Daniel Thomson, headmaster of Duns Public School, in 1913.

David Alexander Veitch married Mary Ellen McAlpine of Duns in 1910.

William Martin Veitch emigrated to Canada in 1913 as a civil engineer.

Grace Stuart Veitch (who had been a VAD nurse in Southfield) married Frank J Elliot of Nisbet Hill, Duns in 1919.