

Sources in Local History
New Series Volume 26

THE FAMILY LETTERS OF
WILLIAM LAIDLAW
1792-1795

Transcribed with an introduction by
Sally Gerrard



THE EUROPEAN
ETHNOLOGICAL
RESEARCH CENTRE

*The Family Letters of William Laidlaw
1792-1795*

Transcribed by
Sally Gerrard

Introduction by
Sally Gerrard

Edited by
Kenneth Veitch

First published in 2023 by
The European Ethnological Research Centre

University of Edinburgh
21 Buccleuch Place
Edinburgh EH8 9LN
Scotland

Text © The European Ethnological Research Centre.

The text is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution
NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license.

To view a copy of this license, visit

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Images © as credited.

Sources in Local History
General editor: Kenneth Veitch

CONTENTS

Preface	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Editing	v
Maps	vi
Family Trees	x
Facsimiles	xii
Introduction	xviii
Correspondence	1
Appendices	47
Further Reading	50

PREFACE

William Laidlaw (1771–1841) lived and worked in Peebles, a writer (lawyer) for most of his adult life. A considerable number of letters written to William by his family and friends survive – 144 in total, sixty-three of which were written by members of the Laidlaw family. It is these family letters which form the basis of this volume. They were written between 1792 and 1795, when William was living in Edinburgh and working for his cousin James, a Writer to the Signet. William's siblings Walter and Mary wrote to their brother on at least a weekly basis, their letters often accompanied by William's freshly laundered clothes, various foodstuffs or other letters and items to be passed to family or friends also living in Edinburgh, including their brother Robert. There are also letters from Robert, written when he or William was away from Edinburgh; from their eldest brother James, the resident surgeon in the spa town of Moffat; from their father James, a successful tenant farmer; from William's aforementioned cousin James, and his first wife Janet Pitcairn Laidlaw.

The voices of William's family expressed through these letters allow us an opportunity to 'know' them, even at a remove of more than two centuries. The letters are largely of a familial, intimate nature, generally concerned with daily life and interpersonal relationships. Nonetheless, the Laidlaws lived in dynamic times which saw political and religious uncertainty and societal change, and the letters show us that even they, with their relatively small lives, were impacted by the wider issues of the day.

The French Revolution was a recent event and Britain had been at war with France since 1793. In Scotland, the Revolution and its aftermath had polarised opinions with society divided between radicals favouring political reform and loyalists advocating the status quo. Religious division, already present in Scottish society, accompanied this political polarisation; and there was an ever-growing number of dissenters against the Established Church. There are indications in the letters that the Laidlaws not only favoured political reform, but also belonged to one of these dissenting groups.

The transatlantic slave trade was another major social and economic force which influenced the lives of the Laidlaws, notably in their access to luxury goods like coffee and sugar. The Laidlaws also knew people personally who were directly involved in the slave trade, such as Robert Nutter Campbell of Kailzie and Robert Bogle of Daldowie, both of whom owned estates worked by enslaved persons in Grenada. It is likely that Robert Laidlaw secured a job on one of these estates in 1797.

It was also an age of rapid technological advance in many spheres of life. Widespread ongoing improvements to local and regional road systems facilitated

travel of all kinds and had given rise to an extensive network of carriers, postal services and public transport. The Laidlaws used these services to send and receive letters and goods; and to travel – often to Edinburgh – for business or pleasure. It was becoming easier by the 1790s to travel by road – at least for most of the year. James Laidlaw junior’s letter concerning his epic four-day journey from Moffat to visit his family at Hundleshope – normally a day’s journey – through a winter snow storm in 1795, is a reminder of how easily the weather could supersede even the best laid plans.

The Laidlaws were close-knit, not only William’s immediate family, but within a broad network of blood relatives. Several of these people are the topic of conversation in William’s letters, including various aunts and cousins. As with most families though, there were occasionally tensions between William and his relatives, most of which appear to have stemmed from William’s laxity in responding to their letters. These letters can tell us about so many aspects of the Laidlaws’ daily existence: their social and financial lives; occupations; health; hopes and aspirations; beliefs and opinions – all those intangible things, in fact, which are so often lost by the long passage of time. They tell of the travels of the Laidlaw family, who relocated from the farm at Broadmeadows, near Selkirk, to Hundleshope, near Peebles. We read of the annual summer seaside holiday to Prestonpans, enjoyed by the Laidlaw siblings and their many friends and relatives; of Robert Laidlaw’s move to Dundee in 1795 for a new job; of William’s fervent – if sadly doomed – attempt in the same year to secure an official position for himself in Peebles.

William’s letters are no less than a window into the past, a clearly illuminating light which shows us a world long gone, seen through the lived experiences of a middle-class Borders family, whose lives would otherwise have vanished into the darkness of time with it. They are a remarkable survival.

Sally Gerrard
February 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The EERC is grateful to the National Records of Scotland for permission to reproduce copies of the correspondence. The front cover image is reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland (D NG 1545). Painted in 1788 by Joseph Farington, it shows the Grassmarket, where William Laidlaw resided when he first moved to Edinburgh.

EDITING

The original spelling has been retained. Its standard varies across the letters, reflecting not only the aptitude of the correspondent, but also an inconsistent approach typical of the period. The practice of using in- at the beginning of words that in modern English would begin en- (for example, inclosed) and of ending words with a double consonant where one would now be the norm (for example, att, furr and usefull) is also evident in some of the letters. To prevent the text from becoming congested with editorial insertions and corrections, words that have been misspelled but are readily recognisable have not been annotated. Familiar archaisms have similarly gone unmarked. Missing letters have been inserted in [] only when the meaning of the word would otherwise be unclear. Sic has been used sparingly, mainly to indicate irregular or archaic spellings or constructions that might otherwise be mistaken for transcribal or typographical errors. For misspelled words that are not immediately obvious, or that might be confused with another word, the correct form is given.

Each letter has been provided with a header that gives the name of the sender, and a number by which it can be identified. The salutations and valedictions have been reproduced as they appear in the originals, but the dates when the letters were sent have been standardised and placed immediately after the headers.

MAPS



Map 1. A detail from William Dassauville's *Plan of Edinburgh* (1806).
The places where William Laidlaw either lived or worked during the correspondence have been circled:
1. Gilmor's Close, Grassmarket; 2. Cannonball House, Castle Hill; 3. Dobie's Land, Richmond Street.
(Courtesy of the National Galleries of Scotland)

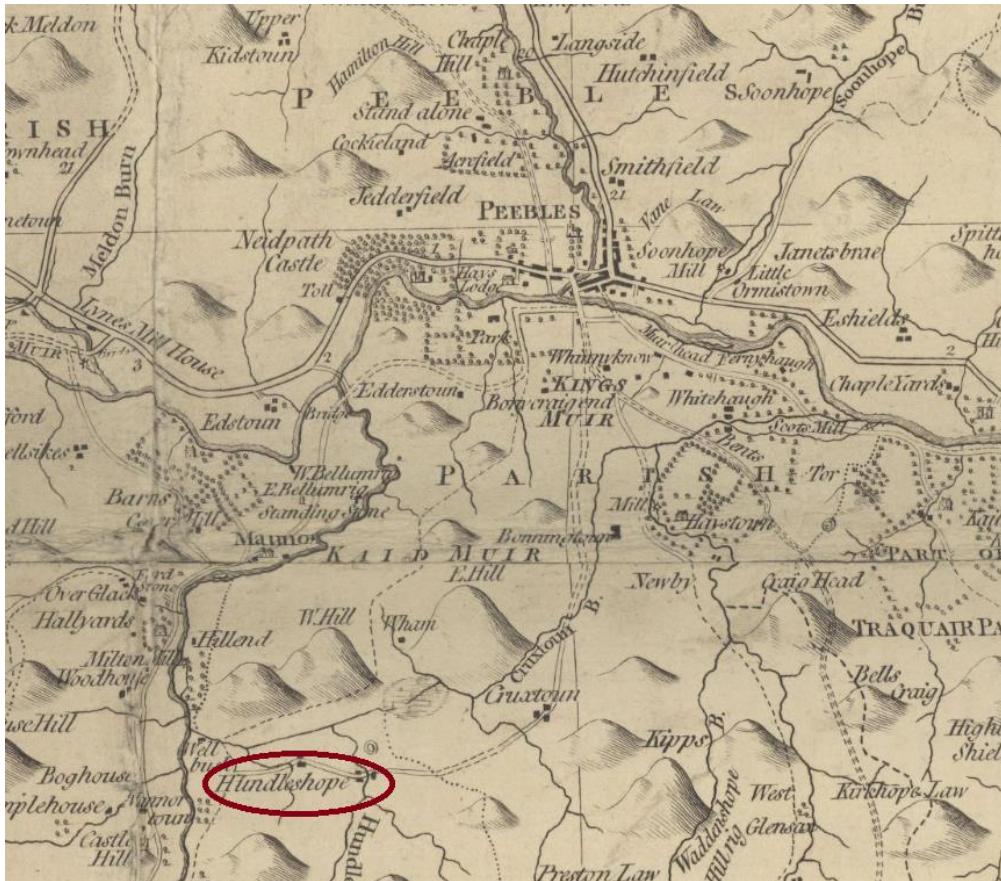


Map 2. A detail from Thomas Kitchin's *Scotland* (1771), showing the roads that connected Edinburgh with Peebles and Selkirk. The approximate locations of Broadmeadows and Hundleshope, the farms successively tenanted by James Laidlaw, have been circled.
 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



Map 3. A detail from John Ainslie's *The Environs of Edinburgh* (1812).

Buckholm, an earlier farm tenanted by James Laidlaw and where William and most of his siblings were born, has been circled, as have Broadmeadows and Hundleshope.
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



Map 4. A detail from Mostyn Armstrong's *Map of the County of Peebles* (1775), showing Hundleshope in relation to the burgh of Peebles. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)

FAMILY TREES

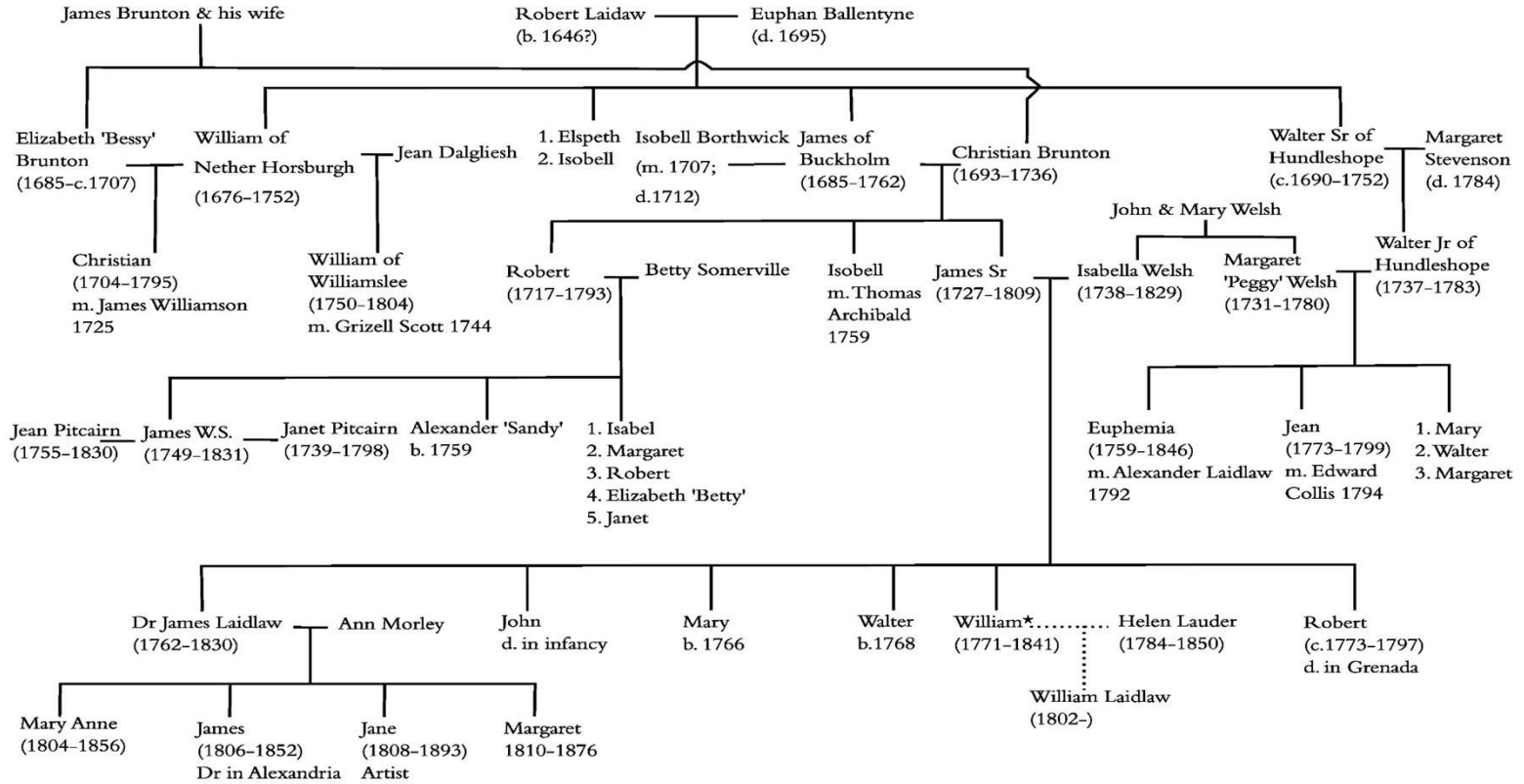


Table 1. The Laidlaw family tree. (Compiled by Sally Gerrard)

* William Laidlaw, the recipient of the letters.

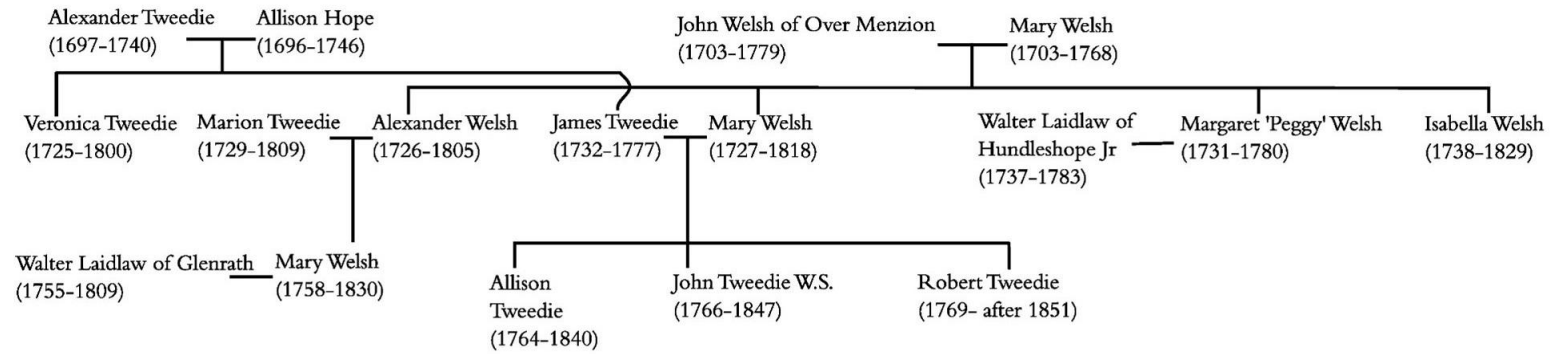


Table 2. The Welsh-Tweedie family tree. (Compiled by Sally Gerrard)

FACSIMILES

115

Dear Will^m Hundleshope 15th July 1794

I received Burns's Poems
 this week, but we expected to hear
 either from Mary or you, how her &
 the rest of the Ladies are, since they
 went to the Bathing —

You will find in the Bundle a flannel
 Vest for Mary which you will send to
 her — I desired you to send out a flannel
 Vest of mine when I came away which
 you have not yet done —

Be so good as give the inclosed to M^{rs} Muir
 I have been a good deal worse since Mary
 went in — I am at present taking
 Medicine & M^{rs} Muir is speaking of
 Laying a Blister on my Breast —

Write how Mary is doing with the Bath-
 ing — I am
 Yours &c. Rob^t Lindsay

Facsimile 1. The letter sent by William's brother Robert from Hundleshope on 15 July 1794.

(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

96

My Dear William

I must put you on your Guard to keep the key of my
 Cupboard as all the keys in the house are in it I am very uneasy till I hear
 from you Mr I wish ^{the} you write with spirit it will make me happy because
 to send it without delay give me all your news I have got nothing news
 from this quarter we are all well content rain I have got to walk this
 morning but it still lowers let me know if you have good news to
 from your Brother Robert And how my young Lads if they are
 Busy and take care of the house till them I wont for get them

Hillhouse Monday 12 a Clock noon
 4 August 1794

J. M. M.
 Janet Laidlaw

Facsimile 2. The letter sent by Janet Pitcairn Laidlaw from Hillhouse on 4 August 1794. (Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

Moffat 14th Dec^r. 1794⁶²

Dear Brother

By an Advertisement in this Nights
News paper I see that all the outstanding Debts
due for the Bee are put into the hands of a Man of
Business in order that Prosecutions may be immediately
commenced. The Author however says that if payments
are made to Mr John Guthrie Bookseller Nicholson's that
of the neat sums due, any time before the 25th ins. all ex-
pence will be saved. I have therefore to request that
you will lose no time, in setting that business on my
Account, with Mr Guthrie. At the same time you
may inform him, that you wished to ^{have} done it long
ago, but could find no admission at the Office.

With best Compl^{ts} to Robert & all friends, & wish-
ing to hear from you soon, I am,

Dear William,

your most affect^{ed} Brother
James Lairdlaw

Facsimile 3. The letter sent by William's brother James
from Moffat on 14 December 1794.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

Dear Will:

You will Receive the Clothes you
sent out all Clean And in good Order, ^{But}
in the ~~circumstances~~ Situation of the family ~~of~~
has been hard Upon your Mother & ~~you~~
In the Trunk you will find these Spoons
you have been so often threaten'd with a
prosecution about — ~~But I Discharge~~
you to give them out of your hand till you
get a Receipt on Stamp paper from the
fellow himself, or from his W^{ch}, which
you will return to me, had it not been for
your being in the house of the fellow's W^{ch}
I would have bestowed more upon the two
fellows than ten times the value of the
spoons, in Calling them to an account of
their Intrusions about my Sisters —
Effects, which Mr Jo: Treggie told me
I was well warranted to do —

Facsimile 4. The letter sent by William's father James
from Hundleshope on 15 April 1795.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

Dear Will

Hundleshope 10 June 1795 ²⁶

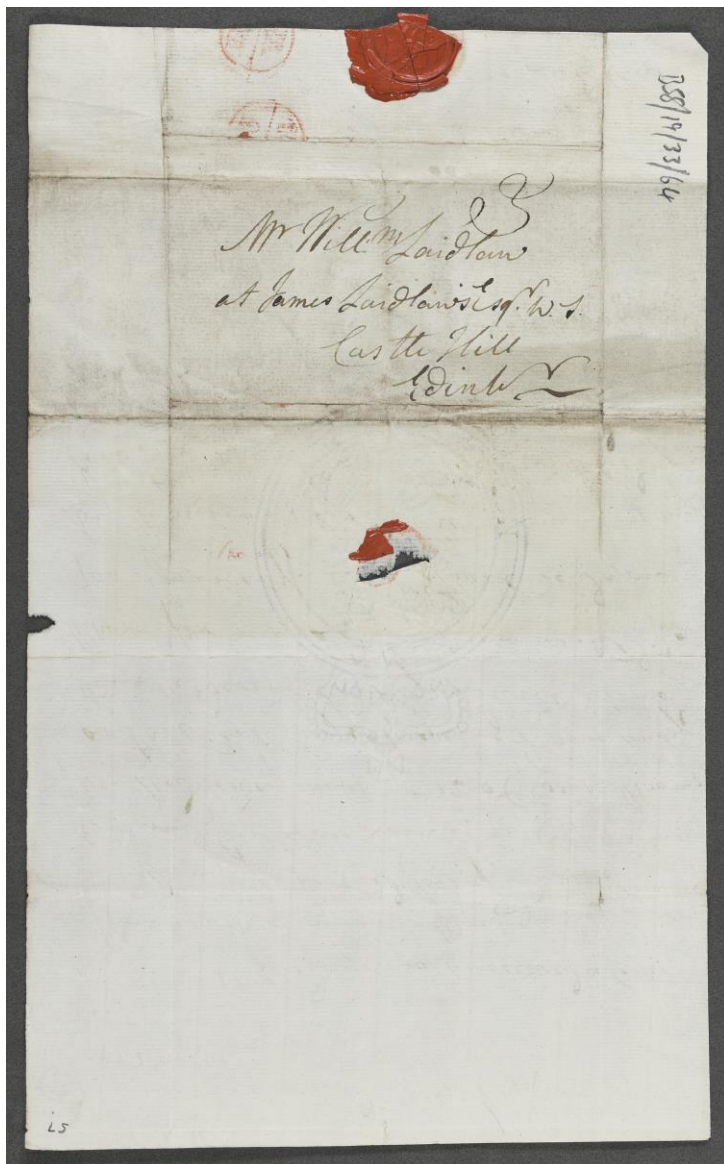
You will receive your

Cloaths this week, which I dare say is sooner
er than you could expect them I should
be greatly obliged to you if you would give
the inclosed to Mr Oliver when you receive
this, as I believe the Carrier leaves London on
Friday morning, and Miss O is very anxious
to know the state of my health, which
induced me to write her a few lines other-
wise I should not have attempted it as I
feel myself too weak for ^{that} business yet
I was very ill last week, especially on Friday
when the pain was fully as severe as at any
time during my illness, I have been easier
for some days past - Be sure to write
when Rob left you how he was to travel
and if you have heard from him since -

Let me know if Jane Crumond is
gone yet, I hope you made my apology
to her & also to Anne (in writing) as she is
not to be in town this summer - I find
by a letter from Margt that she has not
heard of my illness, I must therefore ^{try} tell
would inform her, as it may yet be
some time before I can write -

I am Dear Will your most
affect Sister
Mary Sainclars

Facsimile 5. The letter sent by William's sister Mary
from Hundleshope on 10 June 1795.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Facsimile 6. The cover sheet of the letter sent by William's brother James from Moffat on 19 January 1795. (Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

INTRODUCTION

William Laidlaw was born in the spring of 1771,¹ the second youngest of the six recorded children of James Laidlaw and his wife Isabella Welsh. His parents were the children of prosperous tenant farmers: James was the youngest son of James Laidlaw, tenant of Buckholm, a tower-house and farmstead near Melrose; Isabella was the youngest daughter of John Welsh, tenant of the farm at Menzion in the parish of Tweedsmuir. Both families had been farming in the Scottish Borders for generations. Grandfather James was the son of Robert Laidlaw of Kingledoors and Euphan Ballentyne from Shillinglaw, near Traquair. He was born in 1685 and as an adult tenanted the farms at Ferniherst and Windydoors near Stow before moving to Buckholm in 1714. A successful and affluent man, he was a respected member of the community in Stow and on friendly terms with the Pringles, the main local landowners, who became his landlords when he moved to Buckholm. He was married twice, first to Isabel Borthwick from Heriot, with whom he had two surviving children, and second to Christian Brunton from Peebles, whom he married on 30 October 1712 at Stow, just a few months after the death of his first wife and infant son.

Grandfather James' older brother, William, was the tenant of Nether Horsburgh during the first half of the eighteenth century, a tenancy probably acquired through his mother's connection with the Horsburgh family. He was married twice and had several children. His eldest surviving daughter, Christian Williamson, and eldest son, William Laidlaw of Williamslee, are mentioned in Mary Laidlaw's letter to her brother of 21 January 1795: 'You will perhaps have heard of the death of our friend Mrs Williamson in Peebles who died on Friday last, aged ninety, her brother in Williamslee is now the only survivor of that family' (Letter 43).

Grandfather James' younger brother, Walter, was the tenant of Woolandslee in the north of Innerleithen parish. In 1748, he purchased the estate of Hundleshope from David Scott for the sum of 24,000 merks.² Scott, who had inherited the estate, was a former captain of the Foot Guard who had taken up a second career as a merchant in Edinburgh on his retirement from the army. As his life was there, Hundleshope was at first leased to tenants and then put up for sale. The following advertisement appeared in the *Caledonian Mercury*:

To Be SOLD

The Lands and Barony of HUNDILSHOPE, lying in the Parish of Manner and Sheriffdom of Peebles, on the River Tweed, 18 Miles South of Edinburgh, holding Taxward of the Crown, paying of yearly free Rent 111 l. 17 s. 1 d. Sterling, besides some Superiorities,

with a convenient House lately built, with good Office-houses and a Kitchen Garden. There are several Thousands of thriving young Planting, and a little Bush of natural Alder, a good part thereof being fit for cutting, and plenty of Peat and Turf very near the House.³

When Walter took up residence at Hallyards, then part of the Hundleshope estate, the tenancy of Woolandslee passed to his nephew William, who moved there with his young family from Nether Horsburgh the following year.⁴

Hundleshope was to be a focal point for the Laidlaw and Welsh families for two generations. In 1751, a year before he died, Walter transferred the estate to his only surviving son, also named Walter. The younger Walter Laidlaw was fifteen when he inherited and, like his father, preferred to reside at Hallyards, leasing the farm at Hundleshope to tenants. Five years later, Walter married Margaret 'Peggy' Welsh, another daughter of John Welsh of Menzion. It was the marriage between Walter and Peggy that first united the Laidlaw and Welsh families. Peggy was the elder sister of William's mother, and it is quite possible that she and his father met at Hundleshope, particularly as John and Mary Welsh moved into the farm following the marriage and remained there for the rest of their lives – and where, it may be imagined, their daughters visited them often.

James Laidlaw and Isabella Welsh were married at Tweedsmuir on 14 July 1761, almost five years to the day after the marriage of Walter and Peggy. James was by then the tenant of Buckholm, his father being in retirement. The marriage was witnessed by his cousin Walter and James Tweedie, who was spouse to Isabella and Peggy's sister Mary and had taken over the farms at Menzion. Wedding celebrations would probably have taken place at Hundleshope as the home of the bride's parents, with family and friends in attendance.

The following year, the elder James Laidlaw died, aged seventy-seven. William's parents remained at Buckholm for a few more years, probably seeing out the term of the current tenancy, and it was here that William's eldest brother James was born in April 1762. They left sometime between 1765 and 1766, as William's sister Mary was born in April 1766 at Kirkhouse in the parish of Traquair. The Laidlaws appear to have been residing there temporarily, perhaps with friends or relatives while James was waiting to move into his new farm at Whitsunday (15 May), a common starting date for farm tenancies. Either in 1776 or the following year, the Laidlaws moved to Craig, a farmstead north of Selkirk, where William, Walter and perhaps also Robert were born.

Interestingly, James and Isabella did not register William's birth, nor that of his brother Robert, at Selkirk parish church, even though they lived within the parish. It may be that sometime between 1768 and 1771, the Laidlaws had left the established Church and joined the Associate Synod (also known as the Burghers), a secessionist Church which had a meeting house in Selkirk (established in 1759). While the local Church of Scotland minister reported



Figure 1. Hundleshope Farm, Peeblesshire.
(Photograph by Gordon Brown)



Figure 2. The remains of Buckholm Tower and farmstead, Roxburghshire.
(Photograph by Walter Baxter)

rather vaguely in the early 1790s that the number of Burghers in his parish ‘cannot be considerable’,⁵ they grew to be ‘pretty numerous’ over the coming decades,⁶ and when the letters were written, they included the Laidlaws’ friends the Parks. By this time, the meeting house also enjoyed a national prominence having been made the Divinity Hall (training college) of the Burghers and its pastor, George Lawson, its professor. The connection between George Lawson, the Associate Synod and the political reformer William Skirving, moreover, might account for Mary Laidlaw’s interest in the latter’s sentence after his trial for sedition.⁷

The farm at Craig comprised 140 acres of arable land and twenty-five acres of pasture,⁸ and as with the majority of farmers in the region, William’s father practised a mixed farming regime. Crops of oats, barley, pease, grass, clover, potatoes and turnip would have been grown in rotation for either human consumption or animal feed, sometimes both. Sheep were bred for their wool, for their milk and to sell at market. Cattle were kept chiefly for dairy, particularly butter, which was an expensive commodity. It is quite possible that the Laidlaws also kept bees for honey.

James Laidlaw’s brother Robert and his family lived at the neighbouring farmstead of Peel. The brothers were two of three surviving siblings, the third being their sister Isobell, who was married to Thomas Archibald, a stabler and vintner with premises in Candlemaker Row, Edinburgh.⁹

Farm leases commonly ran for nine years in Selkirkshire, and it appears that with the exception of Buckholm, James Laidlaw was inclined to move on at the end of a tenancy. In about 1776, the Laidlaws moved to Hartwoodburn, a farm to the south of Selkirk, where they lived until 1785. In February of that year, the farm and lands at Broadmeadows were advertised for lease:

MANSION-HOUSE AND LANDS IN SELKIRKSHIRE

To be LET for such a number of years as may be agreed on, and entered to at Whitsunday 1785, that part of the Lands of BROADMEADOWS, presently possessed by Mungo Park tenant in Foulshiels. The farm consists of about 760 acres of excellent sheep-pasture. Likewise, the Mansion-house, Office-houses, Garden, and Pigeon-house, with about 70 acres of ground, mostly arable, all inclosed, and in good order, as it has been in the proprietor’s possession for a good many years past.¹⁰

William’s father secured a nine-year lease for the house, outbuildings and garden at Broadmeadows, along with the seventy acres of ground advertised, and moved there in the spring of 1785, his brother Robert taking on the tenancy of Hartwoodburn until his death in 1793. The remaining 760 acres of sheep pasture at Broadmeadows was re-let to Mungo Park.¹¹ The land farmed by the Laidlaws at Broadmeadows was considerably less than at either Craig or

Hartwoodburn and was mostly arable – although it is possible, of course, that William’s father sub-let pasture from his new neighbour Mungo Park. Whether there were sheep or not on the Laidlaws’ lands at Broadmeadows, there were cattle, chickens in the farmyard, working dogs to help with herding the animals, and a pet dog called ‘Rover’.¹²

The Laidlaws were sufficiently affluent to enjoy a comfortable standard of living in Selkirkshire: they had access to a range of luxury goods sourced from Selkirk and Edinburgh, including sugar and confectionary, coffee and whisky. They were also in a position to patronise their relations working in mercantile professions and were inclined to do so. Indeed, price seems generally to have been less important to the Laidlaws during their years at Broadmeadows than patronage. They consistently bought their bread from James’ nephew Sandy Laidlaw in Edinburgh, even though there were three bakers within easy reach in Selkirk, and their groceries from Isabella’s nephew Robert Tweedie, also in Edinburgh. James Laidlaw’s displeasure at being obliged on one occasion to buy sugar from Selkirk grocer William Stoddart is quite evident in a letter to his son:

I wanted some sugar to make some gelly [*i.e.* jelly] the berrys being now ripe and the villain Stoddart charged me fifteen pence farthing for single reined [*i.e.* refined] sugar which I am told Mr Tweedie has never charged more than thirteen pence for. (Letter 4)

James quite clearly considered fifteen pence farthing an outrageous price for single refined sugar!

The freedom to make this sort of choice was ultimately only possible due to the excellent carrier service that ran between Edinburgh and Selkirk. The improvement of existing roads and the building of new ones during the latter half of the eighteenth century had led to the emergence of a carrying and postal service that would once have been unimaginable. There were three carriers servicing Selkirk on a weekly basis – naturally, the Laidlaws patronised the aforementioned Thomas Archibald. His carrier, James Steele, travelled from Edinburgh every Wednesday and arrived in Selkirk the next day. The Laidlaws regularly sent and received a wide variety of goods via the carrier: foodstuffs like butter, cheese and barley, clothing of various sorts and other sundry items.

The Laidlaws were already friends with their new neighbours the Parks when they moved to Broadmeadows, as they were with other local families of similar social standing – in Selkirk the Anderson, Henderson, Laing, Oliver, Rodger and Veitch families; and in nearby Yarrow, the minister, Dr Robert Cramond, and his family.¹³ William and his siblings would have known the children from all these families from a young age and most of them would have attended Selkirk Grammar School, which was already old by the time this generation of scholars attended. Built in 1674, it stood west of Selkirk parish

church in Hume's Close, near to the junction between the Kirk Wynd and the Marketplace.¹⁴ The school year was divided into quarters, marked by the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter and by the summer, in much the same way as British school terms are today. Three of the four quarters were taught, with the third, the summer quarter, being a time of school closure. Although the summer was kept free mainly so the children could undertake agricultural activities, there were holidays for those who could afford to take them. The Laidlaw siblings stayed at Prestonpans every year for what was essentially an extended beach holiday, accompanied by a substantial number of friends and family. The holiday at Prestonpans was an annual event for the Laidlaws and their social circle, loved by all and doubtless a welcome break from the rigours of school and later on, work.

The fees for the grammar school in William's day ranged from 11s to 15s per quarter, probably dependent on the age of the child – a considerable expense amounting to approximately £2 per annum. William and his friends would have received a comprehensive education by contemporary standards, learning English, religious knowledge, Latin, Greek, French, geography and the principles of natural philosophy, ancient and modern mathematics, drawing and cartography, commercial education, and music. William and his brothers James, Walter and Robert all attended the grammar school. It is possible that Mary was educated there too, since the school provided a more limited education for girls under twelve years old, who were taught separately in the rector's house. Whether Mary attended the grammar school or one of the burgh's 'dame schools', a typical education for girls at the time would have comprised the 'basic' academic subjects of English, geography, mathematics and religious knowledge, as well as practical subjects associated with traditional female roles, such as dressmaking, needlework and knitting. Mary and her friends may also have been taught drawing and music, important accomplishments for girls of their social class. As neither the Laidlaws nor the Parks owned a carriage or chaise of any kind, the children from both families probably walked to school together.

Beyond a general education, James and Isabella Laidlaw had the means to ensure that all of their children received the training necessary to secure both a livelihood and a respectable position in society. Three of their sons entered apprenticeships: James with the Edinburgh surgeon William Chalmers; Robert with the Edinburgh ironmonger John Muir; William with family friend Andrew Henderson, a writer who was also the town clerk of Selkirk. Walter found a place on the farm working alongside his father, while Mary would have learned to manage the household, in the expectation that she would one day marry and be responsible for her own.

Brother James had already finished his medical studies by the time the family moved to Broadmeadows. He had been apprenticed to Chalmers on behalf of the Royal College of Surgeons from 7 June 1780 for five years at a



Figure 3. Moffat High Street, late eighteenth century. This lithograph was printed by John McMillan (1732-1820), whose shop is the third building down on the right. Rae's is the first building on the left.
(From a lithograph by T. Clark)

total cost of £50, a considerable sum. He attended the University of Edinburgh for six sessions, from 1780 to 1785, and was funded by the Royal Medical Society for his final session. After graduating, he moved to Moffat, a small spa town about forty-eight kilometres south west of Selkirk, where he joined the practice of local physician Dr James Johnstone. His maternal grandmother Mary Welsh was from Moffat, and he doubtless had relatives there. He took lodgings at James Rae's establishment in the High Street, a stone's throw from Dr Johnstone's surgery on Church Street.¹⁵ Known locally as 'Rae's', it not only served as an inn, but was also home to the post office and the Hartfell Masonic Lodge, founded there in 1770. James Laidlaw was a Freemason himself, along with Rae and a small number of others.¹⁶

The two principal inns in Moffat were the King's Head and Dr Johnstone's, the latter known simply as 'The Hotel' (see Figure 3, the fourth building along on the left).¹⁷ There were a number of other inns besides, including Rae's, the Black Bull, the Star and the recently opened Spur Inn. Moffat also boasted a large number of lodging houses, the contemporary equivalent of bed and breakfast establishments. The inns and lodging houses largely catered for the increasing number of visitors who descended on the town every spring and summer to visit the Moffat Well (Fig. 4). The Well was famed for its sparkling mineral waters, which were widely believed to be something of a panacea and particularly efficacious for the treatment of respiratory diseases, stomach complaints and arthritis.



Figure 4. Moffat Well in 1795.
(From a watercolour by David Allan)



Figure 5. Moffat Well in 2022.
(Photograph by Sally Gerrard)

In James Laidlaw's time, Moffat Well was about two and a half kilometres from the village along a well-maintained carriage road, easy walking distance for some – but in case visitors could or would not walk, a daily transport service was available throughout the season. The Well was equipped with a stone-built room for the convenience of visitors, stables and a toll booth, where those who came to take the waters made their payment.¹⁸ Dr Johnstone was one of its keenest advocates, widely promoting the virtues of drinking or bathing in the water. He also had a business with his brother John exporting the mineral water from Moffat's other mineral well, nearby Hartfell Spa, to the West Indies.

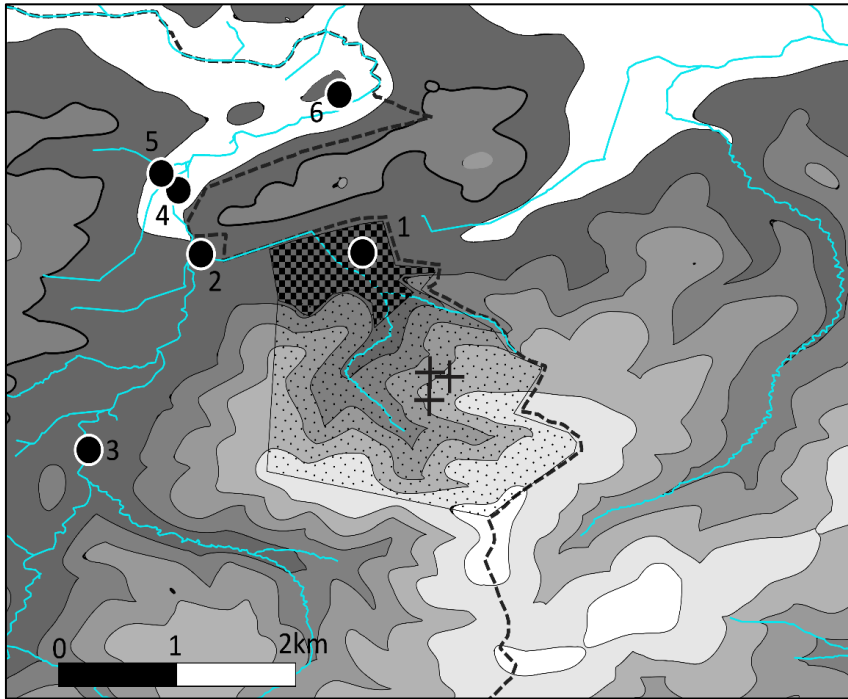
The summer of 1794 brought an unusually large number of well-seekers to Moffat. Business was booming and James knew an opportunity when he saw it and was quick to take advantage, abandoning his plans to visit his family in favour of remaining in Moffat for the trade:

While I am thus in the way of asking favours let me still request another, which is that you will call at Mr Robert Scott apothecary on the South Bridge and desire him to send by the Moffat and Dumfries diligence on Thursday two bottles of Godbold's Vegetable Balsam. (Letter 25)

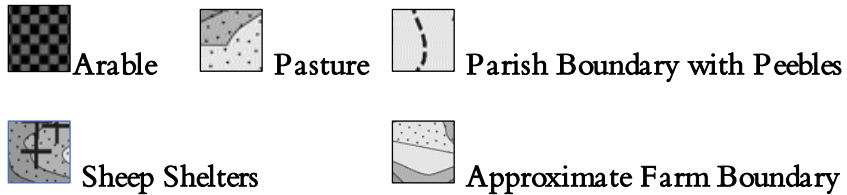
Godbold's Vegetable Balsam, patented just a few years prior in 1785, was already an extremely popular medicine for respiratory illnesses and doubtless James hoped to make a profit by selling it to those visiting Moffat Well for a cure.

A few months earlier, William's parents and siblings Walter and Mary had left Broadmeadows for Hundleshope. There was clearly some regret at the move for Walter and Mary, who unlike their siblings had lives that were still centred there and in nearby Selkirk. As Walter put it, 'Adieu to Broadmeadows and all its sweets, to Selkirk and all its enchantments thereof' (Letter 12). Amidst the chaos of moving, William's parents went ahead to Hundleshope whilst Walter oversaw the removal of their possessions from Broadmeadows and Mary stayed with her friends in Selkirk, perhaps Margaret Oliver or the Hendersons. Mary's letters show the close bonds she enjoyed with her childhood friends from Selkirk, and she doubtless saw them regularly whilst her family lived at Broadmeadows. The move to Hundleshope was a change for her.

Following the death of Walter Laidlaw of Hundleshope in 1783, his heirs sold the estate to Mungo Campbell, a planter in Grenada. By 1794 his son, Robert Nutter Campbell, had inherited and was the Laidlaw's new landlord. The Campbells had divided the estate and it was just the farm at Hundleshope that was leased to the Laidlaws. Even so, at around 2,000 acres of pasture and 200 of arable, it was bigger than any they had previously tenanted. It was also the last tenancy in the farming career of James Laidlaw, who was by then sixty-seven years old. Hundleshope must have held many memories for William's parents and for his eldest brother James, who was old enough to remember a



Key



1. Hundleshope 2. Cademuir 3. Glenrath 4. Kirkton Mill
5. Hallyards 6. Bellanridge

Figure 6. A topographical plan of Hundleshope and vicinity.
(Courtesy of Dr James Gerrard)

Note to figure. The farm boundary followed the parish boundary with Peebles on the north and east sides. It is suggested here that the line of the farm boundary on the south and west sides followed the ridgeline. Land to the immediate west appears to have belonged to the neighbouring farm of Glenrath. Based on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map.

time when his grandparents lived there. The decision to return to Hundleshope was probably due in part at least to familiarity and the personal connections it represented to William's parents. The decision to tenant a large sheep farm may also have been influenced by Walter's career ambitions as a sheep farmer. He went into business with his father at Hundleshope and together they employed a staff of at least eight men and women, who would have worked as shepherds, farm servants and general labourers, and in the house and dairy.¹⁹

William, meanwhile, had moved to Edinburgh. Although it appears he could have remained in Selkirk working with Andrew Henderson had he wished, he was resolved to leave once his apprenticeship was served. He perhaps thought that Edinburgh offered better opportunities or was simply drawn by the prospect of living and working in a big city, where both family and friends were to be found. His brother Robert was still serving his apprenticeship with John Muir. Edinburgh was also home to his cousin James Laidlaw, a Writer to the Signet, who had offered William a job as an underwriter in his office.²⁰

Cousin James lived at the top of Castle Hill, in the endmost tenement of the building now known as Cannonball House (Fig. 7), along with his wife Janet Pitcairn, a housekeeper, a maid and a manservant. The tenement, which had nine rooms, as well as closets, a kitchen, cellars and garrets, had been a residence of the Pitcairn family since the days of Janet's grandfather, the celebrated Edinburgh physician and satirist Dr Archibald Pitcairn. It also housed James' legal practice and would be William's place of work for the three years he resided in Edinburgh.

On arrival in Edinburgh, William took lodgings with a Mrs Scott at the foot of Gilmore's Close, off the Grassmarket. It is quite possible that they were recommended to him by his cousin James, whose own cousin, Ann Somerville, lived in the Grassmarket with her husband, Edinburgh tea merchant David Gray. By the summer of 1793, however, William was looking for new lodgings, as we see in a letter from his brother Walter:

... be sure and write when you change your room that I may know where to direct for you. My Father proposes you to pay your proportion and the room rent so that you may be cautious what sort of a one you take. (Letter 2)

He found them in West Richmond Street, in the home of John Williamson, a master cabinet maker who leased rooms to young professionals.

The area of Richmond Street where the Williamsons lived was known as Dobie's Land, because the tenement encompassing numbers 18-28 had been built by George Dobie (Fig. 8).²¹ Completed in 1780, it was a smart new building, inhabited by successful merchants and professionals. The apartments



Figure 7. Cannonball House, Edinburgh, 1920, showing the former end tenement where William Laidlaw worked between 1792 and 1795.
(Courtesy of City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh Libraries)



Figure 8. Dobie's Land, West Richmond Street, c.1920, where William Laidlaw lived for most of his stay in Edinburgh.
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)

varied in size and accommodation: most had two or three general purpose rooms, a kitchen, bedrooms, garret space and cellars for storage, while the larger ones included a dining room, drawing room, pantry and additional bedrooms and garret space. William shared a room at Mr Williamson's with James Rodger, a childhood friend from Selkirk. James was a few months younger than William; he probably came to Edinburgh in the spring of 1793 to look for work as a professional gardener, and he and William decided then to lodge together. William may have wished to take up lodgings on Richmond Street in particular because it was around the corner from Richmond Place, where the Laidlaws' longstanding friends the Cramonds lived. Following the untimely death of Reverend Dr Cramond on 14 February 1791, the family had left Yarrow to take up permanent residence in Edinburgh. Mrs Cramond was originally from the city and had family still living there, which doubtless influenced her decision. The continuing close friendship between the two families is evident in Mary's frequent correspondence with the Cramond sisters, their shared summer holidays at Prestonpans, and William and Robert's frequent visits to their house on Richmond Place.

William had relatives living and working in Edinburgh besides brother Robert and cousin James. There were his mother's sister Mary Tweedie (known by the Laidlaws as 'Aunt Welsh') and her sons John (a Writer to the Signet) and Robert (the aforementioned grocer). There was also his father's sister Isobell. All in all, Edinburgh must have seemed to William both new and familiar, a home from home. He also appears to have enjoyed the various delights offered by the city, which included the theatre and the circus for entertainment, various inns, and Sunday walks to Leith and other neighbouring districts.

Even so, William was clearly not content to remain a clerk in his cousin's practice for long, as within the year he had started looking for a new situation 'with the utmost anxiety' (Letter 54). At a loss how best to further his career in Edinburgh, he began to look further afield, and in the summer of 1794 considered applying for the vacant post of sheriff clerk of Roxburghshire. While this came to nothing, another opportunity soon presented itself when William Little, the commissary clerk of Peebles, fell dangerously ill later that year. As usual with matters of local business, William received the news from his brother Walter:

I have just now heard by our minister (who is come here today to visit the family in the way of his duty) that Mr Little writer in Peebles is very dangerously ill of a fever at Edinburgh and it is feared (owing to his shattered constitution) it will stand very hard with him to get free of it. (Letter 35)

His illness continued through the hard winter of 1794/95 and into the spring, and William thought on the possibility of being his successor. He had good

reason to suppose himself a contender in this particular contest not least because Little had succeeded his father's cousin, Walter Laidlaw of Hundleshope, who had been commissary clerk of Peebles from 1754 until his death in 1783. William thus had a family precedent on which to base his hopes, as well as the years working as an underwriter for both Andrew Henderson and James Laidlaw.

Little eventually died in Edinburgh in June 1795 and William began to seek the position of commissary clerk in earnest, enlisting the help of his brother Walter to intercede on his behalf wherever possible. On 13 June, Walter wrote to William: 'I am this evening informed of the death of Mr W Little writer in Peebles but this being Saturday I cannot see Mr Reid until Monday about the Town Clerkship [*sic*] ...' (Letter 55). Whether or not Walter succeeded in meeting with Mr Reid is unknown, but a week later he did manage a brief conversation on the topic with 'Mr Campbell',²² who revealed that,

... the offices of Clerk to the Commissioners of Supply and Justices of the Peace are both held by Commissioner Robertson and not by Mr Little as you wrote me but he also told me that any little business that he had in that line at Peebles should be given to no other person if you came there. (Letter 57)

The prospect of receiving the patronage of Robert Nutter Campbell (Fig. 9), and perhaps other influential members of the community, was no doubt a great encouragement to William. The news that two of the paid positions he thought had been held by William Little were in fact held by the local commissary, John Murray Robertson, must have been a great disappointment, however, and might have lessened his enthusiasm for pursuing the post. Whatever the case, William had already made up his mind about leaving Edinburgh for Peebles. As he wrote to Walter:

... not that I think Peebles is a place for making money in my line, far from it; however from particular circumstances I am inclined to think (though I should even not succeed to the Town Clerkship) that I might be able to earn a scanty subsistence which is all I look for. It is all my utmost labours can attain at present and I think it is easy to perceive which of the two situations is to be preferred. (Letter 54)

It was probably just as well that William was set on his course regardless. His friend Alexander Park, who by this time had qualified as a notary and was working in Selkirk, was also interested in the position of commissary clerk of Peebles. Park, already a clerk to Peebles Commissary Court, was the preferred candidate from the start, enjoying the endorsement of several influential people. In a gesture of friendship, he offered to make William his deputy once appointed – an offer that William declined for whatever reason. It appears that



Figure 9. Henry Raeburn's portrait of Robert Nutter Campbell and his wife Margaret Montgomery, c.1805. (Courtesy of Glasgow Museums)

he had missed an opportunity for greater things by choosing to go to Edinburgh in 1792 instead of accepting a position with Andrew Henderson in Selkirk – had he done so, he may well have been put forward in 1793 for the position of commissary clerk of Peebles.²³ Instead, in the late summer of 1795, he travelled to Peebles to set himself up as a self-employed writer.

A few weeks earlier, William's brother Robert had obtained an early release from his apprenticeship to Muir and subsequently left Edinburgh to work for ironmonger Robert Adamson in Dundee; another reason, perhaps, for William to feel that it was time for a change of scene. Notwithstanding his hope for no more than a 'scanty subsistence' in Peebles, it is clear from Walter's talk with Mr Campbell and the assurances from Alexander Park that William could expect to be well patronised. He was presumably content with his situation because he remained living and working in Peebles for the rest of his life.

After the letters – the Laidlaws in Peebles and beyond

The latest surviving letter to William was written in September 1795. After this there are few references to him in Peebles. His work as a writer there would have been varied. In addition to his everyday business, he acquired various long-term commissions. These included acting as an agent for the Scots Militia Insurance Company and issuing annual certificates for the payment of hair powder tax for the Stamp Office in Edinburgh (a commission perhaps obtained through the considerable influence of his cousin James).

As William settled into his new life in Peebles, family life went on much as before. His parents and siblings Walter and Mary were close by at Hundleshope, running the farm and the household, and James close enough to visit. In the summer, William, his siblings, and his friends travelled to Prestonpans for the holidays as usual. Friends visited, William visited them – life probably appeared to change little, if at all.

In the spring of 1797, Robert Laidlaw left Scotland for a new job in Grenada. He may have obtained his employment through the influence of Robert Nutter Campbell, whose brother Alexander owned the Maran sugar plantation (Fig. 10) and over two hundred enslaved people in the parish of St John.²⁴ Another possibility is that he was employed by Robert Bogle of Daldowie, who owned two cotton estates in Grenada worked by enslaved people. That there was some connection between Bogle and the Laidlaws is suggested by Mary Laidlaw's letter to William of 10 March 1794:

You may see by this scrawl what a pen I write with; them you made me are all gone into disrepair I think you might send me one or two in your bundle. I beg you will forward the inclosed to Daldowie as soon as possible. (Letter 9)

Robert, like many young Scots at the time, saw an opportunity for success and prosperity in the Caribbean. He arrived in Grenada in June 1797, but in a cruel twist of fate, was thrown from his horse and died just a few weeks later, on 2 August. The news of his death was publicly announced in October:

Died at Grenada, upon the 2d of August last, in consequence of a fall from his horse, Mr ROBERT LAIDLAW, Son of Mr James Laidlaw, tenant in Hundleshope, a very promising young man. His friends and relations will please accept this notification of his death.²⁵

While this vignette demonstrates to the modern reader how the economic consequences of the triangular trade and slavery penetrated all levels of Scottish society, for the Laidlaws the loss of Robert, particularly at such a young age, was a family tragedy. In the absence of any written evidence, it is difficult to gauge the material effect that his death had on the lives of those who had held him in affection, beyond the grief that must have followed.

Around this time, William's brother James left Moffat for London,²⁶ settling initially in Battersea. The kind of work James was doing when he first moved to London is unknown: he may have joined a private practice or worked for one of London's hospitals – perhaps the Royal Chelsea Hospital, which was over the river from Battersea. He appears to have lived in Battersea until 1803, when he married Ann Morley. Shortly afterwards, he embarked upon a new business venture as a private chiropodist, working from premises



Figure 10. The buildings of Maran Estate, Grenada, 1822.
(Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library)

on Grosvenor Street in Mayfair. It was the right place and time to embark on a new career as a private medical specialist – fashionable society was moving on from a reliance on universal elixirs like Godbold’s Vegetable Balsam to a new era of tailored personal care.²⁷ James once again saw an opportunity for profit when it presented itself – just as he had in Moffat in 1794.

In the next few years, children followed for James and Ann: Mary Ann in 1804 and two years later, James. By the end of 1806, James’ chiropody practice had proved sufficiently successful that the Laidlaws could afford to buy a house on New North Street in nearby Bloomsbury, where they lived and worked for several years. The following advert appeared in early 1807:

To the Afflicted in the Feet – J. LAIDLAW respectfully informs his Friends and the Public, that he is removed from Grosvenor street, to No. 9, New North-street, Red-Lion-Square, where he continues to receive patients for the Cure of the most inveterate Corns, in-grown Nails, Carnosities, and Bunnions; Ladies on Wednesdays and Fridays, from eleven till five (the operations performed on the Ladies by one of their own sex); Gentlemen on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, from one till five. Ladies and Gentlemen waited on at their own homes every day of the week (Sunday excepted), from eight in the morning till one. In all obstinate cases, yearly patients will be regularly attended to. In Cases of the most inveterate Corns, immediate relief is given, and cures generally performed. As relief to the afflicted is one motive of his exertions, operations will be performed gratis every Monday morning, from nine till two.²⁸

James regularly advertised his business in local papers and directories during the course of his career in London, but the advertisement quoted above is one of the earliest and most interesting. It not only suggests that he was something of a philanthropist, committed to providing free medical care to those who could not afford his fees, but also reveals that he employed women to perform minor operations for his female clientele, decades before there were any female doctors in Britain. One of the women who may have been employed by James was Mary Cox from Dumfriesshire. Born in Penninghame in 1784, she would have been in her early twenties in 1807. She was a witness to James' will, written in 1814 whilst the Laidlaws were still living at 9 New North Street. She had known him for several years by then and it is possible that they met while he was living in Moffat.

In Scotland, William's father and brother Walter wound up their business at Hundleshope in 1801, with William and cousin John Tweedie acting as their legal representatives. William's parents and sister Mary moved to Peebles while Walter continued in the farming business, with a tenancy at Over and Nether Menzion from 1802. Menzion had once been tenanted by his grandfather John Welsh and was his mother's childhood home. Walter was still a boy when his grandfather died and may not have known Menzion well, but his parents did and would have been able to offer him advice during his first sole tenancy. He spent the next few years experimenting with farming improved breeds of sheep, an increasingly popular and lucrative enterprise for forward-thinking farmers. His experience at Hundleshope had obviously prepared him for the challenges of managing a large sheep farm, as in 1809 he was awarded a silver medal from the Highland Agricultural Society for his introduction of Cheviot sheep to Peebleshire, 'upon an extensive scale, to his own advantage and that of others in the district'.²⁹ At the age of forty-two, Walter had shown himself to be a successful farmer in his own right. However, the farms at Menzion were advertised for lease the following year and Walter disappears from the records. He may have moved to another part of the country like his brother James, or perhaps more likely, emigrated, as some of his cousins had done.

In the same year as his parents and sister moved to Peebles, if not earlier, William began a relationship with Helen Lauder, the daughter of Peebles tailor Thomas Lauder, who was thirteen years his junior. Intimate relationships outside the sacred institution of marriage were not permitted by the Church, but were very common nonetheless, as were the illegitimate or 'natural' children who were the inevitable consequence. Surviving records from kirk sessions, which acted both as a low-level Church court and a *de facto* parish council, reveal high levels of illegitimacy in Scotland at the time.

William certainly knew people who had been similarly involved in clandestine relationships, including his friend Andrew Henderson the younger, who had a daughter with his father's maidservant, Jennet Leavers, in 1793. A far greater scandal, and one closer to home, was the disastrous affair between

William's cousin-in-law James Somerville and household servant May Shiels. Somerville (1766-1816) was the eldest son and heir of John Somerville of Evelaw and Hillhouse, whose sister Betty was married to William's uncle Robert Laidlaw. In the spring of 1786, Somerville absconded from his father's house at Evelaw and without consulting either family or friends, ran off to Edinburgh with Shiels, where they were clandestinely married. A few days later, the new Mrs Somerville appeared at the house of David Gray in the Grassmarket looking for her husband, whom she had clearly arranged to meet there. Her claim to be James Somerville's wife was met with disbelief by Gray, who was aghast at the idea, and exclaimed: 'You his wife, you do not seem to be at all his equal in point of Station, nor look like a Woman he would take for his Wife'. What was there for Gray to do except call for James Laidlaw, W.S., cousin to his wife Ann and also to Somerville, so that he could assess the legality of the situation. Two hours passed and Somerville arrived at Gray's house; three more hours passed, and James Laidlaw finally appeared and, as later reported by Gray, said:

'O James, this is a sad affair, but are you really Married' to which he answered 'Yes – Mr Laidlaw I am Married'. Mr Laidlaw then asked if he had marriage lines to which he answered that he had, Mr Laidlaw then desired to see them but the pursuer said he was afraid Mr Laidlaw would rive³⁰ them, that Mr Laidlaw having assured him that he would not rive them, the pursuer pulled a paper out of his pocket which Mr Laidlaw read and appeared to be satisfied that they were marriage lines, and expressed himself in these words 'Well James I see that you are Married'.³¹

The shock and horror that reverberated amongst the Somerville and Laidlaw families at this terrible truth is difficult to overestimate – for while socially unequal liaisons were common enough, they absolutely could not lead to marriage. Somerville had broken an inviolable social taboo by marrying his father's servant and John Somerville was quick to act, disinheriting his son and, with the help of James Laidlaw, packing him off to Jamaica in a matter of months to work on the Forrest Estate Plantation as a bookkeeper, where he remained for the next five years. Shiels was abandoned to fend for herself in Westruther without support from either her husband or his family.

In 1792, James Somerville returned to Scotland seeking a divorce. The proceedings were long and no doubt costly. Claims of adultery were heard on both sides but in the end, the court found in Somerville's favour, his divorce was granted and May Shiels was left without the compensation for abandonment that she sought. As for Somerville, he was publicly reconciled with his family, returning to Evelaw and assuming his father's duties as a heritor in Westruther, as befitted the eldest son. Appearances were restored, but Somerville was never

forgiven for his transgression and did not inherit his father's estate when he died in 1807, which instead went to his younger brother Archibald.

William would of course have known all about this scandalous affair, probably more than most, since he was living in Edinburgh during the divorce proceedings and knew many of the people involved in one capacity or another. Whether it served as a cautionary tale for him or not, William's actions over his own socially unsuitable affair were quite different.

On 20 December 1801, Helen Lauder appeared before the kirk session of Peebles to name William as the father of her child and just a few weeks later, on 30 January 1802, their son was born. As was usual, he was named William, after his father. It was common practice for people to appear before the local kirk session in circumstances such as Helen and William now found themselves. Generally, both parties admitted their offence and the matter proceeded from there – either in marriage, or if not, at least in financial support from the father. William, however, persistently ignored all requests to appear before the kirk session for the next three years until eventually, exasperated at the unresolved situation, the kirk session referred the matter to the presbytery, which acted as a higher Church court. The presbytery met on 12 June 1805 having requested that William attend to account for himself – but still he did not appear. Finally, several weeks later, William wrote an unrepentant letter to the moderator of the presbytery:

Peebles, 7th August 1805

Reverend Sir,

I received a citation to attend a meeting of Presbytery of 12th June last, on a reference as I understand from the Kirk Session of Peebles, at which time I happened to be necessarily called from home. Upon the subject of the Reference, which I confess has excited my surprize, I have not the smallest hesitation in stating that I never denied being the Father of the Child laid to my Charge. I admitted it to Dr Dalglish himself personally, long ago, and it is well known to him – to the Kirk Session – in short it is a notorious fact, that this Child has been all along acknowledged by me.

I have supported him hitherto – I certainly of course in future mean to do so. Under the circumstances therefore, I hope the Presbytery will see no Reason for giving either the matter or me further trouble in this Business.

I am most respectfully, Reverend Sir,
Your most obedient, humble Servant,
William Laidlaw³²

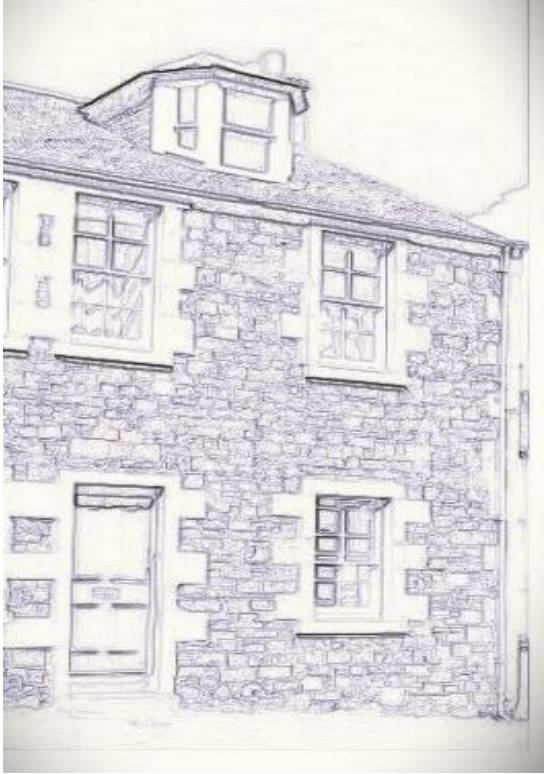


Figure 11. The home of William and Mary Laidlaw, Old Town, Peebles.
(Drawing by Sally Gerrard)

William's letter appears to have satisfied the presbytery, as no further action was taken – he had after all freely acknowledged paternity of his son and confirmed his financial support, which was essentially the outcome that the kirk session would have sought had he seen fit to communicate with them. William's impatience with the matter is evident from his letter and his dogged determination not to attend either the kirk session or the presbytery when called may well have been due to his suggested Seceder upbringing – clearly it was not that he denied paternity, as the kirk session had suspected. The fact that William did not baptise his son weighs in favour of this conclusion.

Helen Lauder left Peebles for Broughton, about fifteen kilometres west of Peebles, in about 1804. Two years later, she married James Anderson, a ploughman and tenant of a cottage at Bogside, with whom she had five children. It is likely that William Laidlaw the younger was brought up by the Laidlaws in Peebles. The details of his life are largely unknown, although he did elect to be baptised as an adult at Peebles kirk in 1822, perhaps an indication that he did not share the beliefs held by his father and his family.

The lives of the Laidlaws in Peebles into the nineteenth century can be broadly traced. James Laidlaw senior died in March 1809, around the time of his eighty-second birthday. The accounts of Peebles kirk session for that year

record that he was buried in the parish first-class mortcloth at a cost of 10d.³³ On 28 March, the Laidlaws hired the parish hearse for 8s to carry James the nine kilometres from Peebles to Innerleithen churchyard for burial, where his father and siblings also lay at rest. William's mother Isabella Laidlaw lived for another twenty years in Peebles and died aged ninety-one in January 1829, leaving only William, his sister Mary and perhaps William the younger living together in Peebles. The following year, William's eldest brother James died in London at the age of sixty-eight.

William practised as a writer in Peebles until shortly before his death. In his later years, he and Mary lived together in a small house at the end of the Old Town (Fig. 11), where they were listed in the Census of 1841. Just a few months later in July 1841, William died, aged seventy. According to the custom of his immediate family, he too was buried at Innerleithen, with the first-class mortcloth. There is no discernible trace of Mary Laidlaw in the records following William's death, either in Peebles or beyond, and the remainder of her life must remain a mystery. Perhaps it was she who kept her brother's letters, or perhaps it was his son William – we will probably never know. Whoever it was, William Laidlaw's letters have survived, a richly detailed testament to his life and the lives of his family, one that has long outlived the people and the times from which they were born.

Sally Gerrard
February 2023

NOTES

- ¹ A relatively common name in Lowland Scotland, there are other William Laidlaws with whom William may be easily confused, including William Laidlaw the celebrated Edinburgh mathematician (1762–1810) who was born in Manor (Peeblesshire) and whose father was also called James. There was also another writer named William Laidlaw, who lived and worked in Dumfriesshire.
- ² Buchan, J. *A History of Peeblesshire*, Glasgow, 1927, 604.
- ³ *Caledonian Mercury*, 26 July 1743.
- ⁴ William appears to have built Williamslee as a new residence for himself and his family. The farmstead stands approximately half a kilometre due south of the old tower house of Woolandslee. In passing, there is no doubt that this William and his wife Grizel Scott were the Laidlaws of 'Willenslee' – an archaic name for Woolandslee – who employed the renowned Scottish poet James Hogg as a shepherd between 1788 and 1790. Hogg later recounted many tales about his life at Willenslee, including, famously, the encouragement he received from Mrs

Laidlaw to read: ‘The late Mrs Laidlaw of Willenslee took some notice of me, and frequently gave me books to read whilst tending the ewes; ... [she] also gave me sometimes the newspapers, which I pored on with great earnestness’ (Hill, D O. *The Poetical Works of the Ettrick Shepherd*, Glasgow, 1840, xvii-ix).

- ⁵ *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, II (1792): Selkirk, Selkirkshire, 443.
- ⁶ *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, III (1845): Selkirk, Selkirkshire, 4.
- ⁷ See Letter 7.
- ⁸ *Caledonian Mercury*, 25 July 1812.
- ⁹ Thomas Archibald (1729–1807) declared bankruptcy in 1795 following the death of his wife Isobell. His financial affairs were managed by John Tweedie. Thomas spent his last years in Gillespie’s Hospital, an institution for former members of the Royal Company of Merchants of Edinburgh who had fallen on hard times.
- ¹⁰ *Caledonian Mercury*, 19 February 1785.
- ¹¹ Mungo Park senior, the father of the African explorer Mungo Park (1771–1806). The pasture belonging to Broadmeadows was tenanted by the Parks until 1849.
- ¹² Rover is described as a large, black, furry dog in a letter to William from Mungo Park junior. See National Records of Scotland, B58/19/32/14, 1 March 1791.
- ¹³ The Reverend Dr Robert Cramond (1741–1791), his second wife Isabella and their daughters Margaret (1770–1839), Jane (1772–1865) and Isabella (1775–1865). Cramond also had an elder daughter, Ann (b. 1766), from his first marriage with Ann Wood. Before moving to Yarrow in 1776, the Cramonds ran a boarding school for boys in Etal, Northumberland. Mrs Cramond and her daughters Margaret and Jane later established a boarding school for girls at George Square, Edinburgh.
- ¹⁴ See the *Southern Reporter*, 27 November 1873 to 5 February 1874 for various articles on the history of Selkirk Grammar School.
- ¹⁵ James Rae (1754–1825) was a Moffat vintner and postmaster and a significant figure in local society. In 1802 he famously saved the Moffat-bound mail coach and several of its passengers when Moffat Bridge collapsed during a storm on 4 November, aided by his servants and resident surgeon Mr Clapperton. ‘Rae’s’, which appears to have had no other name during his lifetime, has been known as The Buccleuch Arms since c.1865, when the building was substantially renovated. Rae Street, adjacent to The Buccleuch Arms, is named after him.
- ¹⁶ James Laidlaw subscribed to several Masonic publications. Hartfell Lodge meets in The Buccleuch Arms to this day.
- ¹⁷ Dr Johnstone’s hotel stood on the spot now occupied by No. 10 High Street, an ice cream shop at the time of writing. The hotel reputedly had fourteen bedrooms,

two kitchens and a ballroom, and was doubtless very profitable for Dr Johnstone, who also owned most of Church Street.

- ¹⁸ The enduring popularity of Moffat Well led to the erection of Moffat Baths on the High Street in 1827, comprising a public assembly room and a suite of baths, supplied with water from the Well through a system of underground pipes.
- ¹⁹ The following staff worked at Hundleshope in 1798: James and Robert Tait, William and Robert Stewart, William Amos, Helen Dickson, Isobel Ballentyne and Elizabeth Wybear. See the Voluntary Servant Tax Subscriptions list published in the *Caledonian Mercury*, 12 May 1798.
- ²⁰ A Writer to the Signet was a member of the College of Justice and had particular privileges in respect of Court of Session procedure and a monopoly on writing some of the papers relating to it. An ‘underwriter’ was a junior legal clerk.
- ²¹ *Caledonian Mercury*, 3 March 1781.
- ²² Almost certainly Robert Nutter Campbell (1761-1845). He was one of the heritors of Peebles with a responsibility for the upkeep of the parish. He also sat on Peebles Town Council.
- ²³ Had William accepted the position of deputy clerk offered by Alexander Park, he would have eventually realised his ambition to become commissary clerk of Peebles when Alexander died unexpectedly in 1814.
- ²⁴ The exact number is unknown, although in 1835 the compensation claim for the Maran Estate upon the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 cites 271 enslaved people. See the *Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery* website: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>.
- ²⁵ *Caledonian Mercury*, 5 October 1797.
- ²⁶ As contemporary tax rolls for Moffat demonstrate, James Laidlaw was not in residence after 1797.
- ²⁷ For a reference to James Laidlaw as an example of the new medical specialist of the early nineteenth century, see McKendrick, N, *et al. The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England*, Bloomington, 1983, 189.
- ²⁸ *Morning Herald*, 21 January 1807.
- ²⁹ The minister of Tweedsmuir, Reverend James Gardiner, also received a silver medal from the Society for drawing up and submitting the account of Walter’s improvements. See Ramsay, A. *History of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1879, 131.
- ³⁰ To rip or tear up (Scots).

- ³¹ NRS, CC8/6/927, Process of Divorce: James Somerville vs. May or Marion Shiels, Depositions of Witnesses, David Gray, Merchant, 19 June 1793. The Somervilles had intermarried with the Shiels of Westruther and there is some tentative evidence that May Shiels was related to them, perhaps an illegitimate child, which might go some way to explain the very strong reaction of John Somerville to his son's irregular marriage. She certainly had family in Westruther, as both a brother and mother are referred to in the divorce papers. Documents written by May suggest that she was not only literate, but reasonably well educated. Following her divorce, she took up with a local tenant farmer, with whom she had a daughter, Allison, in 1797. Unfortunately, the father of her child was shot in an altercation with another man and May was yet again left to her own devices.
- ³² William's letter was transcribed into the minutes of the Presbytery Session of Peebles. The Reverend Dr William Dalgleish was the minister of Peebles. See NRS, CH2/295/13, Peebles Presbytery, Minutes, 1780-1818.
- ³³ Kirk Sessions had the sole right to keep mortcloths and let them for burial. Seceder assemblies were not permitted to keep mortcloths and Seceders, as the Laidlaws may have been, were expected to pay the parish dues to hire a mortcloth for their burials. See Walker, D M. *A Legal History of Scotland: The Eighteenth Century*, Edinburgh, 1988, 279.

THE FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE OF
WILLIAM LAIDLAW

1. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Edinburgh 16th July 1792

Dear Brother

I would have been down yesterday, but as I did not get time to call at Mrs Cramonds^[1] till last night I delayed coming till I knew whither Jane would go along with me or not. She is very keen to go, and we intended to come on Sunday first. Aunt Tweedie^[2] and family were to leave town this day, but John said he would be in next week at the Races.^[3]

The famous Mrs Siddens^[4] is come to town and is to act this night in character of Bellvidera if you be not here before Sundy [*sic*] you may expect to see Miss Jane and me then. Compliments to Mary. I am in great haste

Yours etc.

Rob Laidlaw

(that's a scribble for you)

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mrs Carre's, Ravenshaugh near Prestonpans

¹ Formerly of Yarrow, Selkirkshire, Mrs Cramond and her daughters were old friends of the Laidlaw family. They now lived in Richmond Place, near to William Laidlaw's future lodgings in Edinburgh. See the Introduction (note 13) for further details.

² William's aunt Mary Tweedie, also called 'Aunt Welsh' elsewhere in the correspondence.

³ The Leith (or Edinburgh) Races was an annual horse racing event held at the end of July on the sands to the east of Leith harbour. John is probably the aforementioned Aunt Welsh's son.

⁴ The actress Sarah Siddons (1755-1831). She was appearing as Belvidera in *Venice Preserv'd*, a tragedy by Thomas Otway, at the Theatre Royal.

2. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 17th June 1793

Dear Will

That day I left you I had a very pleasant ride home and arrived here about twelve o'clock midnight when I found the doors locked and the family all in bed. My Father is still complaining a good deal he desires you [*interlined:* to] write if

Mr Laidlaw received the bond which was sent by the last Fridays post – be sure and write when you change your room that I may know where to direct for you. My Father proposes you to pay your proportion of the room rent so that you may be cautious what sort of a one you take,

[*illegible – page damaged*] etc.

Walter Laidlaw

[*written on the back of the letter, probably by William Laidlaw:*]

~~There is such a natural~~ So great is the concord between the [*interlined:* different] motions incident to the human mind that to be merely a spectator [*interlined:* of any] of them in another person renders us to a considerable degree partakers of ~~those perturbations~~ [*interlined:* their feelings] of whatever kind they are. Such was my situation that day you left Edinburgh. Upon beholding your unexpected meeting and almost instantaneous parting with my sister the agitation of mind which was perfectly visible in both your countenances made such an impression on me that I entirely neglected to give you the small volume herewith sent, which I now beg leave to present to you hoping it will afford some amusement for an idle hour. You will also receive the pen knife which you spoke of to my brother Rob – it should have been sent before now but he ~~went~~ [*interlined:* having gone] to the country some time ago ~~and~~ left it with me desiring it might be sent to you immediately and I having been so much engaged of late in writing hornings and captions^[1] (a bad business) that I have never till now had an opportunity of sending it, for which I must request your excuse

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mrs Scotts, Foot of Gilmors Close, Grassmarket, Edinburgh

¹ Legal documents issued against persons who had not paid their debts.

3. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 8th July 1793

Dear Will

You [*interlined:* will] receive the box with a piece of butter of which you are to take a part and give the remainder to Mrs Cramond, I beg you will deliver the inclosed to Bell immediately upon receipt of this; as it bears a commission which must be answered this week; therefore if you cannot go yourself I hope you will send it by a sure hand as she will have little enough time. Your clothes

are sent in a band box which [*interlined:* you] are to give [*interlined:* her] if she thinks it will answer: if not she must buy one.

I mentioned it to her, and also that you would give them the butter. Write us when you hear from Rob and if he received his clothes, as we had no letter from him last week – put the cloth round the box again when it comes out in case it should give way. I am

Dear Will
your most affectionate Sister
Mary Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

4. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 29th July 1793

Dear Will

I am sorry to see by your letter to Watty that folly and vanity is still so predominant in you as to make you neglect the request of a parent, and such a parent as God and your own conscience knows I have been to you, had you wanted any thing for yourself you would have found time enough to have wrote, butt [*i.e.* but] the way you have answered me will teach me how to anser you in time to come. I wanted some sugar to make some gelly [*i.e.* jelly] the berrys being now ripe and the villain Stoddart charged me fifteen pence farthing for single reined [*i.e.* refined] sugar which I am told Mr Tweedie¹ has never charged more than thirteen pence for. I little expected ever to have a son in Edinbrugh [*sic*] that would have used me in the manner you have done – butt however if you think it worth your while you may go to Mr Tweedie and tell him to send me a loaf of his Best Lump Sugar nott exceedindg [*i.e.* exceeding] 20 or 24 p[o]und weight and write me the price, and if it does not come this week it shall be the last commission I ever shall give to you. I am sorry to subscribe my self the affectionate father of an undutytful son

James Laidlaw

P.S. you may tell Mr Tweedie he shall have his money the first time your Brother Watty or I come to town.

The cover sheet does not survive.

¹ Probably William's cousin Robert Tweedie, who owned a grocer's shop on South Bridge.

5. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 10th September 1793

Dear Will

I have in two former letters already hinted my mother's illness, she is however no better but rather the reverse. My Father therefore begs that you would come out in the Peebles Fly^[1] on Friday as she is the better of some person being always in the room with her he is but poorly himself and I am employed in the harvest and Mary is taken up with the house so that he thinks you might be of use to us all in many respects.

You need not be alarmed there is apparently no imminent danger she is as yet free of sickness but much confused and indistinct as you know she always is when she aileth – my Father desires you to let Aunt Welsh know of my mother's illness.

I am Dear Will

Your affectionate Brother

Walter Laidlaw

P.S I will be at Peebles on Friday with a couple of horses.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Wright, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ The Edinburgh-Peebles stagecoach left from Fortune's stable, Chapel Street, Edinburgh, every Tuesday and Friday at 9 am, and returned the same day at 2 pm. The cost of a ticket was 6 shillings.

6. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 11th November 1793

Dear William

Your famous screw that you brought me from Selkirk gave way the first wine cork that Walter drew with it the worm came out of the handle. But that is not the worst of it, the screw is so thick that every cork it cleaves as with an ax driven down through it, and in drawing a gross of corks it will cost me eighteen pence.

You will send me this week two or three screws of the same kind I had before, and if there are any in Muirs shop^[1] of any other construction that you think better, send two or three of them if the price does not exceed one shilling,

and six pence, and what is nott kept shall be returned, and what is kept Walter will pay when he comes to town.

You will give my compliments to your Aunt Welsh and ask her if she gott the direction for using the Oriental Cordial,^[2] and if she has tryed it, and what effect it has had, and tell her from me that if she has nott felt her self the worse affected I think she should continue att it for some time.

I am Dear William
Your affectionate Father
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ John Muir, ironmonger, where William's brother Robert served part of his apprenticeship. His shop was located between Byre's Close and Allen's Close on the High Street.

² The makers of the Oriental Vegetable Cordial, an 'essence extracted from the most rare and valuable herbs, flowers, and roots, with which Nature hath enriched the Eastern Regions for the Preservation of Man', claimed that it 'acted immediately on the stomach, bowels and nervous system' and so would relieve those suffering from apoplexies, cholick, gout, rheumatics and various other disorders.

7. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 6th January 1794

Dear Will

I am sorry to learn that the stockings are too little, which indeed I suspected would be the case, when too late; but you are partly to blame yourself as I [*interlined:* know] you have a great predilection for strait cloaths; I think they would answer me but I am afraid you would weary before I could have another pair ready; you may tell Rob, I am busy working a pair for him.

Be sure to burn the inclosed as soon as you have it read, you will no doubt think it very severe, but at the same time you ought to be thankful, when you think upon others; for I cannot help thinking you are comparatively happy; at least I can with all my heart say with the wise man; "Better is a dry morsel, in quietness therewith, than a houseful of sacrifices with strife".^[1] The reason of our enquiry about the price of coffie [*i.e.* coffee] was to know if it was any cheaper, than at Selkirk, but as it is exactly the same price you mention, it would be dearer for us to get it from Edinburgh.

You will no doubt be attending the trial of Skirvine today,^[2] I wish you may not be trode [*i.e.* trod] down amongst the crowd; be sure to write his sentence.

I think you might now venture to go and see Mrs Laidlaw and her young friend, write how they and all other friends are and what is the child's name when you know it, it will certainly be Margaret.

I hope you will be carefull to forward every letter for me, as soon as possible after you receive them, as they are sometimes of a very old date, when they reach me.

I am Dear Will
your most affectionate Sister
Mary Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ Proverbs 17:1.

² William Skirving (c.1745-1796) was the secretary to the Edinburgh Society of Friends of the People. He was on trial for organising seditious meetings and circulating a seditious pamphlet. He was found guilty and sentenced to fourteen years transportation.

8. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 3rd February 1794

Dear William

Owing to the very heavy fall of snow and severe strom [*i.e.* storm] which we have had in this part of the country the courier could not get away, the roads being entirely stopped. We however did not receive a letter the last time the courier was in. You will receive your cloaths this week which you will undubtedly be in great need off [*sic*].

I attended the roup of Cadonhead^[1] on Saturday last when it was set to an English man at the enormous sum of 258£ sterling yearly rent – write me next when I shall have more time to give you the news of our storm. I am

Dear Will
Your ever affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a parcel

¹ In Scots, to 'roup' was to sell or let at a public auction. Cadonhead was a farm in the Moorfoot Hills on the borders of Peeblesshire and Midlothian.

9. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 10th March 1794

Dear Will

You will receive Rob's shoes and a fowl for my Aunt, but before you take it to her you must take off the outer cloth, as it might be lost in the confusion; as to my coming in I know not what to say about it, my father seems to wish it much, and I would with all my heart agree to it if I thought I could be of the least use to her, but my infirm state of health makes that doubtful, I have been so poorly for some days past, that it will be impossible for me to try it this week and especially in such weather and besides we have no horses, my fathers mare being lame and the rest plowing [*i.e.* ploughing] at Hundleshope, I think you might mention it to my Aunt and if she seems to wish it, if I am any better next week I shall certainly try it.

It is not improbable I may take your advice about my flitting, as the road you propose is full as near as the others. However, you are wrong for once in your conjecture about that affair, as I only had the pleasure of asking my friend how he did (upon horseback) on Wednesday evening as he passed, for I could not prevail with him to stop as he was obliged to be home that night, but he has promised to be with us very soon.

I am truly sorry to hear that my Reverend friend is still persecuted to such a degree though I hope he will at last get the better of them all. The trial I think indeed shows the Relief Presbytery^[1] of Edinburgh to be (as he says) filled with the spirit of malice as well as whisky and besides I think [*interlined:* they] should study the Law before they attempt to proceed on any similar trial.

You may see by this scrawl what a pen I write with; them you made me are all gone into disrepair I think you might send me one or two in your bundle. I beg you will forward the inclosed to Daldowie^[2] as soon as possible. I am

Dear Will

your most affectionate Sister

Mary Laidlaw

The cover sheet does not survive.

¹ The Presbytery of Relief (also known as the Relief Church) had been established in 1761 by Thomas Gillespie in opposition to the Church of Scotland's approach to patronage.

² Robert Bogle of Daldowie, a merchant who traded mainly in tobacco and sugar. He also owned two cotton estates in Grenada worked by enslaved people.

10. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 12th May 1794

Dear Will

You will receive your trunk and the bundle, and I expect you will send in return this week the things I mentioned to you. I am surprised you should distrust me so much as I find you have done, by the many injunctions you left about the ring, which I could no doubt send in the bundle, but I think it too valuable an article to risk in that way, especially as there is no necessity for it, as Watt tells me you are to be out soon after Whitsunday.

Miss Henderson came here on Wednesday afternoon and went down with us yesterday, she wanted my father to fix a day for coming to Selkirk, but he told her that he felt himself unable to go abroad and therefore was determined to be in no house but his own during his stay here – write how you got in and if the Miss Cramonds are come to town yet, I wonder there are no letters for me from any of them. I beg my best compliments to them all when you see them – write me also if you have heard anything of Mrs Collis.

My Mother desires you will send out all the pocks^[1] and cloaths you have as we will need them much about this time. I am

Dear Will

your most affectionate Sister
Mary Laidlaw

The cover sheet does not survive.

¹ In Scots, 'pock' is a bag or a small sack.

11. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Selkirk 19th May 1794

Dear Will

I received yours together with the bundle and the things I spoke of to you, but the stays will be useless as they are open before and must be wore with a stomacher which you have not sent. The Peebles carrier will certainly be with you this week as Watt is to go over to day to engage him. Inclosed you will receive a note for Rob, and your clothes as usual next week, but my mother desires you to get your next bundle washed in town as we must be fairly settled

at Hundleshope before you send anything out. You may tell Sandy Laidlaw¹ to send no more bread after this week as it will be more convenient for us to get it at Peebles. My mother thinks if you could send the lock and key of the flesh boat² it might be of use to us for pu[t]ting some things into. I [*interlined: am*] here taking leave of my good friends in Selkirk. I go home tomorrow, and we are all to go off on Monday. I am in great haste

Dear Will
yours Sincerely
Mary Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ Alexander Laidlaw, baker, Candlemaker Row. He was William's cousin.

² A tub for storing meat.

12. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Broadmeadows 24th May 1794

Dear William

You will receive your bundle of cloths [*i.e.* clothes] and the stockings which you mentioned. My Father and Mother went away yesterday in order to be out of the confusion of our removal which is indeed very great today as I can with difficulty get a corner in the house to sit down in the time I am writing these few lines as G. Lister is busy tumbling everything down. Adieu to Broadmeadows and all its sweets, to Selkirk and all its enchantments thereof.

I am
Dear Will
Your affectionate Brother
Posatively [*sic*] the last time
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a Bundle

13. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 25th June 1794

Dear William

I got safe home on Thursday night about eleven o'clock; after it turned late I had enough to do to find the way.

I neglected to tell Sandy Laidlaw that I was going out of town; be so good as desire him not to send my bread till I return.

I have sent you the key of my drawers that you may send out some of my woolen stockings which my Mother wishes me to wear while in the country.

Mary expects Nancy Henderson here on Saturday or Monday, on her way to the bathing, and they intend to go to Edinburgh in [*interlined:* the] Peebles Fly the Friday following. Mary wishes to go to her old lodgings but as there are no double bed[d]ed rooms in the house she thinks if Bell Cramond intends going this season, that for them to take two rooms and eat all together will do very well if agreeable to her. She therefore begs you will write Mrs Heath, to keep 1 room or 2 if Bell Cramond goes with them – you will receive a band box with a hat of Mary's to get drest [*i.e.* dressed]. Alison Tweedie proposes being in town on Friday first; you are to give it to her as she is to get it done; but in case she does not come, desire Bell Cramond to do it as she wishes to have it ready when she comes in.^[1]

This has been a long story of Mary's about hats, band boxes and bathing, but it is at length finished.

Be so good as give Mr Muir's letter into the shop.

I am

Dear William

Your affectionate Brother

Robert Laidlaw

P.S. You will receive Mansfield and Ramsay's note,^[2] and draw the other ten pounds and send by the courier.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at James Laidlaw's, Writer to the Signet, Edinburgh

¹ This part of Robert's letter relates to the annual sea-bathing excursion that the Laidlaws and their friends made to Prestonpans. Mrs Heath was no doubt one of the locals who rented rooms to summer visitors.

² Mansfield, Ramsay and Co. was a firm of Edinburgh bankers.

14. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 30th June 1794

Dear Will

I received yours of the 26th current with [*interlined: the*] money you make mention of. My Mother was so throng that she could not get your neckcloths ready last week, but I do assure you that I told her of them.

I suppose that you will this week receive in the bundle with the cloathes some barley (as desired). I had a letter [*interlined: this*] day from James Robertson^[1] with a present from him of some sugar candy for my cough; I have sent an answer to it which you will be so good as deliver to him. I have wrote him for half dozen fly hooks [*interlined: drest*] which he is to send me this week by the carrier, you may either pay them or not as you find it convenient. I understand my Father is rather better than he has been. I am not so often sick as when I left Edinburgh. I have not heard from Jamie^[2] since I came out.

I am,

Yours [*illegible- page damaged*]

Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamson's, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a Bundle and Box

¹ There were at least eight James Robertsons in Edinburgh at this time, although as he was a seller of fish hooks, this was perhaps the ironmonger who later had a shop at the head of South Gray's Close and was perhaps working at Muir's at this time.

² William and Robert's brother James Laidlaw.

15. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 9th July 1794

Dear William

I received yours on Monday at Langhaugh.^[1] I suppose you will have got your neckcloths before this time; James Steel^[2] was to see to get your shoes in with him this week. I believe you will receive a night shirt and some butter.

Be so good as deliver the inclosed. I have this morning sent a letter to Jamie by a person going to Moffat this day, but I am almost disparing [*i.e.*

despairing] of seeing him before I leave the country, as I am told there has not [*interlined*: been] as much company at the Well for 7 years past.

There is a cheese and can of butter which you will send to Mary by the coach. My Father wishes you to send out my Burns's Poems they are in Mrs Cramonds. I am,

Yours etc.
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a Box and Cheese and Cann

¹ Probably Langhaugh farm in the parish of Manor, Peeblesshire.

² James Steele was the carrier between Edinburgh and the Borders. He was based at Thomas Archibald's stables in Candlemaker Row, where he also had a cellar to store goods.

16. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Ravenshaugh 15th July 1794

Dear Will

I take the opportunity of writing you a few lines by Miss A Tweedie and Miss Laidlaw who came here last night and are to return this evening. I hope you got well home on Sunday, though you would be very welcome. We would be glad if you could come down on Saturday and stay all night, as it would be easier for yourself and we can give you a bed.

I beg you will put the inclosed epistle in yours, to the country as it is so very small. I long to hear how my father and Bob are now, which I hope you will inform me of, if you do not come yourself; also how Mrs Archibald^[1] is now. I am

Dear Will
Your most affectionate Sister
Mary Laidlaw

P.S. Be so good as bring me a pen or two as I am in great need of them M.L.

The cover sheet does not survive.

¹ William's aunt Isobell, who was married to the stabler and vintner Thomas Archibald.

17. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 15th July 1794

Dear William

I received Burns's Poems this week, but we expected to hear either from Mary or you, how her and the rest of the Ladies are since they went to the bathing.

You will find in the bundle a flannel vest for Mary which you will send to her. I desired you to send out a flannel vest of mine when I came away which you have not yet done.

Be so good as give the inclosed to Mr Muir. I have been a good deal worse since Mary went in. I am at present taking medicine and Mr Reid^[1] is speaking of laying a blister on my breast.

Write how Mary is doing with the bathing.

I am

Dear Will

Yours etc.

Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a Bundle

¹ Dr James Reid (d. 1803), who at this time was not only the provost of Peebles, but also its physician and surgeon.

18. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW JR

Moffat 18th July 1794

Dear Brother

I received your letter by Mr Pitcairn but as he did not call on his return I had not an opportunity of answering it by him. Being in daily expectation of getting off for a few days to see you, I delayed writing; but now finding that it will not be in my power at this time, on account of a greater number of company being here than for several years past, I now embrace an opportunity which has this moment offered of writing you by James McGrigor, a waiter who is leaving Rae's^[1] and who will deliver this to you.

Inclosed you will receive a Guinea note, and [*interlined*: I] request you will lose no time in calling upon Mr Spottiswood W.S. Hanover Street, and pay him the account due by me to Cornelius Elliot Bookseller being 14/6, for which you will receive his receipt, which you may keep till next meeting. If to the remainder you can conveniently add a few shillings and pay Dr Anderson for the last 4 Volumes of the Bee,^[2] I shall esteem it a favour, and which shall be duly and thankfully acknowledged. You may mention to Dr Anderson that there are two numbers which I never received, and one or two which have fallen aside: and I beg to know whether they can still be supplied.

A few days ago I had a letter from Robert at Hundleshope which I answered, but find at present it is impossible for me to get there.

I shall expect to hear from you in a short time; and also be under the necessity of troubling you with respect to that fellow Johnston late at Hunterheck^[3] but now gone to Dalkeith, a copy of whose accompt [*i.e.* account] I shall send to you, and you may endeavour to recover in whole or in part, although I almost despair of either. I am in haste,

Dear William
Your most affectionate Brother
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Laidlaws, W.S. Castle hill, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with £1.1.

¹ Rae's Inn, Moffat. For the inn and its proprietor, James Rae, see the Introduction.

² Dr James Anderson founded, published and largely wrote *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, a magazine that included essays on a wide range of topics from agriculture to politics, as well as articles on literary matters. It was published between December 1790 and January 1794, and cost 6 pence per issue. Despite its popularity, Anderson was compelled to abandon its publication because a large number of its subscribers failed to pay their dues. The office of *The Bee* was in the Meal Market Stairs, Edinburgh.

³ Hunterheck was a farm in the parish of Moffat, Dumfriesshire.

19. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 22nd July 1794

Dear William

I received yours this week with the bundle; Since I wrote you I have got your last weeks letter. You may tell Mary when you see her, that Watt was so throng

with sheep sorting etc. that he had not time to write her. Let us know how she is next week. You need not expect to get your cloaths in next week, as since writing you last week, my Mother has been a good deal indisposed with her old complaints, and they are very throng with the ewes milking.

My complaints are nothing abated since last week, but cannot get the blister applyed on account of my Mother's illness, from these circumstances you may suppose my Father to be but poorly. Such are the Events of Providence! If you see Mr Muir or J. Robertson please tell how I am now.

I am
Dear William
Your affectionate Brother
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

20. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 29th July 1794

Dear William

You may call at James Steele for the galloway^[1] as you spoke of coming to the country. My Father desires you to come away in proper time so as you may not be late as you are a stranger to the road from Peebles as Rob had great difficulty in finding it when he came out it being dark.

You will write Mary before you leave town that my Mother is rather better so that she may continue at the sea bathing a little longer yet as we once had a thought of her being called home in consequence of her illness.

I am
Dear William
Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ The Galloway pony was a small breed of horse, valued for its hardiness, stamina and ability to cover rough terrain.

21. FROM JANET LAIDLAW

Hillhouse 30th July 1794

My Dear William

Your not being in when I left the [*interlined:* house] that morning was the reason of my ~~burning~~ not leaving my keys for Mr Laidlaw. I have sent you the key of my cupboard where the keys is you stand with Jennie or she gets what I want and keep the key or you give it into Mr Laidlaw's own hand I beg this a particular favour of you and I shall serve you as much in turn. I am

Dear Sir

Yours sincerely
Janet Laidlaw^[1]

forward Mr Laidlaw's [*interlined:* letter] to me when it com[e]s to hand as I am anxious

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr James Laidlaw, writer, Castlehill

Note on cover sheet: with a key

¹ The wife of William's cousin James Laidlaw W.S.

22. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 30th July 1794

Dear William

As the Galloway is sent this week with James Steel my Father desires you to come off tomorrow as soon as you can after receiving it as you are a stranger to the road betwixt Peebles and this in [*i.e. ?and*] to have plenty of day light to come home in.

We think my Mother rather worse today as she did not rest well last night but hope she will soon be well. If you have time hand the inclosed into Mr Muir if not give it to a porter. In hopes of seeing you tomorrow I am

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

23. FROM JANET LAIDLAW

Hillhouse^[1] 4th August 1794

My Dear William

I most [*i.e.* must] put you on your gaurd [*sic*] to keep the key of my cupbord as all the keys in the house are in it. I am very uneasie till I hear from your Master. I wish [*interlined:* he] write with spirite [*sic*] it will make me happy be sure to send it without delay give me all your news. I have got nothing new from this quarter we are all well. Constent rain. I have got a walke this morning but it still lours, let me know if you have good accounts from your Brother Robert. And how my young Lass [*interlined:* e] if they are Buzie [*i.e.* busy] and taks care of the house tell them I won't forget them.

I am Sincerely

Yours

Janet Laidlaw

Addressed to: the cover sheet does not survive.

Note: Someone has written a poem on the back of the sheet. See Appendix B.

¹ In the original, Janet Laidlaw has added 'Monday 12 a coke [*i.e.* clock] noon'.

24. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 4th August 1794

Dear William

Since you left this my Mother is turned a good deal worse, as she did not rest well at all last night; she seems to wish Mary to come home, my Father is worse of consequence. He therefore desires you on the receipt of this to lose no time in taking out a ticket in Peebles Fly for her on Friday first; and then to go down to P.pans [*i.e.* Prestonpans] and inform her of it yourself rather as by letter, least she should be alarmed, and also on Miss Tweedies account that she may not lose her ticket if she wishes to come out with Mary. I am Dear Will

Yours sincerely

Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Wright, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

25. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW JR

Moffat 19th August 1794

Dear Brother

On the 19th of last month I wrote you by James McGrigor who was a waiter at Rae's, but upon some difference left him at that time. Inclosed in that letter I sent you a Guinea Note with directions how it was to be applied: but I suppose neither the man nor the letter have ever made their appearance to you. I understand he is now a waiter at an inn at Kirkaldie [*i.e.* Kirkcaldy]: and if you will take the trouble to call at Camerons in the New Town,^[1] where he formerly served, and inquire for the name of the inn and landlord with whom he now is, (as I am informed they know it) and write me his address, I shall esteem it a favour.

While I am thus in the way of asking favours let me still request another, which is that you will call at Mr Robert Scott apothecary on the South Bridge and desire him to send by the Moffat and Dumfries diligence on Thursday two bottles of Godbold's Vegetable Balsam.^[2] He may direct them to Mr Rae, by which means they will be better taken care of and less expence in the carriage. You may make my compliments to Mr Scott and tell him that as they are for an old acquaintance and fellow student, (who perhaps he may have forgot) I beg he will be pointed in sending them. He may enclose a note of the price within the cover. I shall expect to hear from you in the course of a few Posts.

With best compliments to Robert as well as yourself, and anxious to hear how you both are,

I always am,
Dear William,
your most affectionate Brother
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: William Laidlaw at Mr Laidlaw's, W.S. Castle Hill, Edinburgh

¹ Perhaps Cameron's Hotel, 2 Princes Street.

² The balsam was the invention of baker Nathaniel Godbold (c.1730-1799). Claiming that it was a mixture of various fruits, herbs and gums dissolved in distilled vinegar, he advertised it as a remedy for consumption, asthma and other lung disorders.

26. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 20th August 1794

Dear William

I expected to have been in town before this time but as my complaints are very little abated the surgeons think it improper for me to return to town till my health is more confirmed but would fain hope to be able to return to town in ten days or two weeks at farthest, be [*interlined:* so] good as call on Mr Muir and tell how I am, have you ever spoke of my indentures to him yet?

Mary had not time to write this week. She desires you to send out her shoes this week with Steele you will receive some neckcloths. My Father desires you to send him out yesterdays Advertiser and tomorrows Courant with Steele this week. My Mother is rather better.

I am

Dear William

Yours sincerely

Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

27. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 27th August 1794

Dear William

I received yours of the 21st instant with [*interlined:* the] newspapers you mention.

You will receive this week a piece of butter and the bundle with cloaths. Steele will bring in your shoes if ready. From the style in which you wrote to me last, you appear to have been in a huff at I do not know what.

You mention [*interlined:* the] impropriety of talking with Mr Muir of my indentures, for my part I do not perceive it. Mr Muir might throw my absence in your teeth whenever you mention that affair to him, however long after, but you seem to put it off from time to time. I intend being in Town if I keep well about tomorrow about eight days. From ~~the~~ a letter I got from Mr Muir, and what he said to me when I left Town, I am very far mistaken if he would

ever mention my absence as a cause for changing the bargain. My Mother is rather some better. I am

Dear William
Your affectionate Brother
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Wright, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle and box

28. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 3rd September 1794

Dear William

You will receive this week a small parcell which I believe consists mostly of cravats.

Your letter with respect to Jamie came to hand this morning and all that I can say at present is that my Father does not at all relish it especially [*i.e.* especially] with regard to the money part of it which in his circumstances he thinks he is not bound in duty to do. You may write me if you hear any more of it and in expectation of seeing you soon. I am

Dear William
Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a parcell.

29. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Edinburgh 25th September 1794

Dear William

I am favoured with yours of yesterdays date, and am glad to learn you got well home (though with a wet skin I suppose). Since you went out I have been but

very indifferent, not being able to stand in [*interlined*: the] shop the shop [*sic*] hours since I came in; having almost continued pain in my breast and squeemishness, but this day have been rather easier. As Mr Muir is taking stock at present, we are all in hurry and confusion; I have however sent the goods my Father ordered which I hope will give satisfaction, I had not time [*interlined*: to] send an account of them regularly drawn out, but have inclosed a slip of the number of articles that should be in the parcel, I believe the price is marked on each.

I have not heard from James since you left this. J. Sommerville^[1] was gone from this before the letter came. I sent off your other letter as desired.

Be sure to get a pair of shoes made for me as soon as possible and sent in as the pair I have will need to be soaled very soon and I have not a pair to keep my feet dry till they be mended, the length of my foot is exactly $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches cause them to be made shorter in upper leathers than the last were.

Write how my Father and Mother are next week etc.

yours in haste,
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Hundleshope, Peebles

Note on cover sheet: with a trunk and parcel

¹ Probably the writer John Somerville of 67 Princes Street. For the relationship between the Laidlaws and the Somervilles, see the Introduction and Family Trees, Table 1.

30. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Edinburgh 2nd October 1794

Dear William

I have yours of yesterday as also the box with its contents as mentioned in the letter. You may inform my Father that I saw a copy of the report of the secret committee^[1] in Baillie Dickson's [*interlined*: Shop] Royal Exchange,^[2] the price of it is 4/6 stitched containing 174 pages about the thickness of one of the volumes of Burns's Poems but not so large by a good deal, I think it a very dear article.

I have sent out your cloaths in the bundle with mine this week; my Mother will find her specta[c]les wrapt up in the bundle with a dog collar for Mrs

Laidlaw Glenrath^{3]} which I think should answer and you will please deliver with my compliments to Mrs Laidlaw and hers.

Mr Tweedie was to send the whisky this week if a permit can be got in time, if not next week. If my Mother could send me some barley it would be obliging.

The sett of table knives and carvers sent last week we can recommend as realy stout and good, the handles after being used some time will turn much darker and (if keep properly) much prettier – we had tea knives [*interlined:* with] the handles rivet[t]ed and exactly of same pattern and quality of the tables, but as they are about 1/6 or 2/ per dozen dearer I thought those I sent might do well enough to cutt cheese or butter with.

I am your affectionate Brother,
Rob Laidlaw

P.S. Desire them never to allow the handles of the knives to be put into warm water as it is apt to loosen [*interlined:* the] cement and the tea knives not being rivetted in the end may come off altogether.

With compliments to my Father and Mother etc.

I am yours in haste, R.L.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Hundleshope, Peebles

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

¹ In May 1794, a Committee of Secrecy had been appointed by the government to inspect the books and papers of the London Corresponding Society and other reform societies that were thought to be plotting against the state. Two reports quickly followed, both of which concluded that the societies were intent on overthrowing the existing political order, by force if needs be.

² James Dickson was a bookseller whose shop was in the Royal Exchange, High Street.

³ William's cousin Mary Laidlaw. She was married to Walter Laidlaw, the farmer at Glenrath.

31. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Edinburgh 9th October 1794

Dear William

I received yours with the shoes; you may inform my Mother that the goldsmith said her spectacle case would take more to mend it than it was worth, and could

not be done to any purpose. Mrs Laidlaw's padlock opened well enough with me when sent away, (I thought some of you might have had the ingenuity to open a common bag lock!) you turn the key only half round to hold back the spring, and then pull up the staple.

Mr Guthrie^[1] is to send the Secret Report, for my Father this week. I do not intend to go near the execution on Wednesday next so they may be easy in that respect.^[2]

I have inclosed in the box a shirt, neckcloth and pair of stocking; you may tell my Mother the [*interlined*: new] pocket handkerchief of mine, which she was speaking about is not here, so I presume it is lost. Mr R. Tweedie sells his single refine sugar at 1/ per pound which she wisht to be informed about. Write how the crop is getting in etc.

I am rather better than I was, but have for the most part a pain at my breast which I doubt much of getting free off. Write how are all.

I am
Your affectionate Brother
Robert Laidlaw

P.S. Inclosed is a letter I got from Bell Cramond on Sunday last – R.L.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Hundleshope, Peebles

Note on cover sheet: with a box

¹ Probably John Guthrie, bookseller, Nicolson's Street.

² Robert Watt, an Edinburgh wine merchant, had been found guilty of high treason and was to be executed on 15 October.

32. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 17th October 1794

Dear William

You will receive this week as follows. Viz. 1^{mo} a butter can 2^{do} a haggis 3^{tio} six shirts and some neck[c]loths and as to the money I desired Deacon Smith^[1] to call upon you and give you a supply, he being in town this week [*illegible word*] Croaks I thought that a surer way of conveyance than sending it in a letter. We had a visit this week of Alexander Park^[2] and Archibald Dunlop by whom I hear that Andrew Henderson^[3] is just now in town with his bride and that he is to be out soon at Selkirk a husband which I am very glad to hear.

Write me by the carrier if you have seen him and in what spirits he is in as I dare say he will be laughing.

I am
Dear William
Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ Donald Smith, head of the bank Donald Smith and Co.

² For the connection between the Laidlaws and the Parks, see the Introduction.

³ The son of the Andrew Henderson to whom William was apprenticed in Selkirk.

33. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Peebles 18th November 1794

Dear William

I have this moment received the dismal news of Mr J Tweedies^[1] death a circumstance which ought to make all young people think, seriously. I assure you I never was more surprised in my life but as a celebrated author observes Deaths shafts fly thick.^[2]

I received your letter giving an account of your journey which I dare say would be a very disagreeable [*sic*] one on account of your sore leg.

I beg you will write me how you are doing since you went to town. You will receive this week a letter to Miss Oliver from Mary which you will forward, as also a bundle for yourself. I am

Dear Will
Yours Sincerely
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Richardsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ James Tweedie, surveyor of excise, who had died at Stanhope on 15 November aged twenty-eight years.

² A quotation from Robert Blair's poem 'The Grave' (1743).

34. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 19th November 1794

Dear Will

The inclosed which I hope you will forward next week by the carrier will be delivered to you by John Tweedie,^[1] who is to be out tomorrow, on account of the melancholy event of his cousin's death, which I am truly sorry for; my Aunt intends going in with him, she dined here today on her way to Dreva, for that purpose; as it has been a remarkable high wind all day, we are all very anxious about her and Alison who was also with her, but is to return with her brother; we will not hear of them till Watty's return from the burial.^[2] You would receive a letter from him by Steel inclosing one to Miss Oliver, which will be too late for Melrose fair,^[3] I must therefore beg you will desire Mr Park to get it as soon and safely conveyed as possible, he may perhaps get it away at the ball, if not sooner.

Be sure to write how your cold and also your leg is now, I am still coughing, I hope Bob is continuing better.

I am

Dear Will

your affectionate Sister

Mary Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: Per favour Mr Tweedie

¹ William's cousin John Tweedie, son of James Tweedie of Dreva, Peeblesshire. He too was pursuing a legal career in Edinburgh, and was apprenticed to Andrew Hamilton W.S., Buccleuch Street. John's sister Alison is mentioned later in the letter.

² James Tweedie was buried at Tweedsmuir kirk.

³ The Martinmas Fair was held each year on 22 November. One of the three annual fairs held in Melrose, its main business was the buying and selling of cattle.

35. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 26th November 1794

Dear William

You will receive this week a bundle of clothes of different kinds in which are your new vest which you left to be made in the country. Mary desires you to send her a pair stockings and a white furr Tippet as being ~~the~~ of the cheapest kind, ~~and~~ also to take a pair stockings to yourself the money for which you will find inclosed and give the remainder to Rob as he will proboblay [*sic*] be needing some soon.

I have just now heard by our minister (who is come here today to visit the family in the way of his duty)^[1] that Mr Little writer in Peebles^[2] is very dangerously ill of a fever at Edinburgh and it is feared (owing to his shattered constitution) it will stand very hard with him to get free of it. Write by return of carrier how you are now doing. I always am

Dear Will
Yours Sincerely
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

¹ It was one of the duties of a Church of Scotland minister to visit his parishioners twice a year to ensure their knowledge of the catechism was sufficient to allow them to take communion.

² For William Little and William's ambitions to succeed him as commissary clerk of Peebles, see the Introduction.

36. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 3rd December 1794

Dear William

As usual you will receive inclosed a letter from Mary to some of her correspondents which you will please forward as directed.

Owing to the uncommon severity of the weather for these some days past James Steele has not made his appearance here this week, in consequence of

which the butter can must be delayed being sent until next opportunity when you may depend [*interlined*: upon] the receipt of it.

I am sorry to hear that your leg is no better, you certainly ought to take particular care of it and never walk when it can be avoided.

I hear Mr Little is no better but you will perhaps know more of his situation than me. I shall however not lose a moment of observing the hint which you gave me should matters turn out so as to require it. I am

Dear Will
Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

37. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 9th December 1794

Dear William

In a small bundle you will receive your neck[c]loth's and flannel vest as desired but I am affraid Robs shoes will not be got sent this week as Steele has not come up this length these several weeks since the weather changed so much to the worse and as this is a fair day in Peebles the shoe maker will very probably be engaged in business, however I shall do my best to get them sent.

Your bundle with its contents came safe to hand and Mary seems very well pleased with her tip[p]et in every thing but the price which she thinks rather too high. My Father desires you to send him out this week a barrel cork screw as he has broken the one that he had before. Mary desires you to write if you received her letter by Mr John Tweedie inclosing one to Miss W. Henderson as you have never acknoleged the receipt of it. Write bearer how your cold and leg are as I am just [*interlined*: going] off to the fair I must conclude. I am

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

38. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW JR

Moffat 14th December 1794

Dear Brother

By an advertisement in this nights newspaper I see that all the outstanding debts due for the Bee are put into the hands of a man of business^[1] in order that prosecutions may be immediately commenced. The author however says that if payments are made to Mr John Guthrie Bookseller Nicholsons Street of the neat sums due, any time before the 25th instant all expence will be saved: I have therefore to request that you will lose no time, in settling that business on my account, with Mr Guthrie. At the same time you may inform him, that you wished to [*interlined: have*] done it long ago, but could find no admission at the office.

With best compliments to Robert and all friends, and wishing to hear from you soon,

I am,
Dear William,
your most affectionate Brother
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at James Laidlaw Esquire, W.S., Castle Hill, Edinburgh

¹ *i.e.* a lawyer.

39. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 31st December 1794

Dear William

You will deliver the inclosed as usual according to its direction. Your clothes are likewise sent and the flesh boat will follow next week so that I think you will soon be complete in all the necessaries of life.

Mary has a grievous complaint against you with regard to a letter to Miss Oliver commit[t]ed to your care as she has had one from her since informing her that she has not yet received it so that you be so good as write her where you sent it and if you have not sent it away to give it to her brother John and he will get it conveyed. I have been at Selkirk these two or three days upon a very agreeable piece of bussiness. I suppose you know very well what I mean,

I never was more happy in my life joy being painted in every persons countenance, however I will give you a particular account at meeting which will probably be in the course of a week when I will bring Rob's Indentures with me. Adieu,

yours sincerely
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: With a bundle

40. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 14th January 1795

Dear William

After a rather disagreeable ride oweing principally to the darkness of the night and partly to coming all the way solus^[1] that day I left Edinburgh I reached Peebles about 8 o'clock and got home in good time to supper which I told you I was determined to do that night, however no more of my Edinburgh Expedition. You will deliver the inclosed to Mr Tweedie upon the receipt of this. You will receive in the bundle the neckcloths which you spoke of to me and as many other cloaths as my Mother can get ready in time for the carrier. The flesh boat was also sent last week but some how or other it was neglected to be directed. I think however you will know it when you see it as it is safe in Steeles sellar [*i.e.* cellar] at Archibalds so that you may enquire as above. Write by return of the carrier. Publick affairs seem still to have a very gloomy aspect.

I am
Dear William
ever Yours
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: With a bundle

¹ *i.e.* alone.

41. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW JR

Moffat 19th January 1795

Dear Brother

A few days ago I received a letter from a Mr Sommervil Writer, intimating a meeting of the creditors of David Johnston late in Hunterheck in John's coffee house^[1] on Wednesday next at 12 o'clock noon; as the post is just going I have only time to desire that you will attend there for me, and do as you would do for yourself.

I shall send you by tomorrow's post the amount of my account and should not have troubled you at so late an hour tonight, had it not been that I durst not trust to your receiving my letter before the meeting on Wednesday.

I am, in haste,
My Dear Brother,
Most sincerely yours
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at James Laidlaw's Esq. W.S., Castle Hill, Edinburgh

¹ John's coffee-house in Parliament Close was a popular meeting place in Edinburgh, especially for members of the legal profession. It had a number of large rooms, some of which were used for meetings of creditors and similar business.

42. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW JR

Moffat 20th January 1795
9 o'clock PM

Dear Brother

I wrote you last night just as the post was going away, and having scarcely got into bed when I was called away and only just now returned, I have only time to mention in general as I did last night, that a meeting of the creditors of David Johnston late in Hunterheck is to be held in John's coffee-house on Wednesday the 21st instant at 12 o'clock noon, where I give you full power to appear and act for me. He has £42 Sterling annually from the King, and £20 from Dr James Currie of Dumcrief^[1] both of which sums I am informed he has assigned away. I must therefore request that you will make proper enquiry into that matter before you give your assent to any composition. But upon such enquiry,

should you find it to be the case, and that he has a legal right to make such assignation; I beg you will consent to any reasonable composition; or in short do as you would for yourself. My sum is about £10 or more, but shall transmit you a more particular state of it afterwards. In the mean time I shall expect to hear from you in [*interlined*: the course of] a post or two.

With all the compliments of the season to you and Robert,

I ever am
Dear William
your most affectionate Brother
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, James Laidlaw Esq. W.S., Castle-hill, Edinburgh

¹ James Currie, a physician who pioneered cold water treatments for fever patients, is perhaps best known nowadays for his anthology and biography of Robert Burns. He lived at Dumcrieff House, near Moffat.

43. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 21st January 1795

Dear Will

I beg you will forward the inclosed as soon as possible. I would be glad to know when or how you disposed of my last to Miss Oliver, I had a letter from her lately informing me that she had at last received mine which I had given up for lost, which I was glad to hear – have you heard any thing of Nancy Henderson, I am anxious to know how she is now. I am much surprised that Willie has not wrote me, if she was not able herself.

I had a letter from Jane Cramond soon after you left us, part of which belonged to you and I shall give it in her own words – “ I beg you will present my service to William, and tell him that he was much in the wrong to suppose that I stood in need of any preparative before reading your letter except he thinks me as sleepy headed as himself, as I understand he sat snoring by the fireside while you was writing to me?”

You will perhaps have heard of the death of our friend Mrs Williamson in Peebles who died on Friday last, aged ninety, her brother in Williamslee is now the only survivor of that family.^[1] You will receive your cloaths and some barley. My father orders you to send Thomsons Seasons^[2] this week,

observe this is a day of wrath; write how Thomas Archibald and the rest of the family are,

I am
Dear Will
yours Sincerely
Mary Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mrs William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

¹ William's aunt Christian Williamson and uncle William Laidlaw of Williamslee. See the Introduction for more details.

² James Thomson's poetic cycle *The Seasons*, first published between 1726 and 1730.

44. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW JR

Moffat 3rd February 1795

Dear Brother

I received yours of the 22nd ultimo [*i.e.* January] respecting the proceedings at the meeting of Johnstons creditors. The day following I set off on [*interlined:* a] visit to [*interlined:* our] friends at Hundleshope, and was overtaken by such a storm as I never remember to have encountered before. After four days scrambling over mountains of snow mostly on foot, I at length reached the place of my destination, where I could only remain one night.

After again facing the same and even greater difficulties, I arrived here late last night, labouring under the pressure of a very severe cold and sore throat, which now confines me to my room, and indeed through the most of this day to bed. You will therefore easily see that it is impossible for me tonight to give you a particular detail of every article in my account which indeed could scarcely come under the compass of a post letter. I shall however so soon as the carrier can again take the road, send you [*interlined:* a] full copy of it. In the meantime I think your hint is a very good one, provided sufficient security can be obtained for the payment of the composition in any reasonable time: for which purpose I think it would be proper for the creditors to apply to Dr Currie to pay up the annuity of £20 on a proper discount, otherwise the payment must be very tedious.

You will however be the best judge when you hear the proposals, and I leave it entirely to yourself to act as you shall find it expedient. With best compliments to Robert and in hopes of hearing from you soon,

I am
Dear William,
your most affectionate Brother
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, at James Laidlaw's Esquire W.S., Castle Hill, Edinburgh

45. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 13th February 1795

Dear Will

I wrote you three weeks ago inclosing a letter to Margaret Cramond which together with a bundle of clothes and barley are still at Peebles, where in all probability they will remain yet a good while, as the storm is still increasing which has entirely stopt all communication to Edinburgh excepting by post and even that but thrice a week at most; as the Peebles post is obliged to walk, which he thinks sufficient labour for two days; Watty received yours last week and would have wrote you before now but we were unwilling to put you to the expense of even a page for postage and especially as he and Mr Laidlaw in Glenrath intended to have been in town this week; but they have now got other business, and it is very uncertain when you will see them.

We are sorry to hear that you are both complaining, my father has also a severe cold, it is indeed a general complaint here at present. You will no doubt be in great want of clothes, but you see it is impossible that we can relieve you in that respect, you must therefore do the best you can; and be thankful that you are in warm quarters and have meat enough, which many poor creatures are in great in [*sic*] want of at present.

The flocks are everywhere in a sad situation, ours have got nothing yet but what they work severely for and that you may easily suppose must be very little, but you know we have nothing to give them and there is scarcely a thing such as hay to be got for any money. Our friend A[lison] Tweedie left us on Monday fortnight to go to Edinburgh and notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, we could not prevail with her to stay; but she is arrested at Peebles, and can neither get backward nor forward, it is a pity on her brother's account who must be very solitary by himself.

We had a visit of James lately he had then a very bad cold, he promised to write you whenever he got home. I beg you will write whenever you receive this, if you have heard from him; and how you and Rob are now, if there are any letters for me you may put them into the post office.

I am
Dear Will
your most affectionate Sister
Mary Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Laidlaw's Clerk to the Signet, Castle Hill, Edinburgh

46. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 24th February 1795

Dear William

My father is not yet got free of his cold however it is no worse but Mary has had a very severe attack of the same complaint attend[ed] with a sore throat and sickness the same way as you speak of Rob. I am happy to hear of both you and him getting well again. I suppose you will have got some newes [*sic*] by Steele being in Edinburgh as I heard that the Peebles carriers sett off last week but could [*interlined:* not] bring their carts along coming home owing to the depth of the snow. This is indeed a storm that baffles all description and if it is not removed soon I may say with the prophet in the old Testament that their [*sic*] will be neither stocks in the fold nor herds in the stalls^[1] the people in general being feeding their sheep at a very extravagant rate.

Write me by post how you are doing.

I am
Dear William
Yours sincerely
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, at Mr Laidlaw's Clerk to the signet, Castle Street, Edinburgh

¹ Habakkuk 3:17.

47. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 25th March 1795

Dear William

Your letter to Mary came safe to hand but I do not see how these spoons the perpetual topic of conversation between you and us for some time past can be sent till such time as there is a bundle sent to town, besides the present situation of the family here is such that no thought can be taken of any thing of that kind. Mary is no better and my mother is also far from being well and you know what effect that must have upon my Father's spirit [*illegible word – page damaged: ?and*] that of course a very heavy charge falls upon me. As Steele intends going to town this week you will receive a cheese but the barley cannot be so conveniently sent without being wrapped in a bundle when such opportunity occurs. Robs indentures will also be sent.

I am

Dear William

Your affectionate Brother

Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

48. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 15th April 1795

Dear William

You will receive the clothes you sent out all clean and in good order, [*illegible word*] in the distressed situation of the family ~~of~~ has born hard upon your mother indeed. In the bundle you will find those spoons you have been so often threat[e]ned with a prosecution about. But I discharge you [not] to give them out of your hand till you get a receipt on stamp paper from the fellow himself, or from his billy,^[1] which you will return to me, had it not been for your being in the house of the fellows billy I would have bestowed more upon the two fellows than ten times the value of the spoons, in calling them to an account of their intrusions^[2] about my sisters effects, which Mr Jo: Tweedie told me I was well warranted to do.

I was told that you wrote a letter to the fellow which Mr Tweedie very much approved off [*sic*]. Send me a copy of that letter, that I may have the satisfaction to see if it is wrote in the style the fellow deserved.

As to the long distressed case of our family I have only to say that we have great reason to be than[k]ful that your mother has been greatly better, butt your sister is still in great distress by a gathering within her ear, which returns again and again upon her, as to my self I need not till [*i.e.* tell] you of the low state I most [*i.e.* must] be reduced to by my constitutional weakness, added to the distressed scene I have been wittness of these many weeks past. I discharge you to pay the hair powder tax.^[3]

Your affectionate father
James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw att Mr Williamsons, Ritchmonds Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

¹ In Scots, a 'billy' could mean a friend, a brother or a lad.

² In Scots law, the assuming of the possession or management of someone else's property with or without authority.

³ An act had recently been passed stating that anyone wanting to use hair powder must, from 5 May 1795, visit a stamp office and pay for an annual certificate costing 1 guinea.

49. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 22nd April 1795

Dear Will

According to your desire the Galloway is sent to Peebles this night and if there is no letter in the Post office will be forwarded by Steele. If it arrives tomorrow by 11 o'clock I think by giving it two or three hours rest you may reach this in the evening with out hurting it by hard rideing which I know you are very apt to do. My mother continues well but Mary is still very distressed and no appearance as yet of a recovery. The cloaths will be sent next week.

If any thing comes in the way to prevent your coming out I expect to hear from you by return of the carrier and I am Dear Will

Your ever affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

50. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Edinburgh 30th April 1795

Dear William

I expected that you or Walter would have wrote me how you got out, how Mary is now, (as you mentioned that she was no better last week when I parted with you) your not having done so makes me rather uneasy [*sic*]. If you do not come in next week before Thursday be sure to write me how you are all.

You will receive the bundle for the carrier with the cloaths; see that the clean cloaths are sent next week.

I am, in haste,
Dear William
Your affectionate Brother
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Hundleshope, Peebles

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

51. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 12th May 1795

Dear Will

Mary continues much in the same situation as when you left this without any apparent change to the better. With regard to our pecuniary affairs I hope you will advise me of the issue as soon as you can. I accomplished my west country ja[u]nt on Monday but was unfortunate as to miss the man I wanted after a ride of upwards of sixty miles in one day however I left a letter for him which I hope will have the same effect as if I had seen him. In expectation of hearing from you next week,

I am
Dear Will
Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamson's, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

52. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 20th May 1795

Dear Will

Inclosed you will receive a guinea note to Rob and an advertisement taken verbatim from the last Mondays Courant which I think is worth while to look after without delay for Rob. Yours of the 19th came safe to hand last night by which I am happy to find you have succeeded so far as to our money affairs. I would wish the bill to be sent this week as I am uncertain but I have to attend Glasgow Market for horses on Monday the 25th instant, in which case I will come to Edinburgh on Saturday and proceed on my journey on Sunday, if otherways [*i.e.* otherwise] I think it unnecessary for me to come to Edinburgh at all, you may meet me with the money at Howgate any day and hour that you may please to appoint and my Father will pay for the hire of the horse from Edinburgh.

Mary is still but very poorly and much perplexed about her removal from this to Hundleshope which is now fast approaching.

Write me by the carrier or if any thing particular occurs I will not gru[d]ge 2d.^[1] You will be so good as inquire at Archibalds about the fish and some grass seeds as neither of them has made their appearance.

I am

Dear William

Yours Sincerely

Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

¹ At this time, postage was paid by the recipient of a letter, not its sender.

53. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 10th June 1795

Dear Will

You will receive your cloaths this week, which I dare say is sooner than you could expect them. I would be greatly obliged to you if you would give the inclosed to Mr Oliver when you receive this, as I believe the carrier leaves town on Friday morning, and Miss O is very anxious to know the state of my health,

which induced me to write her a few lines, otherwise I should not have attempted it as I feel myself too weak for that business yet. I was very ill last week, especially on Friday when the pain was fully as severe as at any time during my illness, I have been easier for some days past. Be sure to write when Rob left you, how he was to travel and if you have heard from him since.

Let me know if Jane Cramond is gone yet, I hope you made my apology to her and also to Nancy (in writing) as she is not to be in town this summer. I find by a letter from Margaret that she has not heard of my illness, I must therefore [*interlined*: beg] Bell would inform her, as it may yet be some time before I can write. I am

Dear Will
Your most affectionate Sister
Mary Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

54. TO WALTER LAIDLAW

Edinburgh 13th June 1795

Dear Watt

I was surprized last night to hear of Mr Littles death which (though I believe long expected) must certainly have been very sudden at last. In consequence of this event I take the earliest opportunity of earnestly requesting you not to lose a moments time on waiting upon Mr Reid^[1] and solliciting [*sic*] his patronage for me, if not previously engaged. If he seems to have any doubts as to my ability for the office of Town Clerk I think upon my application to Mr Andrew Henderson he would send me a letter which would altogether remove them. I beg you will also make known my intention to any other members of the Town Council with whom you are acquainted and whose interest you think we have the smallest chance of obtaining.

I have already been an underwriter for between 6 and 7 years and I now think it is high time (if ever) that I should be preparing to do something for myself. I have been looking around me for two years past with the utmost anxiety and nothing has ever occurred (except at Selkirk when I was hardly ready) that had the smallest appearance of an opening till the present which I really think I should not let slip – not that I think Peebles is a place for making money in my line, far from it; however from particular circumstances I am

inclined to think (though I should even not succeed to the Town Clerkship) that I might be able to earn a scanty subsistence which is all I look for. It is all my utmost labours can attain at present and I think it is easy to perceive which of the two situations is to be preferred.

You will perhaps wonder at seeing me so keen in this business but if you reflect for a moment how deeply I am interested I am persuaded, that astonishment will soon vanish. The means of my existence in this world depends upon it. I must therefore in concluding most earnestly entreat that my father and you lose no opportunity of making application to every person in your vicinity with whom you are acquainted who you think may have any interest and inform me as soon as possible of your success. In the meantime with best compliments to you all. I remain in the greatest anxiety

Dear Watt
Your affectionate Brother
William Laidlaw

P.S. I beg you will not shew this to any person as it is rather warmly expressed.

The cover sheet does not survive.

¹ Dr James Reid, provost of Peebles (1778-1783 and 1788-1803).

55. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 13th June 1795

Dear Will

I am this evening informed of the death of Mr W Little writer in Peebles but this being Saturday I cannot see Mr Reid untill Monday about the Town Clarkship [*sic*] in the mean time you may consult with your friends in Edinburgh what steps ought to be taken and I shall make it my bussiness to see Mr Reid on Monday [*illegible word – page damaged*] alone. Mary is rather better this some days past. We have had a letter from Rob acquainting us of his safe arrival at Dundee. I am

Dear Will
Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

P.S. Do as seemeth unto you best.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at James Laidlaws, Clerk to the Signet, Castle Hill, Edinburgh

56. FROM MARY LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 17th June 1795

Dear Will

I have delayed writing till it is now within a few minutes of eight o'clock, in expectation of Watts coming home which was indeed very vain; for no business whatsoever can make him alter his foolish course of staying till midnight where ever he goes; which is truly grieving to us all; and will in all probability be so to himself when too late. He wrote the inclosed last night which you will direct and forward to Rob. Be sure to write me the number of his shirts this week.

I am (in great haste)

Dear Will

Your most affectionate Sister

Mary Laidlaw

Cover sheet blank.

57. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 20th June 1795

Dear Will

You will no doubt be thinking that I have been very negligent with respect to your business but you must certainly excuse me when I tell you that your letter of the 17th instant sent by post did not come to hand until this morning although called for before, on the receipt of which I set off immediately to Mr Campbell^[1] and met with him just as he was stepping into his carriage going from home upon a visit so that [*illegible – page damaged*: ?I had] only time barely to mention your intentions without discussing them thoroughly [*i.e.* thoroughly] when he told me that the offices of Clerk to the Commissioners of Supply and Justices of the Peace are both held by Commissioner Robertson and not by Mr Little as you wrote me but he also told me that any little business that he had in that line at Peebles should be given to no other person if you came there. These were his express words so far as I recollect so that you may consult with your friends what they think best to be done.

Yours [*illegible abbreviation*]

Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at James Laidlaw Esq., Clerk to the Signet, Castle Hill, Edinburgh

¹ Probably Robert Nutter Campbell (1761-1845). As the laird of Hundleshope, he was the Laidlaws' landlord. He had also recently purchased the estate of Kailzie, near Peebles. See the Introduction for more details.

58. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW

Dundee 22nd June 1795

Dear William

Yours of the 11th instant with the trunk came duly to hand on the 13th, but I have been so much hurried with putting goods in order that I could not well get wrote you last week, I also received yours of the 18th inclosing a letter from Hundleshope by which I learn that Mary is now a good deal better than when I saw her.

I have not yet got through all the streets of this town, it appears however to be the largest that I have seen (Edinburgh excepted) the country around it seems very pleasant and Mr Adamson's family seem agreeable enough as yet; but notwithstanding of all this I yet feel curious being truely a Stranger in a Strange Land,^[1] but God is ever present ever felt, and where he vital breath[e]s there must be joy! Be sure [*interlined:* to] inform me with respect of your going to Peebles.

Please remember me to John Tweedie, and Mrs Cramonds family when you see them, and let me know ~~of~~ [*interlined:* how] Miss Jane likes her place and when they heard from the rest of the Ladies. Inclosed is a letter to Walter which you will forward.

I ever am
Dear Will
Your affectionate Brother
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, at James Laidlaw's Esquire, W. Street, Edinburgh

¹ Exodus 2:22.

² Robert had left his apprenticeship at Muir's ironmonger in Edinburgh to work for Robert Adamson, an ironmonger in Dundee. He was evidently staying with Adamson and his family.

59. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 24th June 1795

Dear Will

You will receive inclosed a letter from Mary to Miss Nancy Cramond which you will deliver to the Perth carrier this week. You will also receive a bundle of cloaths in which you will find [*interlined:* a] gown of my mothers which you are to give to Miss Bell Cramond to make, the patron [*i.e.* pattern] is along with it. The petty coat along with it is to be one yard three inches long and if possible to be ready to send out with the carrier next week. I expected to have heard from you by this time what you intend to do about the Peebles business as you must have received my letter in answer to yours by this time which as I wrote you before ~~came~~ was sent as soon as possible after receipt of yours. I am

Dear Will

Yours in haste

Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a bundle

60. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 30th June 1795

Dear Will

My father and I gott very well home on Saturday night or rather on Sunday morning, however I was happy to find him upon the whole less fatigued with the journey than I could have expected. As you know [*interlined:* the] hurry which we came away in you will be so good as send my great coat and also my spurrs and a shirt which I left in Mr Tweedies with Steele, as also what I told you with respect to Mr Robert as I was so confused with my fathers impations [*i.e.* impatience] at the time I parted with you. I am

Dear Will

Yours Truly

Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

61. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 8th July 1795

Dear Will

You will receive per Steele this week £40 sterling which I hope you will pay to the Governor and Company of the Bank of Scotland immediately and get upp [*sic*] the bill granted for that sum which is payable in three months from the date the 6th of April so that you see this is the last day of grace and if it is not payed the consequences may be serious. You will also receive a bundle of your clothes and in hopes of seeing you soon I mean at the races where I propose to sell the young mare. I am

Dear Will

Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

62. FROM WALTER LAIDLAW

Hundleshope 15th July 1795

Dear Will

You will receive this week a piece of butter which I dare say will be very acceptable in these hard times, you will not however receive your clothes till next opportunity. Mary desires you to call Miss Bell Cramond and tell her that the box which came out with her bonnet is returned this week and also two inclosed letters which must be forwarded according to their direction. [*word illegible – page damaged*] wine decanters came safe and likewise the returned bill last week. With regard to what you mentioned in your last respecting yourself I can not say anything particular about it at present but shall talk fully to you upon the subject in person very soon. In the mean time I always am

Dear Will

Your affectionate Brother
Walter Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Mr Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

Note on cover sheet: with a case

63. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW W.S.

Edinburgh 25th September 1795

Dear Willie

I received yours of the 15th September at Dundee and since my return have yours of the 23rd current. In answer to the first I thank you for the trouble you took in getting the commission by my aunt expedé,^[1] which I find sufficiently correct except in one article the tertiary clause you have forgot to mention ~~that it is wrote on stamped paper~~ [*interlined*: the number of pages] on which it is wrote but this can yet be mended first time you come here and before recording. I very much disapprove of this rapid departure and I'm not sure but is as well I was not present. I shall write her son this month per the pacquet for North America.

Please tell Mr Laidlaw he must not be in such hurry for his interest because I have not yet got it from Mr Riddell this however I believe is partly owing to Mr Riddells absence from town and perhaps partly to mine but as soon as I get it I'll send it.

With regard to your plan of settlement after having addopted [*sic*] it there's no looking back therefore you must keenly set your heart on it and you may assure yourself I heartily wish you success – and will aid you as much as I can though indeed thats little considering I have almost nothing in my power in that county. I should be glad you could come here a day or two in order to settle our account and bring with you my bill to Mrs Welsh that I may pay it – as well as to arrange what papers you had in your desk, and any other matters that may occur. I will not leave town next week so any day will do.

When I was at Dundee I saw your Brother who told me you had been here. He is looking very well but I had so ~~short~~ little time to spare I had no conversation with him about his place, nor how he liked Dundee further than I found he liked it better than at first. I beg you'll present my best compliments to your father, mother and family in which my wife joins me and ever am

Dear Willie

Yours and very affectionately

James Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Peebles

Note on cover sheet: answered *viva voce*

¹ In Scots law, to write out a document, and get it signeted, sealed, or otherwise completed.

APPENDIX A

William Laidlaw's family correspondence includes the following two letters that are not addressed to him.

1. FROM JAMES LAIDLAW W.S. TO JAMES LAIDLAW

Edinburgh 22nd May 1795

Dear Sir

As I'm afraid it will not be in my power to lend you the hundred pound you want and I do not know of any body who can. What I think you must do is, to discount a bill with Sir William Forbes Esq^[1] for that sum at four months date. This will give you plenty of time to gather in your own funds to retire it as soon after Lammas^[2] as you can and to pave the way for this I spoke to Mr John Nay who agrees to it on my becoming indorser, which I shall do. The bill is inclosed which Wattie can sign as drawer you, yourself as acceptor and when he brings it to me I shall manage the rest for him. I ever am, with best compliments to my auntie,

Dear Sir

Yours most affectionately
James Laidlaw

P.S.

Walter should be here tomorrow by 12 o'clock as the banks shut sooner on Saturdays.

Addressed to: Mr James Laidlaw, Hundleshope, Peebles

¹ Sir William Forbes (1739-1806) was the head of the Edinburgh banking house Forbes, Hunter & Co., although Laidlaw's use of 'Esq.' might suggest that he was referring to Forbes' son, who was also Sir William (1773-1828) and worked for the bank.

² Lammas (1 August) was a term day in Scotland, one of the four divisions of the legal year.

2. FROM ROBERT LAIDLAW TO JOHN MUIR

Edinburgh 6th June 1795

Dear Sir

I hereby acknowledge to have received from you the sum of five pounds sterling which I accept of in full and place of the ten pounds sterling agreed to be paid by you to me at the expiration of my indentures; in consideration of your allowing me to go to Mr Adamson at Dundee. I am

Dear Sir,
Your most Obedient Servant
Robert Laidlaw

Addressed to: Mr John Muir, Merchant, Edinburgh

APPENDIX B

The following anonymous poem was copied on the back of Letter 23, probably by William Laidlaw. Entitled 'Lines' or 'Verses', it was first published in 1794 in two Cheshire newspapers – the Chester Chronicle (15 August) and the Chester Courant (26 August). The poem was subsequently printed in the Kentish Register and Monthly Miscellany (September 1794), but with an error in the seventh line. Instead of 'He falls, on a new element to reign', as in the earlier version, it read, 'He fails on a new element to reign'. William's transcription of the poem contains the same error and it is possible that the Kentish Register was his source for the poem – although the possibility that it was printed in other contemporary publications cannot be ruled out.

Hung upon an Oak in Lord Longford's park

The Monarch Oak Britannia's strength and boast,
Adorns her forests, and defends her coast;
To natures sons he food and shade supplies,
His branches crown the earth and grace the skies,
And when at length the woodmans arms invade,
And the thinned forest sees his honours fade,
He fails on a new element to reign,
And soon assumes the empire of the main,
Lends wings to Raleighs enterprise and soul
With steady Cooke surveys the distant pole,
Unites with mercy gallant Longfords name,
Bears Hawke to victory and Howe to fame.

FURTHER READING

The original letters are held by the National Records of Scotland: NRS, B58/19/33, Personal and family letters to William Laidlaw.

For a contemporary description of the parish of Selkirk see *First (Old) Statistical Account of Scotland*, 21 vols, Edinburgh, 1791-99, II, 434-448. For the parish of Manor, see volume III, 383-388. A history of Hundleshope and its owners can be found in Buchan, J W and Paton, H. *A History of Peeblesshire*, 3 vols, Glasgow, 1925-27, III, 598-606. See also Chambers, W. *A History of Peeblesshire*, Edinburgh, 1864, and Alexander, W. *Glimpses of Peebles, or, Forgotten Chapters in its History*, Selkirk, 1895. For a detailed description of agriculture in Peeblesshire when James Laidlaw was farming Hundleshope, see Findlater, C. *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Peebles*, Edinburgh, 1802.

John Stark's *Picture of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1806, offers a detailed depiction of the city around the time of William Laidlaw's stay. The entry for Edinburgh, and its appendix, in the *Old Statistical Account* provide further contemporary details, as does *The Traveller's Companion through the City of Edinburgh and Suburbs*, Edinburgh, 1794. Anecdotes about the places, manners and characters of late eighteenth-century Edinburgh can be found in Robert Chambers' *Traditions of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1824-25. John Kay's caricatures, collected in *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings*, 4 vols, Edinburgh, 1842, provide a wry glimpse of Edinburgh society during the 1790s. Local newspapers, such as the *Caledonian Mercury* and the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, are a useful source of information about the events mentioned in the letters.

For an account of lawyers and their world during the period, see Finlay, J. *Legal Practice in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, Leiden, 2015. For life in Edinburgh in general, see Harris, B and McKean, C. *The Scottish Town in the Age of the Enlightenment 1740-1820*, Edinburgh, 2014.

See the notes to the Introduction for other relevant works.

SOURCES IN LOCAL HISTORY

GENERAL EDITOR: KENNETH VEITCH

The *Sources in Local History* series was established by the EERC in 1994. Its aim is to provide edited transcriptions of diaries, letters and other personal documents that can be used to study everyday life in Scotland over the past three centuries. Six volumes were published between 1994 and 1997, making available a range of original sources, from the diary of an eighteenth-century Orkney farmer to that of a nineteenth-century Dundee millwright. The series was re-launched in 2015 as a free-to-access digital resource and forms part of the EERC's Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project.

If you have a document that you would like to see included in the series, please contact the general editor at: kenneth.veitch@ec.ac.uk.