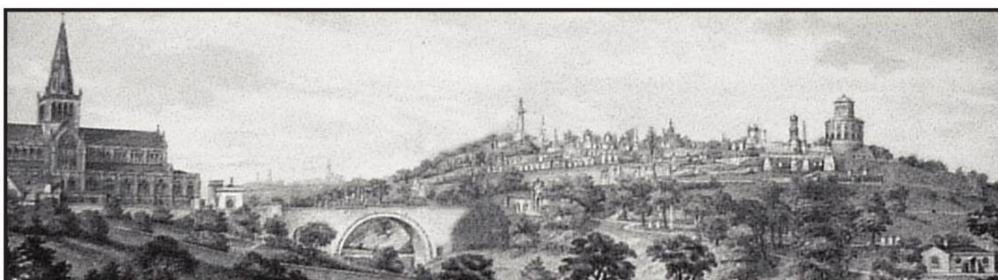


## THE FRIENDS OF GLASGOW NECROPOLIS



**c/o St Mungo Museum, 2 Castle Street, Glasgow G4 0RH.**  
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# Grave Matters

**Number 11**

**Spring 2020**

Little did I think when I chose the title Grave Matters for this newsletter how appropriate it would turn out to be as Covid 19 creeps up on us. So far as I know the indexers are well. Some are working from home and/or caring for young children and do not have much time to spare at the moment for other matters; some are busy supporting the less able members of their community and a few are finding themselves with time on their hands and welcome extra indexing.

The indexers continue to make progress and the number of records indexed in the last three months is as follows –

January 2020	567
February 2020	300
March 2020	456

This brings our database of persons buried or commemorated in the Necropolis to 32006 entries at the end of March 2020.

### The Necropolis's First Murder Victim

On the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1853 the entry for the burial of Alexander Boyd a forty-two year old ship's carpenter gave his cause of death simply as 'murder'. The case, normally referred to as 'The New Vennel Murder', was widely covered in the newspapers of the day. Alexander Boyd had recently returned to Scotland following the death of his mother but leaving his wife and family behind in Valparaiso. He found lodgings with another ship's carpenter in Finnieston. On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June he met an old friend James Law and the two men went on a pub crawl. That night they were picked up by two women named Mary Hamilton and Ann Young and enticed by them to a house in Croiley's Land, New Vennel. By this date the New Vennel and Croiley's Land in particular were notorious for criminality. A favourite occupation was to lure a man to a house where he was overpowered, stripped of his clothes and deposited back in the street in a near naked condition. The clothes were then sold by the thieves.

It seems likely this is what was intended when Law and Boyd were brought there. They were taken to a top floor house of one room where they met Hans Smith Macfarlane and Helen Blackwood. Boyd was persuaded to buy more whisky for the group and Law soon passed out. When the group attempted to rob Boyd of his clothes he resisted and was hit around the head with a chamber pot by one of the women. They then pushed him out of the window, claiming later he had overbalanced, and he fell to his death. A post mortem later found that Boyd's skull had been fractured and his liver ruptured. Police were immediately summoned and Macfarlane and the three women were all arrested in the course of the Sunday.

The four accused were tried for murder in the High Court, Edinburgh on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July. Macfarlane, Blackwood and Young were found guilty and sentenced to death but the charge against Hamilton was found not proven. The case against the accused was very strong due to the presence in Blackwood's house of two young brothers who witnessed the events and gave evidence for the prosecution. Two women had also seen part of what happened from their positions outside on the landing – there were some convenient holes in the door which gave them a partial view.

Ann Young was pardoned and Macfarlane and Blackwood were hanged in front of the Court House at Glasgow Green on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August.

The broadside (below) is one of two held by the National Library of Scotland on the subject of the New Vennel Murder.

THE LAMENTATIONS OF  
**M'Farlane, Blackwood & Young,**  
At present lying in Glasgow Jail, under the awful sentence  
of Death for the murder of  
**ALEXANDER BOYD,**  
In the New Vennel, Glasgow, on Sunday  
Morning, 12th June, 1853.

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*AIR.—"Husband's Dream."*

Come all you young people a warning take by us three.  
We are unhappy creatures that are condemned to die,  
All for that horrid murder that we have lately done,  
On the body of Alexander Boyd on the twelfth day of June.

Boyd has left a wife and family all on a foreign shore,  
What must their grief and sorrow be when they hear he is  
no more,  
For the husband he was murdered by barbarians three,  
May God protect the widow and her small family.

We took him to M'Farlane's house, that is in Croiley's land,  
It is in the New Vennel that we murdered that man,  
We stripped him of his clothing and his money too,  
And from M'Farlane's window Alexander Boyd we threw.

## Sudden death

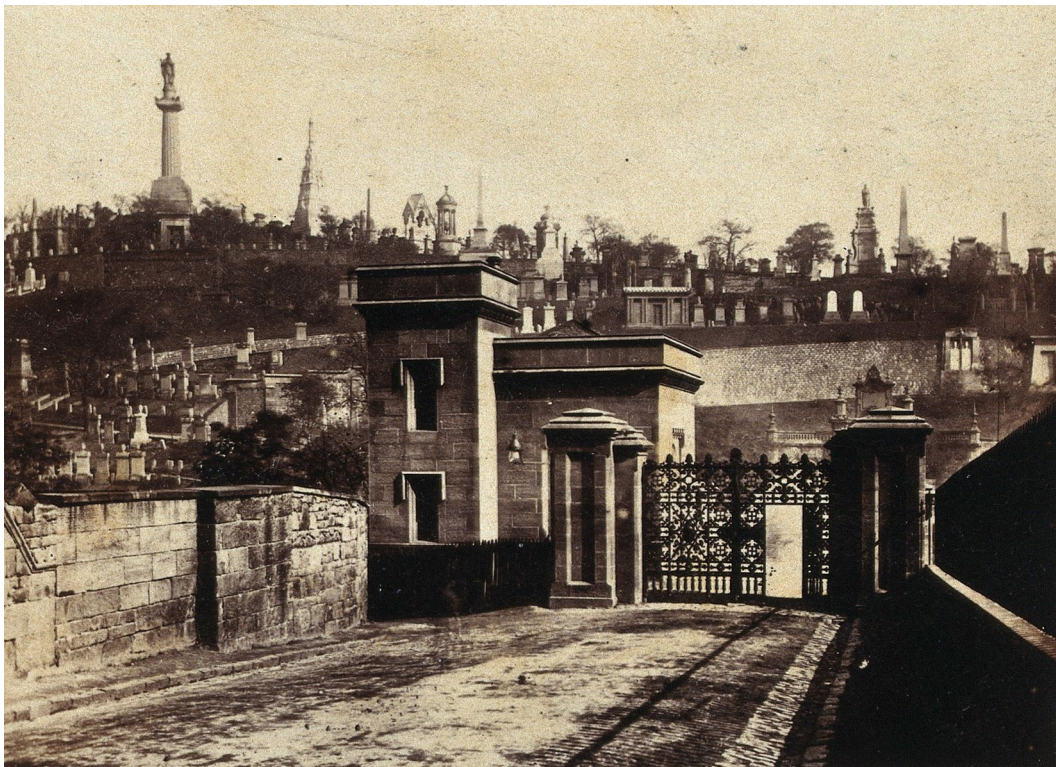
From the *Glasgow Free Press* Saturday 13 Aug 1853

On Thursday night, about seven o'clock, a man was found lying asleep in the High Street, in a state of intoxication. He was wakened by the constable on the station, and taken to the police office, where he gave his name as James Park. At half-past ten he took unwell, and expired in about fifteen minutes afterwards. Deceased, whose death appears to have been occasioned by intemperance, is about thirty-five years of age.

James Park was buried in common ground in the Necropolis on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1853.

## Entrance to the Glasgow Necropolis

I thought readers might like to see this photograph of the entrance gates and lodge in their original position at the east end of Kirk Lane immediately before the Bridge of Sighs. The 1889-90 report of the Dean of Guild and Directors of the Merchants' House, reported that the lodge and gates were in course of being moved from their original position at the Bridge of Sighs to a new locations west of the superintendent's cottage where we see them today.



Entrance of Necropolis, Glasgow.

[Wellcome Collection](#). [Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\)](#)

## An Industrial Accident

Sometime before 1850 James Ritchie moved to Glasgow with his family to take up the position of Engineer and Manager of the Glasgow Gas Works in Townhead. The Townhead Gas Works were established in 1817 on a site which was eventually bounded by Cathedral Street, High Street, Rottenrow and Weaver Street. The lack of space for expansion led the Corporation to close them in 1874 soon after taking them over. The Ritchies lived in Weaver Street convenient to James Ritchie's place of work. By 1853 Ritchie's eldest son, Alexander, had joined his father as assistant manager.



Ordnance Survey map of 1858 showing the location of the Gas Works.

On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 1853 a wall, which was being demolished, suddenly collapsed and buried six men. Alexander Ritchie and three labourers were killed in the accident or expired shortly afterwards. The two bricklayers who were engaged in undermining the base of the wall were partially shielded by their position close to the wall and survived almost unscathed. James Ritchie had already had occasion to purchase a lair in the Necropolis to bury two young children. On the 21<sup>st</sup> May his son Alexander was buried there three weeks after his twenty ninth birthday.

## Family tragedy on Islay

On the morning of Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1853 a family party disembarked at Port Ellen, Islay from the overnight steamer from Glasgow. The group was made up of two sisters Marion and Beatrice Guild with their respective husbands John Learmonth and George Lyon and was completed by George Guild, Marion and Beatrice's brother, his wife Mary Chalmers and an unspecified number of children. They were all going to stay with William Guild, another brother, in Port Charlotte where he was managing the Lochindaal Distillery. The party lost no time in enjoying their holiday

and spent much of the following day sailing across Laggan Bay to the Oa peninsula. That evening George Guild and George Lyon decided they wanted to sail across to Bowmore but no one else in the group wanted to go. The two men set off with two boatmen and reached Bowmore about 9pm. The non-return of the group to Port Charlotte raised alarm bells and early on Thursday William Guild set off for Bowmore. Presumably he sailed across because the first inkling of the tragedy was when he found his brother's body floating in the water. George Lyon's body was recovered later on Thursday. The bodies returned to Glasgow by the same steamer that the whole party arrived in and were buried in their family lairs in the Necropolis on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> August.



Lochindaal distillery

George Guild belonged to a family of prominent distillers, his father James having run the Wellfield and Calton distilleries in Glasgow. About 1847 George and his brother Alexander took the lease of Broomhill distillery near Bonnybridge and from then on the family seems to have made Broomhill their home and centre of operations. On the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1853 Mary Guild gave birth to a posthumous daughter named, not unnaturally, Georgina. Mary survived her husband thirteen years and died in 1866 aged 38.

George Lyon belonged to the family that ran Mountain Blue Pottery in Camlachie. He himself was a partner in Lyon, Lawson & Co, millwrights based at Mountain Blue. His widow Beatrice survived him by fifty eight years not dying until 1911.

## Adult Sons

Generally when an adult male is buried in the Necropolis no details are given of his relationship to anyone whether wife or father. However in late 1853/54 a small group of adult men appeared who were all described as 'son of ... ' and we wondered why.

The three men buried in common ground proved to be completely invisible in the records available to me but it proved possible to make a fair stab at identifying the other four.

David Bankier, son of David Bankier, aged 26 died of cholera in 1854 and was buried in the lair belonging to William Dougal Bankier. There is a David Bankier, son of David and Helen Bankier, born in Ayrshire c1828 in the 1841 census for Largs. David and Helen are still living in Largs in 1851 but David, jnr is not. However there is a D. B. born in Largs c1828 listed in Gartnavel Asylum in 1851 and it seems probable that this is David, jnr. David, jnr's mother was a Helen Dougal which makes it likely that William Dougal Bankier is another son of the family. It seems William was responsible for burying David and chose to add the detail of his parentage.

Robert Buchanan who died aged 23 in 1854 had been orphaned by the time he was nine years old. He was a son of Robert Buchanan a West Indian merchant who spent some time in the Danish Virgin Islands and Maria Briggs. In 1851 Robert was living with Jane Simpson the widow of his elder brother Alexander, a former calico printer, and her two young sons. Robert himself was a clerk to a calico printer. Jane Simpson had already erected a stone to the memory of her husband on the family lair and she is presumably responsible for the description of Robert in the burial register.

In 1847 when John Lauder a surgeon in Calton died his mother erected a stone in his memory which she described as a *'tribute of unavailing sorrow for an amiable and dutiful son ... placed here by his bereaved mother'*. It is thus not surprising that when Janet Lauder lost another son in 1854 James Lauder was described as the son of Janet Lauder in the burial register.

The last of the sample John Wright is the only one whose death gets into the newspapers. He died in 1854 from cholera at 150 Renfrew Street where he had been living since at least the 1851 census. The burial register describes him as 'son of Peter Wright Esq banker' but, as John was the chief clerk in the Royal Bank, it is not clear whether the banker in the burial register is John or his father. This problem of who the occupation given in the burial register refers to is common to a number of the entries – is it the father or the adult son?

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Anyone who would like to help indexing the Burial Registers is very welcome to join us by contacting me at [morag.fyfe@glasgowncropolis.org](mailto:morag.fyfe@glasgowncropolis.org)