

Dunlop Trust Building, Duns

David McLean (2023)



Introduction

The Dunlop Trust building on the west side of the Market Square in Duns is probably the most misunderstood property in the town. Because it has 'Dunlop Trust' inscribed on its façade and because it once housed a temperance hotel, the assumption has long been made that the building was originally constructed as a temperance hotel by the Dunlop Trust. John Dunlop (1789-1868) founded the Glasgow and West of Scotland Temperance Society in 1829 and became, in the eyes of many, the 'father of the temperance movement'. Numerous alcohol-free hotels came to be built in Scotland under the terms of the Dunlop Trust. However, in the case of Duns, all this is pure coincidence and the 'Dunlop Trust' on the front of the building refers to a different trust altogether. Unfortunately, the claim of it being a Dunlop Trust hotel has been repeatedly copied in numerous sources without checking the evidence; even British Listed Buildings has made the same mistake.

Construction of the Dunlop Trust Building

What became the Dunlop Trust building over 50 years later was actually constructed in the years around 1870 by a Dunse draper called Robert McLean; there is a full description carried in the Berwickshire News in November 1871 by which time the building was nearing completion. McLean had owned an old tenement on the site, containing his house and shop, which he demolished down to its foundations for his new property; at the time, it became one of the town's finest buildings in a prime location. It was designed in Italianate style by architects George Beattie & Sons of Edinburgh.

It had three floors, the ground floor accommodating his draper's shop and the upper two floors being his dwelling house although some of these upstairs rooms may have served as workshops for his tailors and milliners – drapery then was a mixture of ready-made goods together with clothing and hats made on the premises. Of particular architectural interest were the large stone ball finials on the top of the façade's corner columns and the slate 'mansard roof' with its steeply sloping sides. This latter feature cleverly maximised the attic floor space so that the upper storey of McLean's dwelling was entirely contained within the roof space, light coming from dormer windows. This would also have kept the cost down.



Steep-sided 'mansard' roof with dormer windows

The position of the building on a peninsular site on the west side of the Market Place allowed his shop to have large plate-glass display windows on three sides and two entrances, the main one in the east-facing façade (Market Place) and the other on the north side (Golden Square). The entrance to his dwelling was from a private door and stair in the south wall (South Street). The masonry, joinery, plumbing and plaster works were all undertaken by Dunse tradesmen while Edinburgh firms looked after the glazing and iron work.

Today, the building is category-B listed. The exterior has undergone partial change with some windows being blocked up and chimney stacks repaired or rendered. The interior has been much altered over the years. The ground floor is now largely occupied by a branch agency of NFU Mutual and the upper floors are given over to flats.

Robert and Charles McLean, Drapers

Robert McLean was born in Langton parish in 1809; he married Janet Crichton in 1851. At the census of that same year, he was living in South Street where he had his draper shop – in other words, in the tenement building which he would demolish twenty years later. Already living with him was his nephew, Charles McLean, age 7, who was born in Glasgow but brought up, for whatever reason, by his uncle in Dunse. At the 1861 census, Charles (at the age of 17) had become a draper's apprentice. Robert McLean's wife, Janet, died in 1868 after which his cousin, Elisabeth Pringle, came to be his housekeeper – as well as his nephew, there were usually a couple of employees including apprentices living under his roof. Charles McLean was a time-served draper by the census of 1871, unmarried and still living with his uncle. That, of course, was the year when work was progressing on Robert McLean's fine new shop premises and dwelling house.

Robert McLean did not enjoy his new shop and house for very long. He died of heart disease at home in 1873 at the age of 64. His death was registered by his nephew, Charles, who took over his uncle's drapery business. At the 1881 census, we find Charles there at the age of 37 now with his wife, Eliza, age 36, two children and two servants; he was employing five apprentices and four milliners – business was apparently still going well.

RETURN FROM LONDON.

CHARLES MCLEAN,
DRAPER AND SILK MERCER,
DUNSE,

BEGS Respectfully to ANNOUNCE his RETURN from LONDON and the SCOTCH MARKETS, where he has succeeded in procuring some of the most beautiful Varieties of FASHIONABLE GOODS he has ever had the pleasure and satisfaction of SHOWING.

A Splendid Choice of Coloured and Black MILLINERY BONNETS, and a Few FRENCH PATTERNS, most Select in Style, and including the New "Marie Stuart" Shape (the very latest novelty).

C. McL. has been fortunate enough to secure from one of the most eminent West End "London Houses" a Selection of Rich MATELASSE JACKETS in SILK and WORSTED, including some new Shapes at almost every price ranging as high as Seven Guineas.

A MAGNIFICENT ASSORTMENT of FLOWERS, FEATHERS, BIBBONS, &c., &c.

AN EARLY CALL RESPECTFULLY INVITED.

PATTERNS POST FREE.

Berwickshire News advert placed by Charles McLean in 1877

These were the days, of course, when people bought just about everything they needed locally, including their clothing and household goods. There were always a few draper's shops in Dunse and, while there would be plenty of business to be had, there must also have been considerable competition between these shops. When the Berwickshire News started up in 1869, it quickly became one of the main ways of promoting the quality, variety and (supposedly) competitive prices of each draper's stock.

In 1878, another of Charles McLean's advertisements took up a double column running to full page length. He listed the various departments of his drapery business – the Tweed; Dress and Winsey; and Jacket and Mantle departments, in the last of which 'he flatters himself he can show a class of goods which have not been seen in Dunse for some time'. Then there was the Millinery department in which he emphasised the need to follow the fashions; the Heavy department which sold sheets, blankets and quilts; the Silk department in which he believed he had a particular reputation; and, finally, the Making-Up department in which garments were made to the customer's specifications.

The last advert for Charles McLean, draper, was carried in the Berwickshire News in the autumn of 1882. Around that time, he disappears from the historical record with no trace being found of him in the subsequent census of 1891 or in death records. The next owner of the property and drapery business would inadvertently cause the eventual confusion over the building's origin.

David Dunlop, Draper

David Dunlop was born in 1859 at Halliburton, a farm just outside Greenlaw, where his father was a shepherd. Eventually living in Lauder, he came to Duns to take over Charles McLean's business at some point in the early 1880s. He is shown as tenant of the building in the 1885 and 1895 valuation rolls but had purchased the property by 1905. He continued to run a very successful drapery business but he never married and so the spacious top two floors of the building were of limited personal use to him. In 1906, he let the upstairs (which contained about ten rooms) for a rent of £30 per year to two sisters by the name of Waddell who opened the Waverley Temperance Hotel. They were soon advertising 'comfortable accommodation for travellers and visitors.' The hotel changed hands a couple of times before, in late 1915, the tenants gave up the lease and Dunlop advertised the space for let; there was no interest and re-advertising in early 1916 met with the same negative result. Later that year, David Dunlop was appealing to have the rates valuation on the upper floors reduced since they were empty apart from a single bedroom occupied by himself. He was unsuccessful, the Appeal Court taking the view that, if even one room was in use, the top floors must be deemed to be occupied.

He found another tenant for the upper floors three years later when, in 1919, Berwickshire County Council leased them for office and meeting room accommodation. Increased responsibilities meant that they had run out of space in the County Buildings in Newtown Street and they moved their secondary education, war pensions and public health offices to Dunlop's upstairs premises.

David Dunlop died of tuberculosis at the Deaconess Hospital (a nursing home) in Edinburgh in 1926 at the age of 66. He had run his drapery business in Duns for some 40 years but his name was about to live on.

The Dunlop Bequest (Dunlop Trust)

After David Dunlop's death, Duns Town Council received a letter from Dunlop's solicitors in Lauder. In his will, Dunlop offered his entire Market Square premises to the council to be held in trust, all money raised from renting the property to be for the benefit of a specified number of widows and spinsters in the town (later set at twelve). To qualify for help, recipients would need to be at least 40 years old, be of respectable character and have lived in the town for a minimum of three years. If the town council turned down this offer, it would be made in exactly the same terms to the Council of Feuars of which Dunlop had been a member.

This placed the town council in something of a quandary. It was, of course, a tempting and generous offer but it came in the form of a 'holograph'; in other words, the paper had been hand written by Dunlop himself and so lacked the rigour of a proper legal document. There was also no provision made for the payment of death duties and Dunlop's relatives made it clear, understandably, that they would not be paying the £300 bill on a property valued at £1750. There was also the upkeep of the building to be taken into account. The matter was referred to the council's Finance Committee which recommended acceptance in March 1926. When Duns Town Council officially accepted the offer, they at least did so with gracious appreciation for one of their townsmen who had made provision for needy residents of Duns.

One of the councillors reckoned that the building was 'in wonderfully good repair' but they were about to receive a shock. Sensibly, the town council asked a local architect – Walter Duns – to prepare a report on the condition of the building. Repairs, it turned out, would cost around £130 (worth around £8000 today), the roof being in especially bad condition. The council had little alternative but to go ahead with these repairs but decided that the only legitimate way to finance them was to borrow money and repay it from income derived from renting the shop and upper floors.

The result was that the widows and spinsters of Duns received not one penny from David Dunlop's bequest for the next thirteen years, the expenses and loan repayments always outweighing the income from renting the premises. In 1934, at a ratepayers' meeting, someone asked what had happened to the bequest. Councillor Glover explained that 'the time had not yet come when any funds were available'. They got £110 in rent but still owed £140 of the original £260 loan taken out for repairs. Ex-provost Winter added that the building they had taken over 'might almost be described as a white elephant'; it was 'practically derelict' and they had spent several hundred pounds on it. It was, in fact, 1939 before the loan was paid off and applications for help were invited for the first time from widows and unmarried women of the town.

Another condition in David Dunlop's will also had to wait many years for fulfilment. He specified that, to mark his bequest, he wished a plaque carved with the words 'Dunlop Trust'

to be placed on a prominent part of the building. This was also put on hold until money was available and the plaque was only set on top of the façade in the summer of 1941. This contributed to the confusion of later generations who assumed the building to have been constructed as a Dunlop Trust temperance hotel.



'Dunlop Trust' plaque placed on the facade in 1941

Cossar and Frisken, Drapers

Robert Brown came to Dunse from Castle Douglas in 1879 to take over a town drapery business which had two shops, one in the Market Place (probably the east side) and another in Murray Street. In April 1903, a small fire broke out on the top floor of his Market Place premises. It was soon put out but Brown was not in good health by this time and the general panic and rushing upstairs brought on a heart attack. Despite medical attention, he died within thirty minutes; he was 58 and unmarried.

In the summer of 1903, Brown's business and complete stock were bought by a draper called James Cossar who took George Frisken into partnership with him – the two men had worked in business together in Lauder. The opening of their new Duns shop was so successful that, on the first two days, they were forced to lock the doors 'as there was not room to move inside'. They felt obliged to publish their apologies in the Berwickshire News to the customers who had been turned away. The partnership was dissolved in 1914 when James Cossar retired but George Frisken carried on the business under its original name of Cossar and Frisken.

Following David Dunlop's death in 1926, George Frisken saw the opportunity of moving across the Market Place to bigger and more suitable premises which were now owned, of course, by Duns Town Council. In May 1926, the council's Dunlop Bequest Committee met with George Frisken and agreed to let the draper's shop to him on a five-year lease for an annual rent of £60; the committee agreed to provide proper toilet and wash basin facilities in

the shop. But George Frisken did not enjoy the advantage of his new shop for very long, dying in Musselburgh in 1931.

With high unemployment and falling standards of living in the depression years of the early 1930s, most shopkeepers were bound to be affected. But, in early 1934, the Cossar and Frisken shop was advertising its best wishes for the new year to all its customers and hoping ‘that the worst depression is now behind us’. That same year, Duns Town Council let Cossar and Frisken to Robert Davidson who had worked in the shop for a long time under George Frisken and had the experience of managing the shop himself since Frisken’s death. Cossar and Frisken went on to become a Duns institution, an instantly recognised name in the history of town businesses. It was still going strong in the 1960s but, like other shops of its kind, eventually succumbed to mail order competition and the chain stores of the bigger towns and cities which could carry far larger stocks and, inevitably, sell at significantly lower prices. Today, most Duns townspeople would have to think hard to recall when there was last a draper’s shop in the town – probably Howie’s in the south-east corner of the Market Square, now the church office.



Cossar & Frisken, drapers with Waverley Hotel above

Return of the Temperance Hotel

As we saw, the Waverley Temperance Hotel occupied the upper floors of David Dunlop’s building for some nine years until it closed in 1915 when he failed to attract a new tenant; instead, he leased the space a few years later to Berwickshire County Council for extra offices. This arrangement lasted for ten years but the county council moved out in 1929 after purchasing the British Linen Bank property in Newtown Street for offices instead. Duns

Town Council (owners of the Dunlop building since 1926, of course) clearly wanted a temperance hotel back and they advertised the upper floors to let specifically for that purpose. The Waverley Temperance Hotel re-opened in 1929 but the new tenants were soon complaining about the state of the kitchen range and hot water facilities. The town council had to pay over £50 to fix these, the expenditure meaning that the widows and spinsters of Duns had to wait even longer for their first payments. When the hotel, now ‘with electric light throughout’, was next advertised for let in 1938, it again found a new tenant. It is interesting to note, however, that through the 1940s, it was always referred to as simply the ‘Waverley Hotel’.

In conclusion, therefore, the Dunlop Trust building in Duns was not built as, and never was a Dunlop Trust hotel. It was built in 1871 as a draper’s shop and dwelling house. A temperance hotel was not opened on the upper floors of the building until 1906. And the inscription ‘Dunlop Trust’ refers to a bequest for widows and spinsters of the town and did not appear on the building’s façade until 1941.



The second shop entrance on Golden Square

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 rolls; and birth, marriage and death records.

David McLean (2023)