

Sources in Local History
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THE LETTERS OF
SIR JAMES PRINGLE OF STITCHEL
TO
WILLIAM HALL OF WHITEHALL
1780-1795

Transcribed by
Lindsay Young

with an introduction by
Lesley Abernethy



THE EUROPEAN
ETHNOLOGICAL
RESEARCH CENTRE

*The Letters of Sir James Pringle of Stichel to
William Hall of Whitehall, 1780-1795*

Transcribed by
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Edited by
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Sources in Local History
General editor: Kenneth Veitch

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EDITING

In preparing the letters for publication, the aim has been to create an edition that is both true to the originals and accessible to a wide readership. To achieve this, the following editorial conventions have been adopted.

Spelling

The original spelling has been retained. It displays certain characteristics typical of eighteenth-century writing. These include using a single consonant in the middle of a word where two would now be standard (e.g. *beging*, *puting*, *disappointed*); using a double letter *l* instead of one in certain words (e.g. *alldready*, *alldso*, *welldcome*) and avoiding it altogether in the auxiliary verbs *could*, *should* and *would*; ending words with a double consonant where one would now be expected (e.g. *concurr*, *usefull*, *wett*); and writing words separately that would now be joined (e.g. *any thing*, *no body*, *to morrow*). To prevent editorial clutter, words that are readily recognisable have not been annotated. 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 an irregular spelling that might otherwise be mistaken for a transcribal or typographical error, and then only on its first appearance in the collection. For misspelled or archaic words that are not immediately obvious, or that might be confused with another word, the modern form is provided in [*i.e.*].

Abbreviations

Pringle occasionally abbreviated past participles ending in *-ed* by replacing the letter *e* with an apostrophe (e.g. *show'd*, *carry'd*). These abbreviations have been silently expanded for clarity.

Punctuation

The original punctuation has been retained, as it often reflects the mood of the writer and helps to convey the conversational nature of his correspondence with William Hall. It should be noted that Pringle not only frequently omitted the apostrophe in possessives but also used commas where nowadays a full stop or a semi-colon would be employed.

Paragraphs

Pringle indicated a new paragraph in one of two ways. The first, as in modern writing, by starting a new line. The second, by leaving a larger gap than normal between the end of one sentence and the beginning of another. In both cases,

but more usually in the latter, he often added a dash. These dashes have been omitted from the transcript, and every paragraph started on a new line.

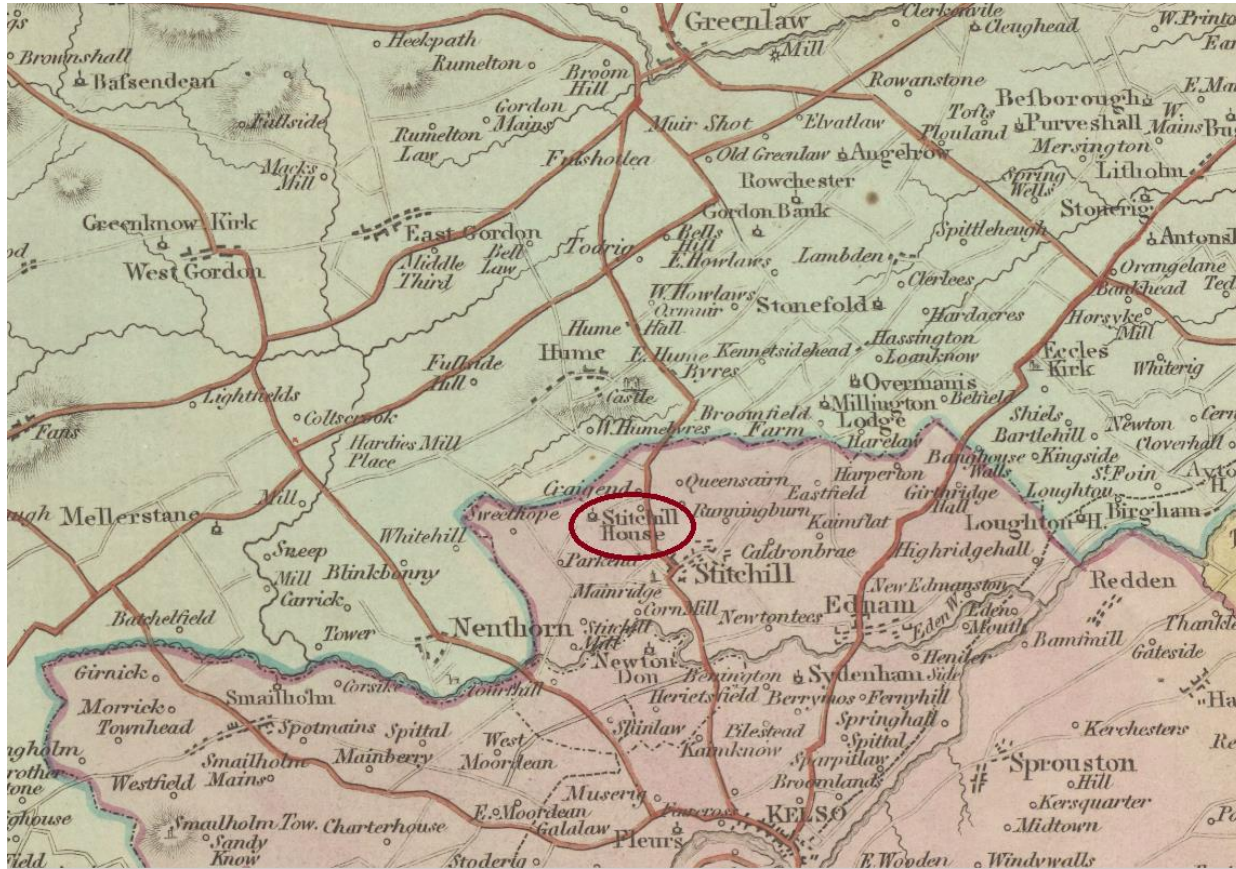
Stichel

The name of Pringle's estate was variously spelled in documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as 'Stitchell', 'Stichel', 'Stichill', 'Stichell' and 'Stichill'. Sir James Pringle consistently used 'Stichel' in his letters to William Hall, and this spelling has been used throughout the present volume.

MAPS



Map 1. A detail from Robert Campbell's *A New and Correct Map of Scotland* (1790), showing the roads that connected Edinburgh with the Borders. Stichel (Stichill) and the location of Whitehall have been circled. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



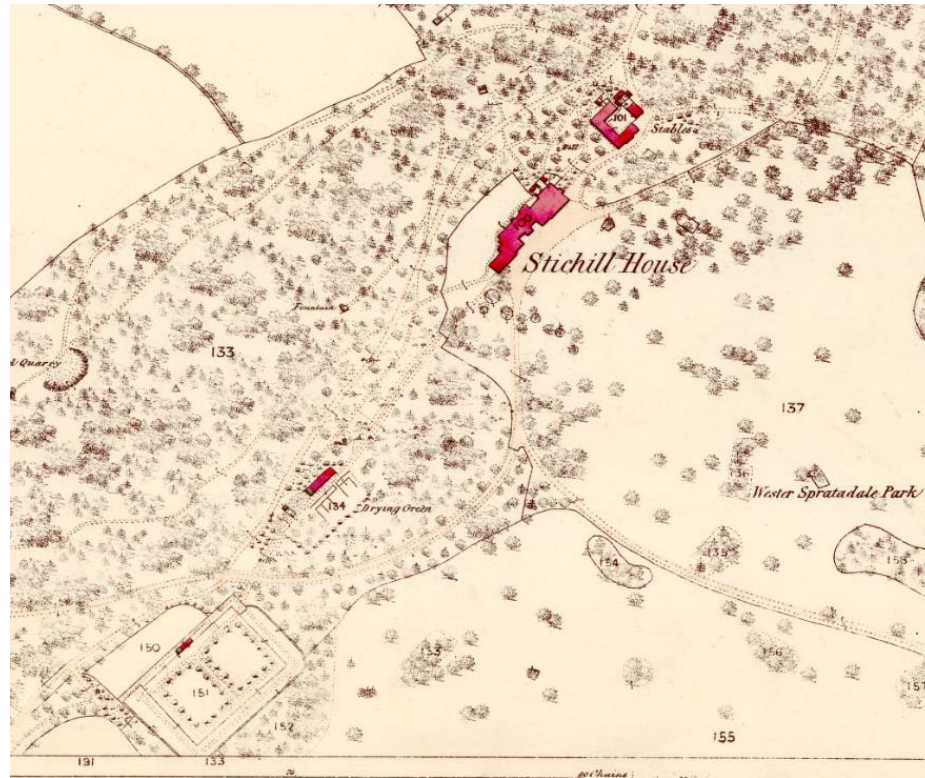
Map 2. A detail from John Ainslie's *The Environs of Edinburgh ...* (1812), showing Stichel (Stitchill) House (circled), as well as some other places mentioned in the letters, including Fleurs, Greenlaw, Kelso and Mellerstain (Mellerstane). (Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



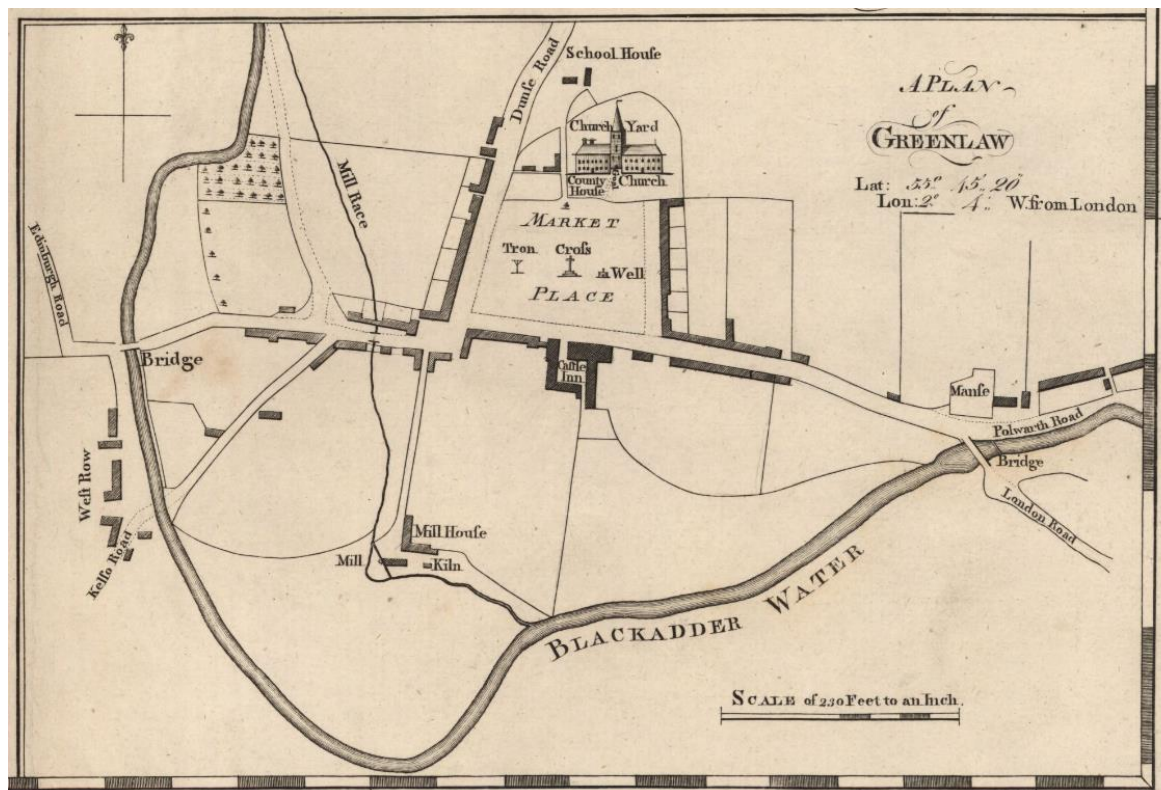
Map 3. A detail from John Blackadder's *Berwickshire* (1797), showing the house and policies of Stichel (Stitchill).
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



Map 4. A detail from John Blackadder's *Berwickshire* (1797), showing the house and policies of Whitehall.
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



Map 5. A detail from the Ordnance Survey 25-inch map surveyed in 1858, showing the house and outbuildings of Stichel (Stichill).
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



Map 6. A plan of Greenlaw from Mostyn Armstrong's *Map of the County of Berwick* (1771). Sir James Pringle visited the town both to attend meetings and to catch the Royal Charlotte post coach, which stopped at the Castle Inn. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)

FACSIMILES

453¹¹ Edin^d March 22^d 1782.
My Dear Sir
I had the pleasure to get your Letter of the 11th in course, but ever since that and a few days before, I have been sadly tormented for several hours every day with my former Complaint of a Megrim in my Eye-brow, however for two days past & this day I have had little or none of it, so that I hope Swallowing about 13 ounces of Bark since Thursday last has drove it off.
I am so little acquainted with the Nature of the Trust deed, or what was to put an End to it, that I truly can speak nothing of it with certainty, but as to your Debt to me it has been all paid Principally Interest several weeks ago, & I fancy full discharged & given, so that you need be under no concern about that Matter, depend upon it I shall be very willing to come in to a Renouac-ation of the Trust Deed when ever it is thought Expedient, for my own Part

Facsimile 1. The first page of Sir James Pringle's letter of 22 March 1782, in which he mentions suffering from a migraine. (Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

Hitchel House 5th Oct^r 1795

453/42

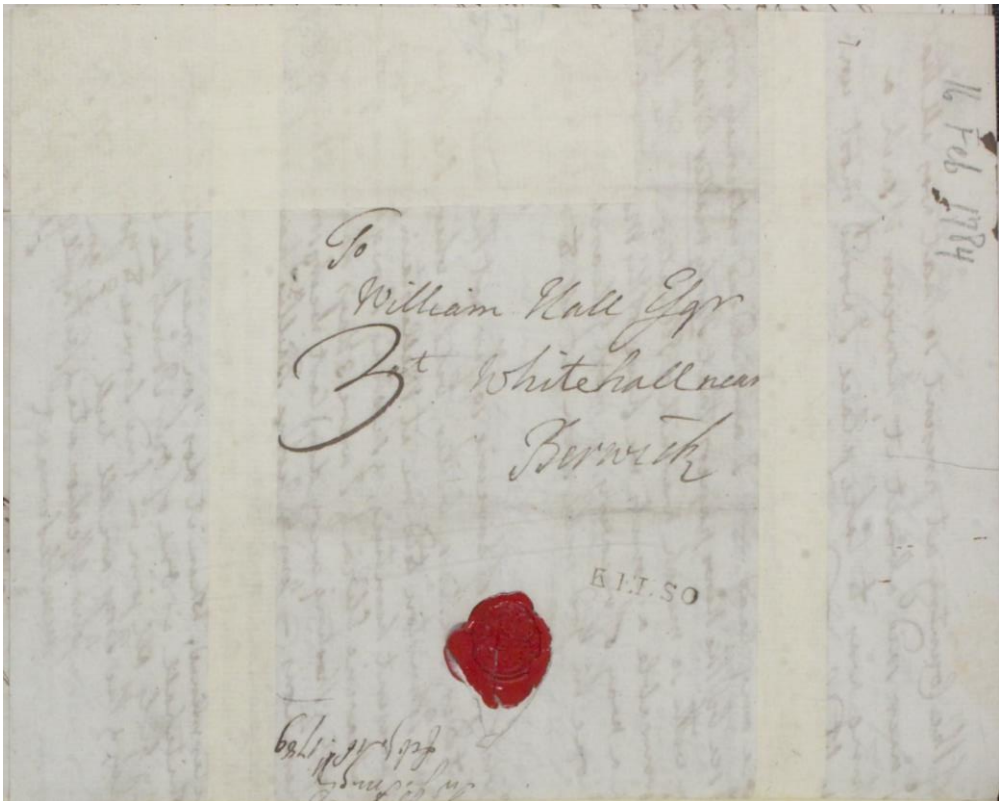
Sir J. Pringle
 in return for a
 stop short from
 Oct. 5. 1795

No wonder My Dear Friend that you
 was angry at me for not writing to you with the
 Man who went for the Sup, but the real fact
 was that I did not know he was to go away so
 soon, or even that day at all, till I met him
 half a mile from the house as I was walking out
 with Mr. Todd of Drygrange, but I now take this
 opportunity to thank you kindly for the finest
 animal we have seen here about, for my own
 part I am by no means a Judge, but folks of
 skill says he is Capital. — I hope by this time
 you have got your Kevin & have as good a crop
 as is in this neighbourhood, better need not be,
 tho' we are never wholly content, for I hear there
 are complaints of the wheat being not giffy.
 By a letter from your sister to one of our Laps,
 we understand she is to be at Sunglap, and not
 certain when she returns, nor can we say when
 we can get your length, as we expect the visit of
 Sup. Pringle, George Fairholme, after that the Helso
 Balls will come on, then the Selkirk Ball, where
 Eliza is Queen, so that our Laps have a wonderful

Facsimile 2. The first page of Sir James Pringle's letter of 5 October 1795.

In the top left corner, William Hall has noted the sender,
 main topic and date of the letter.

(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Facsimile 3. The cover sheet of Sir James Pringle's letter of 16 February 1784, showing his seal and the postal stamp for Kelso. (Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

INTRODUCTION

Family ties have always had great importance in the history of the Scottish Borders. Unlike in the Highlands of Scotland, there were no designated clan chiefs, but people did have allegiance to heads of families who shared their surname. These heads of families were often the biggest landowners, whose estates not only gave them social status but also generated wealth through rents and from farming, particularly after the introduction of improved agriculture. When the owners of Lowland estates were looking for marriage partners for their daughters, a husband from among their own extended family was often sought, to avoid dissipating the family wealth, so there were frequently multiple ties between families over many generations. Estates were inherited by male primogeniture, passing sideways along the branch of a family tree if no firstborn son was available, but were never divided. William Hall of Whitehall and Sir James Pringle were first cousins, and there had been links between the Pringle and Hall families in previous generations, too.

Sir James was the 4th baronet of the Pringles of Stichel, in the baronetcy of Scotland and Nova Scotia. This baronetcy was created by Charles I largely as a money-raising exercise, as new baronets were required to pay 2,000 marks for the privilege. Sir James' great-grandfather, Sir Robert, became the first baronet of Stichel in 1683. The first letter in the present collection was written just after Sir James Pringle's accession to the title, his father, another Sir Robert, having died in 1779. The estate of Stichel lay in Roxburghshire, almost on the border with Berwickshire, some four miles distant from the market town of Kelso.

Sir James Pringle was born in November 1726, therefore is aged fifty-three when the letters begin. After a lengthy and distinguished career in the Royal Scots Fusiliers, he was elected unopposed as MP for Berwickshire in 1761, and again in 1768 and 1774. Unusually, he did not seek a bride from among the elite families of the Borders, instead marrying in 1767 Elizabeth MacLeod, daughter of Normand, the 22nd chief of clan MacLeod, whose seat was at Dunvegan Castle in Skye, though he seldom lived there. Normand MacLeod had been MP for Inverness-shire, but was of doubtful reputation and hugely indebted, so it seems unlikely that Sir James married Elizabeth, over twenty years his junior, for her dowry.

Most country gentlemen also had a town house, and a number of Sir James' letters were written from Edinburgh, where he had a house at no. 32 George Square. The house, on the south side of the recently built square, had been owned by his uncle Sir John Pringle. He had entertained James Boswell there on more than one occasion, while Walter Scott was a neighbour on the west side of the square. The square was also home (or second-home) to a number of Sir James' relatives and acquaintances from the Borders, including Sir James

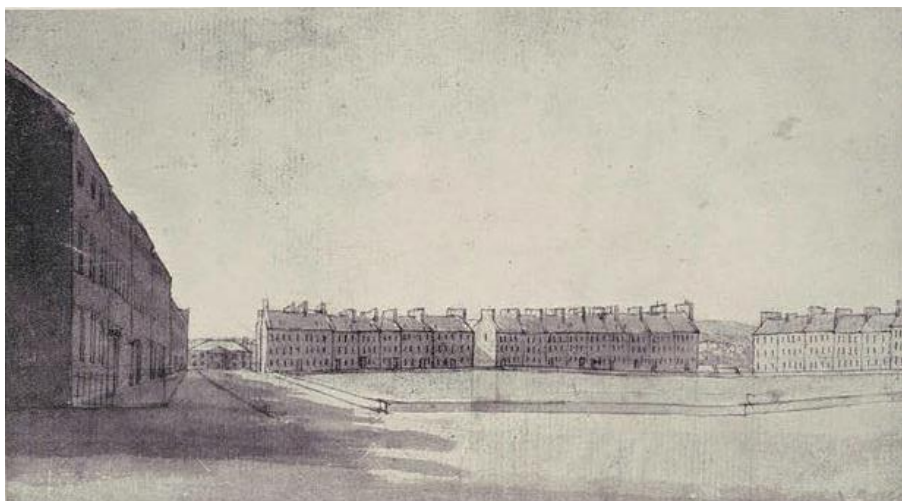


Figure 1. George Square, Edinburgh, as sketched by Alexander Carse in the 1790s. The view looks towards the south row, where Sir James Pringle had his house. The large central green, as yet unadorned with trees, provided Vincenzo Lunardi with plenty of space to display his balloon when visiting Edinburgh in 1786, as described in Letter 17.
(Courtesy of Edinburgh City Libraries)

Pringle of Torwoodlee (first at no. 54 but after 1800 next door to Sir James at no. 31), Mary Pringle (the widow of one of Sir James' cousins, no. 43), Isabella Hall of Dunglass (William Hall's sister, and so his cousin, no. 22), Captain Archibald Swinton of Kimmerghame (no. 14), Thomas Tod of Drygrange (no. 26), and Sir George Hay MacDougal of Mackerston (no. 51).

When Sir James succeeded to his estate in Stichel in 1779, he ceased to be an MP, devoting his energies to managing his lands and his growing family. He did, however, have public offices making demands on his time: he had been appointed Master of the King's Works in Scotland in 1768 (and remained so until his death), and in 1778 got a commission as lieutenant-colonel in the Duke of Buccleuch's Fencibles.

The Stichel House that Sir James inherited is long gone, demolished in 1865 to make way for a grandiose mansion, itself demolished in 1938. The Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of 1859, surveyed the previous year, shows a large, well-wooded estate laid out with many walks, one culminating in a fountain (Map 5). There is a laundry and a walled kitchen garden some distance from the house, an impressive stable block and a long, narrow house the irregular outline of which suggests additions had been made to its original form. In 1694 'The Laird of Stichel' (Sir John Pringle, 2nd baronet) paid tax on twenty-one hearths, and the house may have been extended after this date. The house as it stood when the letters were written was taxed for eighty-one windows, so was quite a sizeable dwelling.

In other tax rolls from the period of the letters, Sir James paid for two dogs, two carriages and six horses. From the taxes paid in 1785 on employing male servants, Alex Linnen, gardener, Will Whitie, coachman, John Broomfield, baker and brewer, and John Turnbull and Robert Wood, house servants, are listed, with Mrs Carfrae, housekeeper, Nelly Stewart, cook, and Eliza Fulton, chambermaid, being the female servants. This seems quite a modest establishment when nearby Mellerstain employed twelve female and seventeen male servants at this date.

By 1780, when the first of the letters was written, Sir James Pringle and his wife already had a family of five daughters: Ann (born 1768), Katharine (1771), Elizabeth (1774), Margaret (1776), and Johanna (1778), hence his evident disappointment in Letter 2 when announcing the birth of Mary, who was not the longed-for son and heir. However, three sons did follow, with Robert (1782), John (1784) and Norman(d) (1786), the last when his father was aged sixty years. Sir James did not mention in Letter 33 the sex of the 'poor infant' stillborn after a three-day labour, when Elizabeth his wife was now forty-two, this being her tenth and final pregnancy. Sir James comes across as a good husband, concerned for his wife's wellbeing, and a tender father, keen to do the best for his children, and greatly saddened by the deaths of Johanna at the age of two and Ann, aged eighteen.

While Sir James Pringle was much concerned with the welfare of his large family, his cousin William Hall had only himself to think about, as he was unmarried. The Hall family held the Dunglass baronetcy from 1687, when it came into the possession of Sir John Hall, twice lord provost of Edinburgh, who died in 1695. His son Sir James, 2nd baronet, husband of Margaret Pringle, died in 1742, and Sir John, 3rd baronet died in 1776, leaving his son aged fifteen, the 'Sir James' often mentioned in the letters, to succeed to Dunglass as 4th baronet.

William Hall of Whitehall, the recipient of the letters, had inherited the estate of Whitehall from his uncle William, brother of the 2nd baronet. The Dunglass estate lay close to the village of Cockburnspath, on the border between East Lothian and Berwickshire, and Whitehall was just outside the village of Chirnside in Berwickshire. It was usual in eighteenth-century Scotland for a gentleman devoid of a title to be known by the name of his estate, so it is likely that William Hall was referred to in society as 'Whitehall'. Sadly, no portrait of William Hall appears to have survived, though there are extant portraits of his parents, brother and younger sister Katherine, known as Katie. In 1743 Katie had married the poet William Hamilton (later laird of Bangour), and they had a son, James, who in 1770 married Peggie Bruce of Kinnaird. James and Peggie are the 'Mr Hamilton' and 'Mrs Hamilton' mentioned in the letters.

As is apparent from Figure 2, Whitehall House was much smaller than Stichel House. Not having a wife and family to transport, William Hall kept



Figure 2. Whitehall House. Although the house was remodelled in the nineteenth century, this photograph from 1975 gives an idea of its modest size compared with those of William Hall's kinsmen at Dunglass, Mellerstain and Stichel.
(Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland)

no carriage, but paid tax for two horses. His male servants were gardener Alexander Riccalton and house servant John Cameron, with housekeeper Dorothy Ramsay and chambermaid Alison Lindores completing the bachelor household.

While the concerns, pursuits and personality of Sir James Pringle may be surmised from what he writes in the letters, because we have none of William Hall's letters, it is less easy to form a picture of the silent partner in the conversation. It is fortunate that his reputation and idiosyncrasies were memorable enough for contemporaries to note them down for posterity. He was a keen botanist, studied chemistry and was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and had done much to improve his estate by planting woods, enclosing, and draining ground for agricultural improvements, and Whitehall Home Farm was the first place in Berwickshire where turnips were grown as a field crop. In 1749 he had been engineer-in-ordinary to the allied army serving in Flanders commanded by the duke of Cumberland, and his name was included in the 'List of the Honourable Company of Hunters' published in the *Universal Scots Almanack* for 1767. His interest in geology probably inspired his nephew Sir James Hall's later expertise in the subject,¹ and astronomy was the subject of his letter to his nephew in 1796 that included detailed scientific observations of the halo of the moon.²



Figure 3. Dunglass Castle, after a sketch by Alexander Carse. The letters suggest that Sir James Pringle and his family were frequent visitors to Dunglass, the home of his nephew, Sir James Hall.
(Courtesy of National Galleries Scotland)

As well as noting his many interests and accomplishments, contemporaries described some personality traits: his great irascibility when contradicted in an argument, and his extreme forgetfulness or tendency to be distracted. One anecdote tells how Hall met a neighbouring landowner while out collecting botanical specimens and, being invited to dinner, was shown to a bedroom in the gentleman's house to avail himself of the washstand. When he failed to appear for dinner a manservant was sent to investigate, and found he had undressed and gone to bed, forgetting all about the dinner. On another occasion he had gone to London with the manuscript of a botanical treatise he had written for publication but left it in the hackney coach he had taken to the publisher's office. The manuscript was never traced, so remained unpublished. The most significant instance of forgetfulness occurred when he had contracted to marry an unnamed lady. The date was set, the invited company assembled, but the bridegroom failed to appear, having forgotten his important appointment. The young lady, understandably, was very upset and would have nothing more to do with him, so he remained a lifelong bachelor. His name became synonymous in Berwickshire with forgetfulness, as seen in the old rhyme:

You're as bad as Willie Ha'.
Wha forgot his weddin' day.³

Even if they had not had family ties, it is likely Sir James Pringle and William Hall would have found each other congenial company: both had had military careers; both were interested in politics and in hunting; and both were preoccupied with their estates and farms. As well as family connections, they appear also to have had a number of mutual acquaintances with whom they socialised. Travel, and its difficulties, shaped the lives of the elite at this period. Most socialising was done with people of equal rank, often geographically quite distant, so the need to travel was an expected part of life. A gentleman travelling alone over a moderate distance would ride on horseback, either on his own horse or a borrowed one, as can be seen from Letter 27 I which Sir James thanks William Hall for the loan of his horse. A carriage (or two in Sir James Pringle's case) was needed to transport ladies and children, and longer journeys between populous places were undertaken by use of regular stage-coach or mail-coach services. Roads were very bad, especially in rural areas, adding to the dangers presented by out-of-control or stumbling horses and overturning carriages and coaches. Parish roads were mended in accordance with the Statute Labour Act, which had decreed since the seventeenth century that every household provide a certain number of days of free labour for road repair, an obligation much resented by the labouring classes who were least likely to make use of roads for extensive travel by wheeled vehicles. The obligatory labour was later commuted to a payment in lieu, which was similarly resented. The eighteenth century saw the beginning of turnpike trusts, where landowners would pay to have roads repaired or made from scratch, with the anticipation of a good return for their money from the tolls which would be exacted at various points along the road by tollkeepers in the tollhouses, many of which are still to be seen alongside Borders roads. Turnpike trustees did not always agree on the best route for a new road, probably with an eye to their own convenience, and William Hall's suggested route for a turnpike road from Duns to Berwick via Foulenden was not the one adopted.

The accepted route from London to Edinburgh had, since the seventeenth century, been the grandly named Great North Road (the modern A1), but the steep ravine at the Pease Burn was a great obstacle to wheeled traffic, and Letters 3 to 6 concern the moves afoot to build a bridge there. Just six years later in 1786 the bridge was completed and was for a while the highest bridge in the world (Fig. 4). Its completion enabled the east coast Royal Mail service to begin, with daily mail-coaches even on Sundays.

Sir James Pringle had another option for travelling to Edinburgh. Following the Turnpike Act (1762), a bridge had been built in 1766 over the Tweed at Coldstream, enabling the creation of a turnpike road north from Newcastle by Morpeth and Wooler, through Coldstream, on to Greenlaw and Carfraemill (the modern A697), before joining the turnpike coming from Jedburgh (the modern A68). This was the route of the *Royal Charlotte* coach



Figure 4. Pease Bridge, after a sketch by Alexander Carse. Sir James Pringle was one of a number of gentlemen from the eastern Borders with an interest in its construction.
(Courtesy of National Galleries Scotland)

mentioned in Letters 27 and 31. Greenlaw, the nearest staging point to Stitchel House, was only six miles distant, so relatively convenient for Sir James. Greenlaw had been the county town of Berwickshire since 1696 and remained so until being supplanted by Duns in 1853. Sir Patrick Hume, earl of Marchmont, had had law courts and offices built adjoining the church, and also an inn (the Castle Inn – see Map 6), which not only provided accommodation for lawyers and other men of business but also serviced the coaches travelling between Edinburgh and Newcastle or (after 1785) London.⁴ William Hall and Sir James both mention attending (or failing to attend!) meetings in Greenlaw.

A common concern which appears in quite a number of the letters is ill health. People of Sir James Pringle and William Hall's station in society could afford to send for a doctor when illness struck. Physicians commanded quite large fees, and their treatments and advice were adhered to by a clientele that had faith in their skills despite the doctors' usual recommendations of blood-letting, induced vomiting and enemas sounding to modern ears more likely to kill than cure. However, understanding of disease and its cause or prevention was still in its infancy. In Letter 25 Sir James mentions that his youngest son Norman[d] had been inoculated against smallpox. This was still some years before Edward Jenner's vaccination using cowpox was begun in 1801. The method previously in use, brought back from Turkey by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu around 1720, involved introducing a tiny amount of pus from the blisters of a smallpox victim under the skin of the patient. A generally mild

form of the disease ensued and once recovered (and most did), the patient was protected from smallpox for life. This was the only attempt at disease prevention other than avoiding contact with infected persons, as in Letter 29, where Lady Pringle is anxious that her daughters should not be in contact with whooping cough victims.

The Pringle family member whose death was announced in Letter 8 was Dr John Pringle, physician to the king, who attended Lady Grisell Baillie of Mellerstain in the last days of her life in London in 1746. Eliza Andrews, the wife of Lady Grisell's grandson George Baillie, although bedridden for a large number of years from the 1770s until her death in 1799, was instrumental in setting up a dispensary in Kelso, where people unable to pay a doctor could be treated free of charge, upon recommendation from one of the subscribers who funded the dispensary, whose number included Sir James Pringle. The records of the dispensary give the name and age of the person seeking help, their place of residence, the nature of their illness and whether or not they were cured.⁵

As well as consulting physicians, wealthy people were able to attempt to improve their health by sea-bathing (Letter 21) or 'taking the waters' at various mineral springs or spas (Letter 38). Another well-recommended 'cure' was drinking goat's whey, frequently resorted to by the Baillie family of Mellerstain, and probably the reason why Sir James Pringle's daughter Ann spent some time at Wooler (Letter 17), where an inn at Wooler Haughhead provided accommodation and served goat's whey from nearby Langleeford. Death in childbirth, or shortly afterwards from puerperal fever, was an ever-present danger for women of all classes, hence Sir James' concern for his wife being disturbed by Lunardi's balloon only a week after giving birth (Letter 17). Tuberculosis claimed many lives, particularly among young adults, and may have been the cause of death of his daughter Ann. Sir James seems quite stoical about his own recurrent migraines, treating himself with the universal remedy of the age, 'the bark', an infusion of the bark of the cinchona tree, the chief active ingredient in which is quinine.

Although preoccupied with local politics and military concerns, Sir John Pringle was concerned that his family should enjoy visits to friends and relatives, and also more public social events. Kelso, easily accessible from Stichel, presented opportunities for shopping for both luxuries and necessities, though Sir James' wry comment about Lady Pringle going to Edinburgh ostensibly to visit her mother, but also the milliner and mantua-maker (dressmaker) hints at Kelso being perhaps too provincial to provide the most fashionable articles of dress. The play attended in June 1790, 'bespoke by the Mellerstain family' (Letter 30), must have been one of the earliest staged at the newly established theatre in the Horsemarket in Kelso. A playbill of 1791 advertised tickets at one shilling or two shillings, good value for money when on that particular occasion the bill consisted of a comic opera, two monologues and a farce. Sadly, Sir James did not say what he and his family had seen on their visit the previous year.



Figure 5. Kelso, after a sketch by Charles Catton II. By the time this sketch was made in the 1790s, Kelso had developed into an important local commercial and social centre.
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

Sir James mentions in October 1791 that his daughter Katharine is to be queen at a ball in Selkirk, but Kelso also afforded the excitement of going to a ball. The Cross Keys Hotel, which still dominates Kelso Square, had been built in 1769, possibly a reincarnation of an old-established coaching inn, and boasted a dining room, an assembly room and a ballroom as well as accommodation for travellers. The Cross Keys was a favourite venue for the Caledonian Hunt Club (established 1777), which despite its name was rather more concerned with horse racing than hunting. Colonel Thomas Thornton described the scene at the Cross Keys when visiting Kelso in October 1786 :

A charming scene of confusion; cooks, waiters, servants, and ladies running against each other, being the time of the annual meeting at Kelso Races. The company is composed of gentlemen of the turf on both sides of the Tweed, with their families and friends, and also the members of the Caledonian Hunt In the morning the fox-hounds and beagles hunt alternately; there is also a concert and races In the [next] evening, the gentlemen of the Caledonian hunt took the lead, and gave a very handsome ball.⁶

Thornton, a Yorkshireman, was somewhat scandalised at the standard of Scottish dance etiquette:

Great regulations might be made about dancing, which would tend to make the assembly more acceptable to strangers: indeed, throughout Scotland there is a strange custom, which is very disgusting to an Englishman. Though a lady is engaged as a partner for the evening, she conceives herself entitled to jump up and dance a reel with any indifferent person, without saying a syllable to her partner. Many disagreeable situations I have seen gentlemen thrown into, from not knowing this custom, which, though established, I cannot think well bred.⁷

Although archery had ceased to be used in warfare by the mid-seventeenth century, it was revived in the last quarter of the eighteenth century as a leisure pursuit among the upper classes, and numerous societies were set up. As can be seen from Sir James Pringle's efforts to get William Hall accepted as a member of the Bowmen of the Border, these societies were very exclusive, and often demanded that members observe arcane regulations and wear curious uniforms. In her *Memoirs*, Susan Sibbald recalled a meeting of c.1790 thus:

At the first meeting of the Bowmen of the Border Club, after we returned from London, my father was balloted for and became a member. They dined together at the Cross Keys Inn at Kelso once a month. On the 4th of June we went to Kelso to witness the ceremony of drinking the King's health by the Bowmen of the Border, at the Cross in the centre of the Square. They were all in full costume – dark green coats with black velvet collars, gold arrows embroidered on them, pale lemon coloured Kerseymere waistcoats and small clothes [breeches], silk stockings and buckles on their shoes. The procession came out of the Inn headed by the Minister, Mr Lundie, followed by John Duke of Roxburghe, the Marquis of Lothian, the Earl of Buchan, Sir George Douglas of Springwood Park, Sir James Pringle of Stichel, Sir Alexander Don of Newton Don, Sir Harry Macdougall of Mackerston, in fact, all the nobility and gentry for many miles round the country, followed by attendants carrying decanters and wine glasses; the lady spectators at the open windows of the surrounding houses.⁸

Sir James Pringle was a member of the even more elite Edinburgh-based Royal Company of Archers and served as President of Council to the Royal Company from 1783 until his death in 1809. In Letter 13 Sir James reveals that a Captain Johnston was at Mellerstain 'shooting bow and arrow' and that he himself and daughters Katharine and Eliza had spent three days there 'dancing every night and shooting every day', suggesting that archery was a sport in which ladies could participate, at least in private circles.



Figure 6. David Martin, *Sir James Pringle, 4th baronet* (1795). Sir James is depicted wearing the field shooting uniform of the Royal Company of Archers. (Courtesy of The King's Body Guard for Scotland, the Royal Company of Archers)

Mellerstain House was newly completed when the first of the letters was written, Robert Adam's castle-style central block having been finished in 1778, linking the isolated east and west pavilions built by William Adam fifty years earlier. Colonel Thornton writes dismissively:

On the left stands Mr. Baillie's house, a very large pile of building, covered to the north by extensive plantations which, in my opinion, are too much in the old style, and too regular.⁹

Modern visitors are generally more enthusiastic, rhapsodising about the enfilade of Robert Adam state rooms decorated with exquisite plaster ceilings. The interiors and the furnishings of Mellerstain are largely unchanged since the 1780s, so we can be certain that the chairs that Sir James Pringle and his daughters sank into after the exertions of dancing, and the dining table they ate off, are still there.

Mellerstain House and Stichel House were about six miles apart, a very manageable distance unless, as in Letter 34, the Eden Water was in spate, there presumably still only being a ford to cross it, as the road (the modern A6089) was not turnpiked until 1799. The Mellerstain family at the time of the letters consisted of George Baillie (1723-1797), his invalid wife Eliza (1736-1799), sons George (born 1763), the 'young George Baillie' of Letter 13, and Charles (1764), and daughters Grisell (1759), Rachel (1760) and Elizabeth (1762), the 'Miss Bettie' of Letter 29. George Baillie's younger sister, Rachel Hamilton (born 1727), was unmarried and a permanent member of the household.

Unlike Sir James Pringle, who often travelled both for business and pleasure, George Baillie apparently distressed his friends by rarely leaving Mellerstain on account of his wife's poor health. Mrs Baillie wrote:

I Live in the midst of a fine extensive Place, yet my view is circumscribed within the Curtains of a five Feet Bed. I have Chariots, Horses, & Horsemen in abundance, yet not one, nor All of them can transport me a yard from my Home.¹⁰

As we have seen, the younger members of the family were still able to enjoy hunting, shooting and dancing and an occasional visit to the theatre without leaving their mother's side for long, and extended visits from friends and relatives were a welcome diversion.

The last letter of this collection was written towards the end of 1795, on a somewhat gloomy note, as there was to be no Bowmen of the Border ball because most of the local families, the Mellerstain family excepted, were in mourning. Mellerstain was, however, to have its share of sadness in the next few years with the death of George Baillie's daughter Rachel, of his sister Rachel Hamilton and of George Baillie himself all in 1797, with Eliza his



Figures 7a & b. Mary Pringle (1780-1865), daughter of Sir James Pringle, and her husband George Baillie of Mellerstain (1763-1841).
(Courtesy of the Earl of Haddington)

widow dying in 1799. William Hall died in April 1800, leaving monetary bequests to his sister and his manservant, and his estate at Whitehall to his nephew Sir James Hall.¹¹

In 1801, ‘young’ George Baillie, now 38, MP for Berwickshire and laird of Mellerstain since the death of his father, cemented the link between the Baillie and Pringle families by marrying twenty-year-old Mary Pringle, the ‘thumping lass’ whose birth Sir James Pringle had proudly announced in Letter 2. Despite her initial description, she was very beautiful and daintily proportioned, earning her the nickname of ‘the pocket Venus’.

Sir James Pringle died in 1809, having lived long enough to see the births of the first six of George Baillie and Mary Pringle’s eleven children. Elizabeth MacLeod, Lady Pringle, outlived her husband Sir James by many years, dying aged 78 in November 1826, at Mellerstain.

Lesley Abernethy

NOTES

- ¹ Dryburgh, P. Sir James Hall of Dunglass – a scientific pioneer, *The Edinburgh Geologist*, 55.1 (2014), 7-13.
- ² The letter was subsequently published: Hall, W. Account of a singular halo of the moon, *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 4 (1793-1797), 174-176.
- ³ Henderson, G. *The Popular Rhymes, Sayings, and Proverbs of the County of Berwick*, Newcastle, 1856, 117.
- ⁴ Gibson, R. *An Old Berwickshire Town. History of the Town and Parish of Greenlaw, from the earliest times to the present day*, Edinburgh, 1905, 224-225.
- ⁵ National Records of Scotland, HH71/7, The records of the Kelso Dispensary, 1777-1783.
- ⁶ Thornton, T. *A Sporting Tour through the Northern Parts of England and Great Part of the Highlands of Scotland*, London, 1804, 271-273.
- ⁷ Thornton, 1804, 273-274.
- ⁸ Sibbald, S. *Memoirs of Susan Sibbald*, ed. F. P. Hett, Bodley Head, 1926, 211-212.
- ⁹ Thornton, 1804, 268.
- ¹⁰ National Register of Archives for Scotland, 104/106, Exercise book containing advice to ‘My Dear Girls’ on their future conduct with other devotional notes etc., 1773.
- ¹¹ National Archives, PROB11.1350.53, The Will of William Hall of Whitehall.

THE LETTERS OF
SIR JAMES PRINGLE
TO WILLIAM HALL

LETTER 1

Stichel 24th January 1780

Dear Sir

I got your letter from Greenlaw this morning, and have by the carrier wrote to Mr Pringle^[1] telling him of your letter to me, and your errand to Edinburgh, but I could not possibly give him any instructions about a busyness [*i.e.* business] of so much importance to you as well as to me, and others concerned, for whom I cannot answer, as I had formerly given Mr Pringle full power to act for me, and for that reason had taken no charge of the matter upon me, and am perfectly ignorant of the chief transactions by which my instructions could be dictated, but you may depend upon it, that I shall be glad to concur in any thing that can contribute to your satisfaction, consistent with the opinion of those who are concerned as well as myself, and of the Men of Busyness,^[2] in whos[e] hand the management of the whole matter was put; if my presence in Edinburgh is at all necessary let me know, and I won't grudge even a winters journey, and have you set at ease. I think it is not improbable but we may meet to do our last sad duty to Torwoodlee on Friday next,^[3] where I may talk to you more at large. in [*sic*] the mean time I am Dear Sir

your affectionate cousin and most obedient servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ This was probably the advocate John Pringle (1741-1811), a relation of Sir James.

² *i.e.* lawyers.

³ *i.e.* attend the funeral of Sir James' uncle George Pringle of Torwoodlee (Selkirkshire).

LETTER 2

Edinburgh 12th October 1780

Dear Willie

I have the pleasure to inform you that my wife was safely delivered of a daughter last night about eight.^[1] She and the Thumping Lass are both as well to day as can be looked for. have at a boy next bout.

Yours faithfully
James Pringle

in haste, writeing a number of cards and letters.

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Mary Pringle (1780-1865). See Figure 7a.

LETTER 3

Stitchel 29th October 1780

My Dear Sir

I am much disappointed at not being able to meet you at Greenlaw on Tuesday next, I had settled everything for that purpose, with a view to have gone over with you, by way of Whitehall, to Dunglass,^[1] in order to have attended your meeting at Cockburnspath next Thursday,^[2] but by your sister's letter of the 17th, I find there is to be no meeting that day, but at Dunbar on the 8th of next month, where, if it is possible, I shall be with you, but however I cannot promise much, and indeed, as I have never attended any of the committee meetings I am not sure that I can be of any use or even if I am one of the committee.

My bairns and I had laid down fine schemes, nay I had even got their mother's consent to go out there tomorrow morning to take them and their governess to Dunglass, and if it had been convenient [*interlined:* for you] likewise to Whitehall, for a week or so, but I'm affraid that won't answer now, for I got a letter last night from the Duke of Buccleugh desireing to see me, upon Regimental busyness,^[3] as His Grace intends to set out on Tuesday (maybe tomorrow indeed) at farthest for London, so I go off for Edinburgh tomorrow morning, with my daughters Ann and Elizabeth, the first by way of a jaunt for health the other for diversion [*sic*]. It is very likely I shall be

employed (if I am not sent to the Regiment) in my usual way of escorting the nurse and young child out from Edinburgh, some day next week, if that is the case I fancy I cannot be with you at Dunbar on the 8th.

If you have an opportunity be so good as to send the inclosed to Dunglass. You cannot conceive the disappointment of the three nymphs, but I hope it will be made up to them in better weather, rather I should say at a more proper season, for better weather I have not seen. I shall probably be in Edinburgh all this week, in case you have any thing to write to me.

Be so good as to make my apology to the meeting for not attending there.

I am Dear Sir

your affectionate and most obedient humble servant

James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Dunglass Castle (East Lothian) was the seat of Sir James Hall (1761-1832). He was the son of William Hall's brother (Sir John) and Sir James Pringle's sister (Magdalen), and so a nephew to them both.

² The meeting was being held to discuss the construction of a new section of road on the Edinburgh to Berwick turnpike. Known as the Pease Pass, it was to include a bridge across the deep ravine of the Pease Dean, near Cockburnspath (Berwickshire). See Figure 4.

³ Henry Scott (1746-1812), 3rd duke of Buccleuch, had raised a regiment of fencibles in 1778 in response to a threatened French and Spanish invasion. Sir James was among its officers.

LETTER 4

Edinburgh 7th November 1780

Dear Sir

I have this moment got your letter without a date, but as you speak of Dunglass and the very bad weather I suppose you are there, and that it was wrote yesterday, for a worse [*word missing*: ?day] I never saw in this continent for an hour or two, and indeed it continues Winter even now, hard [*illegible* – *page torn*: ?frost and snow] on this square.^[1]

I make no doubt but your meeting is to be next Saturday, but it won't be in my power to be there, because, without knowing there was to be such a meeting, I have appointed people to meet me on Thursday at Torsonce about several things that are to be done there,^[2] particularly cutting some timber,

besides that I have made an appointment at Bowland^[3] with some folks, so Mr W Fairholme^[4] and I go out there to morrow morning.

I propose being at Stichel on Monday next, but will be there [a] very short while as I must be at Ayr with the Regiment before the 29th. What cold weather! You may depend upon it, I shall mention the Pease road to Generals Mackay and Skene,^[5] but it will come with more propriety and more force from a meeting of the gentlemen concerned. I shall [be] presenting in force any representation or petition you are pleased to send to them.

I am Dear Sir
your very affectionate and most obedient servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Sir James' Edinburgh residence was in George Square. See the Introduction and Figure 1.

² The lands of Torsonce, near Stow (Midlothian), had been inherited by Sir James on the death of his uncle Walter Pringle in 1769.

³ The lands of Bowland, near Stow, were owned by Sir James' cousin James Pringle. He also owned the nearby estate of Torwoodlee, having inherited it on the death of George Pringle.

⁴ Probably William Fairholme, whose estate of Chappel was in the parish of Lauder.

⁵ The construction of a new road and bridge across the Pease Dean (see Letter 3) was advocated and partly funded by the military, which considered the existing route unsuitable for artillery. Lieutenant-general Alexander Mackay was the Commander of Forces in Scotland, while Lieutenant-general Robert Skene was the Inspector of Military Roads in Scotland. Until recently, Mackay was a neighbour of Sir James in George Square.

LETTER 5

Ayr 6th December 1780^[1]

My Dear Sir

I did not receive your letter [*interlined*: of the 26th November] incloseing the petitions for Generals Mackay and Skene till Monday last, and I have taken the first opportunity to send the petitions as directed, because I thought it was not very material to have more names to them, I signed them myself.

I don't apprehend that it is now necessary to speak to the committee about the direction of the road, for the very contents of the petition sets forth the

easiest direction and if any thing is granted, it will be done upon the faith of the road being made the most easy ascent [*i.e.* ascent] that the ground will admitt of.

I sent the petition for General Skene to his brother, who has now that office which the general held,^[2] and as soon as I receive answers from General Mackay and him, I shall let you know.

What an intense frost we have had here for three days past, threatening snow now.

I am Dear Sir
your affectionate cousin and obedient humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ William Hall has written at the end of this letter: ‘Sir James Pringle concerning petition anent the Pease, Ayr Decr 6th 1790’.

² Lieutenant-general Robert Skene’s brother, Captain David Skene, had recently assumed the post of Inspector of Military Roads in Scotland.

LETTER 6

Ayr 11th December 1780

Dear Sir

By last nights post I received an answer from General Mackay to the letter I wrote him along with the petition for the Pease road, which is as follows.

“I have this day received your letter of the 6th with a representation concerning the road over the Pease. I apprehend that the proper mode of application is to the board of Treasury (through your Member) who will naturally send it on to me. I need not tell you how unfavourable the times and state of the publick [*sic*] are at present for such demands, and though the plan is both laudable and of publick benefit, yet it is hard to say how far Government will agree to bear any part of the expense. I would advise you to request a specific sum in aid of your subscription, and to make it as moderate as possible. When it is remitted to me from the Treasury, all that will remain to me will be to report upon the allegations of your petition”.

So far General Mackays letter, Captain Skene says, that the estimates for this year are given in allready, but if General Mackay and the gentlemen of the

county carry it through with the Treasury, he will do everything in his power. I think the general's plan a very good one, and I dare say the committee will adopt it.

I am Dear Sir
your most obedient and most humble servant
James Pringle

Addressed to: William Hall, Esq at Whitehall by [*illegible*] Berwick

LETTER 7

Stitchel 29th April 1781

Dear Sir

As you saw my sweet babie Johanna^[1] in a very bad way, I make no doubt but it will grieve though not surprise you to hear that the dear infant died yesterday about ½ after ten forenoon. She was seized with a return of violent convulsions on Friday at one p.m. which continued without the shortest intermission till she breathed her last. never child had severer struggles for death than she has had for 19 days past, particularly the last 20 hours of her short life, 2 years and 10 months. Her poor mother, whos[e] Heart's Darling she was, is in great distress.

I had a letter from Sir John Pringle^[2] by last nights post, dated the 23rd, telling me that he proposed to set out next day for Scotland, and to be here next Thursday, the 3rd of May, by way of York, where he is to be 2 days.

If it suits your convenience we will be very glad to see you about that time. Sir John will not stay longer than 2 days with us, and I fancy I will go with him to Edinburgh on my way to join the Regiment.

I am my Dear Sir
your affectionate cousin and obedient servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Johanna Pringle (1778-1781), Sir James' daughter.

² Sir James' uncle Sir John Pringle (1707-1782) was an eminent physician and former president of the Royal Society. He had decided to retire to Edinburgh, but soon returned to London, where he died early the following year (see Letter 8). For a biography, see 'The life of Sir John Pringle, Bart.', *The London Magazine* 2 (1784), 281-95.

LETTER 8

Edinburgh 28th January 1782

Dear Sir

Your sister^[1] told me that she had wrote to you on the 22nd with the melancholy account of our worthy uncle and valuable friends death,^[2] which happened on the 18th at London, by letters I had from Doctor Saunders^[3] of the 14th and 15th, and which I got at Glasgow. I understood that on the 14th he had been taken ill at their club of a sort of paralitick disorder which turned worse and worse till ten at night of the 18th when he was freed of all pain. In him, we that were his relations have lost an affectionate constant and sincere friend, and society in general a most respectable member and an ornament to the country that gave him birth. By what we learn from Dr Saunders he had not suffered, at least it is presumable that he was not sensible of much pain.

Ever since I came here from Glasgow on the 22nd that day Tibbie heard of his death, I never have got one letter till Friday night and that one returned from Glasgow, and dated the 18th from Dr Saunders, had I got that letter in the course of post, I believe it woud have determined me to have set out directly for London, because he speaks of expecting me there, and I hear from other hands at London, though not to myself, that I was expected. However it was not thought adviseable by Mr Pringle and some other friends here to go, because before I coud get there, the burial woud certainly be over, and in that case it was as good to go (if there was any necessity even then) after my wife is brought to bed, which she has hourly expected for some days past. This sort of uncertainty has given me much uneasyness, in case they shoud be still waiting the funeral for me, or some of his near relations. I have wrote to Mr Coutts,^[4] Dr Saunders and James Ramsay beging they woud send an express^[5] to me directly if I am wanted there for any purpose, indeed that ought to have been done at the very first, and it woud have saved me much anxiety.

About the 5th of this month I got a letter from Sir John dated the 1st, inclosing his will (a duplicate) with directions in the letter as well as upon the [*interlined*: back of the] will to be kept by me and opened after his death. Accordingly on Friday last the 26th, by advice of both Mr John Pringle [*interlined*: for me], Mr Charles Gordon for you, Mr John Davidson for Miss Hall, Mr Tod for Mr Hamilton,^[6] and in their presence (Sir James Hall was there too), I opened the will and found it dated January 1st 1782, and that I was appointed heir and executor, paying legacies to the amount of about 350 £, amongst which there is £100 to you, and annuities to the amount of about £600 per annum; but at more leisure I will let you know the particulars.

Tibbie showed me a letter in which you speak of going soon to London. If I am still under the necessity of going, I wish it could happen that our times answered.

I am Dear Sir
your affectionate cousin and obedient humble servant
James Pringle

Addressed to: William Hall Esq, at Whitehall by Berwick

¹ Isabella Hall (1729-1804), William Hall's sister. Referred to later in the letter as 'Tibbie'.

² Sir John Pringle (see Letter 7, note 2).

³ The Scottish physician William Saunders (1743-1817).

⁴ The Scottish banker Thomas Coutts (1735-1822).

⁵ An express service was available for letters that had to be delivered urgently.

⁶ Those giving advice were lawyers. For Thomas Tod, see Letter 42, note 1.

LETTER 9

Edinburgh 7th February 1782

My Dear Sir

It was only within those three days that I was freed from the anxiety I was under, in case they should have been putting off the funeral of our worthy uncle for my coming to London, but on Saturday last, at least on Sunday morning I got letters both from Mr Coutts and Mr Chalmers as well as Dr Saunders, telling me that they had come to the resolution to have the funeral on Thursday last the 31st. Accordingly I had letters last night from Mr Coutts, Mr Mason and Mr Ramsay informing me that there had been some difference in opinion about the place of interment, some were for Westminster abay [*sic*], others for St James's Church;^[1] which last place was determined upon, by the Rector of the parish telling them that Sir John had said to him three years ago, that if he died in that parish, he wished to be buried in the chancel of St James's Church.

There were present at the funeral, Dr Saunders, Mr Mason, Dr Heberden, Sir George Baker, Dr Hunter, Mr Small, Mr Boswell, Mr Coutts, Mr Ramsay^[2] and several other gentlemen who had been of his acquaintance, and every thing I hear was carried on with the greatest decency and propriety.

I find by all those gentlemen from whom I have had letters, that it will not be in any degree necessary for me to go to London, because all the busyness may be done by letters of attorney from this place, particularly as there were few things of any value except his watch and seals and pocket book which was in his own possession at his death. All his wearing apparel being ~~being~~ left to his servant John Ward, to whom he has also left £20 yearly dureing his life and to Mrs Watson his housekeeper the same sum. When we meet (or if you go to London, I will write it to you) I will let you see the will, by which you will see the extent of his annuities and legacies, and to whom. I think the annuities amount to about £700 a year, the legacies of which you have a hundred pound, is payable within six months after his death. When we meet, I'l[l] let you know as far as I do my self too, what I have been told by Mr Coutts, were Sir Johns funds, for I find Mr Coutts had the management of all his money matters. I can hardly describe to you how kind Dr Saunders, Mr Coutts, Mr Mason, and Mr Ramsay have been upon this melancholy occasion, very particularly the first, who attended him allmost constantly ever since he went to London, and never left him in the last stage of his spotless life.

Have you thoughts of going to London soon? Our Regiment marches into the castle to morrow,^[3] which will be nearer to home than Glasgow, as soon as I am settled here, I must go for a week or so to Stichel, where I wish much to have a day or two of you at your leisure to take your opinion of many things there.

I am Dear Sir
yours most affectionately
James Pringle

My wife who was delivered of a fine stout lad on Sunday last, thank God is as well as can be looked for, so is the lad.^[4]

Addressed to: William Hall Esq, at Whitehall, by Berwick

¹ Also known as St James-in-the-Fields, St James' was an Anglican church in Piccadilly, London. While St James' was chosen as Sir John Pringle's place of burial, Sir James arranged and paid for a monument to be erected to his memory in Westminster Abbey.

² The named mourners were mainly fellow Scots and/or medical men. They included physicians William Heberden (1710-1801) and Sir George Baker (1722-1809), and surgeon John Hunter (1728-1793). The Mr Boswell is probably the biographer James Boswell (see Letter 29, note 1). For Dr Saunders and Mr Coutts, see notes to Letter 8.

³ The South Fencibles Regiment were to take over garrison duty in Edinburgh Castle from the 25th Regiment of Foot.

⁴ John Pringle (1782-1869).

LETTER 10

Edinburgh 15th February 1782

My Dear Sir

I trouble you with this merely to say that I got your obliging letter of the 8th on Wednesday night, and give you many thanks for your good wishes. I have been in this moment in the Lady's^[1] room, who is sitting up with her young son on her knee, both as well as heart can wish. He is truly a fine child, and I don't remember of all her eight children she ever had a better recovery hitherto than of this one. She joins me now in our kind service of good wishes for your welfare, and says if you knew the satisfaction of haveing such a child in your arms, you woud certainly put yourself in the way of it. No wonder than [*i.e.* that] the postscript struck you, for though I had been intending to begin my letter with it, the little fellow went clean out of my head, not that I did [not] rejoice at his appearance, for I do acknowledge I did, though had it pleased God to have lengthened our worthy uncles life till he had seen him, it woud have given me more pleasure because I have reason to think that it woud have been very pleasing to him. We are this night to have him made a Christian.^[2]

I have thoughts of going out on Monday to Stichel, for a week or so. I cannot ask you to come at this bad season, and no body but myself there, but will at all times be happy to see you.

Yours affectionately
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Elizabeth MacLeod (c.1745-1826), Sir James' wife.

² *i.e.* baptised.

LETTER 11

Edinburgh 22nd March 1782

My Dear Sir

I had the pleasure to get your letter of the 11th in course, but ever since that and a few days before, I have been sadly tormented for several hours every day with my former complaint of a megrim^[1] in my eyebrow, however for two

days past and this day I have had little or none of it, so that I hope swallowing about 13 ounces of bark^[2] since Thursday last has drove it off.

I am so little acquainted with the nature of the trust deed, or what was to put an end to it, that I truly can speak nothing of it with certainty, but as to your debt to me it has been all paid, principally interest, several weeks ago, and I fancy full discharges given, so that you may be under no concern about that matter, depend upon it I shall be very willing to come into a renunciation of the trust deed whenever it is thought expedient, for my own part I don't understand why it should be hanging over you, but I am no judge in those matters.

I imagine your high flown compliment to Ann is the first of the kind she had met with. I took particular notice how she looked when I read it to her, and I could not help laughing to see that the roses you speak of were a good deal [*i.e.* deal] brightened upon the occasion, it is wonderful to observe how soon that flummery^[3] takes effect.

The Lady, young Robert^[4] and all the rest are well. Your sister is better of a bad cold she had.

It snows and blows at this moment with all the bitterness of the first week of January.

What think you of matters now? We seem to be in a melancholy situation. Sir James and Brand are well.^[5]

I am Dear Sir
your affectionate humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ A migraine.

² Probably an infusion of cinchona bark. See the Introduction.

³ Flattery.

⁴ Sir James' son Robert Pringle (1782-1806).

⁵ Sir James Hall of Dunglass was in Edinburgh at this time attending classes at the university. He and his tutor, the Reverend Thomas Brand, probably resided at his Aunt Isabella's townhouse in George Square.

LETTER 12

Stitchel [1782]^[1]

Dear Sir

I got your letter of the 12th but as Tibbie expects us some day this week I thought it needless to fash^[2] her with a letter; and I fash you with this to let you know the Philistines will be upon you at dinner on Wednesday, Mrs Shairp, Ann and Katharine^[3] with Your Humble Servant, we intended dining with you to morrow, but it seems Mrs Shairp and Lady Pringle had promised to dine with Lady Lochtoun,^[4] so that we can't be with you till Wednesday. We propose Dunglass on Thursday.

Yours most sincerely
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive.

¹ The letter is dated simply 'Monday'. William Hall has written on the back '1782'.

² To trouble or inconvenience (Scots).

³ Sir James' daughters Ann (1768-1787) and Katharine (b. 1771).

⁴ Margaret Pringle of Lochtoun (1711-1791), Sir James' aunt.

LETTER 13

Stitchel 16th February 1784

My Dear Sir

Though I have of late heard of you at second hand, yet your kind letter of the 9th, which I only got yesterday, gave me great pleasure as it confirmed the favourable accounts we had from Mr Lumsden, Captain Johnston etc. but when Mr Lumsden was [*interlined: last*] up in this country, the first day of the year, at our Bowmen of the Border^[1] meeting, I had not the pleasure of seeing him at Stitchel, to be sure at that time I was sore distressed with my old complaint of a periodical megrim, which continued for about 6 hours, 14 or 15 days, and then left me entirely, but barring the great pain, I never was in better health, and have been ever since.

So far were we on our road to Edinburgh for the Winter, that 2 of the maids and all our baggage was sent to that place, however the storm came on which made it impossible to get from this to the turnpike road, that we took the sheaf off the mare^[2] and all was ordered back again to the great joy of our young ladies, and not much to my grief, when their mother after much doubt and deliberation had come to that resolution, they gave three huzas [*i.e.* huzzahs], however Lady Pringle went in for a visit to her mother and sister (I alleged the milliner and mantua-makers woud have their share allso) about ten days ago but we expect her home this week, none went with her but Mrs Waddell.

We had a meeting at Jedburgh about addressing Mr Pitt,^[3] but without regard to any party matter whatever, if it had been looked upon in that light it woud not have gone forward. The matter happened to be mentioned and approved of by several gentlemen in this neighbourhood, and I wrote to Mr Rutherford and some other acquaintances in the west end of the county, who allso were very clear about the propriety of it, so at the meeting for electing a collector,^[4] the other meeting was agreed upon. You have been misinformed about my makeing interest for a meeting of the County of Berwick for the same purpose, I did once ask S A Purves^[5] if he had heard of any such proposal, and if any of the gentlemen in his neighbourhood had spoken of it. He said not, there being many of them out of the country at present, so that was all that I ever said about it, however if such a thing was to take place I woud most undoubtedly attend, and forward it as far as my single voice went, but I by no means woud take any lead.

I am indeed extremely sorry to see by the newspapers that Party matter is carried on with so much warmth and ill nature.

The very favourable accounts we have of His Majesty's being in a way of recovery,^[6] is most pleasing indeed, and I hope in God will soon set all to rights again.

I wish you joy of haveing so far got the better [*illegible – page torn: ?of the*] Whitader,^[7] she is a bitter bitch where she bites; Captain Johnston told me at Mellerstain^[8] (where he is at present hunting, and shooting bow and arrow, and where Katharine, Eliza and I were 3 days' danceing every night and shooting every day), last week, something of your operations.

Young George Baillie^[9] [*interlined:* and I] have some sort of appointment to take a ride together east the Merse^[10] some day, but when that is to take place is not yet determind. When it do[e]s you may well believe that Whitehall is one of our points de vue.

My girls all join in kind service to you. thank God, they and the boys are all well.

I am Dear Sir
your affectionate and faithfull humble servant
James Pringle

Addressed to: William Hall Esq, Whitehall, near Berwick

- ¹ The founding of the Society of the Bowmen of the Border is usually dated to 1788, when they were officially recognised by the Royal Company of Archers (see Hargrove, E. *Anecdotes of Archery from the Earliest Ages to the Year 1791*, York, 1845, 94). This letter, however, shows that they were active before then. Sir James held the office of 'First Captain'. Their uniform consisted of a blue (changed to dark green in 1789), single-breasted frock coat, with a black velvet cape; a buff vest and breeches; and a round hat with a gold loop and button over the right eye, and a black feather.
- ² 'To take the sheaf from the mare' was a Scottish proverb meaning to change one's mind. It had its origins in the practice of feeding a mare a sheaf of oats before a journey. If the journey was cancelled, the sheaf was taken from the horse.
- ³ William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806), the British Prime Minister.
- ⁴ Probably the collector for excise.
- ⁵ Possibly Sir Alexander Purves (c.1739-1812), 5th baronet. He resided at Purves Hall in the parish of Eccles (Berwickshire).
- ⁶ The mental illness that was to afflict George III (1738-1820), king of Great Britain and Ireland, for periods of his later reign began to show at this time.
- ⁷ The Whiteadder, a river which formed the southern boundary of William Hall's estate at Whitehall. It was prone to flooding during prolonged periods of rain.
- ⁸ Mellerstain House was the seat of George Hamilton Baillie (1723-1797), the brother of the 7th earl of Haddington.
- ⁹ George Baillie (1763-1841), the son of George Hamilton Baillie of Mellerstain. See the Introduction.
- ¹⁰ The Merse was the name given to the lands between the River Tweed and the Lammermuir Hills, although it was also used as an alternative name for Berwickshire.

LETTER 14

Stitchel 31st December 1784

This serves My Dear Sir to convey to you the good wishes of all this House for many happy New Years to you, with Health and every other Comfort and Blessing that can make you wish for a long life, and to ask how you live in this frost and snow. Pray let us hear from you.

We are all in romping and dancing health here. We have a goodly company this very day to dine on a haunch of venison from the Duke of Roxburghe,^[1] after which we are to have a dance where you would be a most wellcome sharrer [*i.e.* sharer].

By a letter from Tibbie I find she soon proposes a jaunt to London, it is not common for ladies to volunteer a London journey at this season, however, it may happen to be good travelling for all that.

Have you heard lately from Sir James.

Yours affectionately
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ John Ker (1740-1804), 3rd duke of Roxburghe. A haunch of venison was a traditional gift of goodwill in Scotland, usually given by a social superior to an acquaintance or a valued tenant.

LETTER 15

Edinburgh 27th November 1784

My Dear Sir

Yours of the 14th was sent in here on Thursday from Stichel which the Lady and I left two days before. We came in for a visit to her mother and to see how the house looks after being new papered and painted.

It gave us all great pleasure to see a letter from little Willie Hamilton himself after haveing had such alarming accounts of his death, I never saw such a sudden alteration as it made on the looks and spirits not only upon Miss Bruce but your sister.^[1]

It is long since I spoke to Mr Davidson about your difference with Mr Cockburn, who, I mean Mr Davidson, I know had a conversation with Mr Warrender or Sir James Hall, but as I say am not at all distinct about the result of their conversation, I shall desire the favour of Mr Davidson or Mr Warrender, to write to you; However I recollect now that Mr Davidson told me that Miss Hall had been with him concerning that matter, and that he had explained it to her with a view to your information, so that I fancy I need not trouble you more about it.

We propose leaveing this [place] for Stichel on Tuesday next, where we will all be most happy to see you in our winter quarters, pray, bring some shirts with you. on our way from Houston^[2] yesterday I saw leading of corn within three hundred yards of the turnpike at the Coates,^[3] I hope yours is all safe.^[4]

I am Dear Sir
yours affectionately
James Pringle

Addressed to: William Hall Esq, at Whitehall, near Berwick

¹ William Hamilton (d. 1808) was the grandson of Katherine Hall of Dunglass, and so William (and his sister Isabella) Hall's great-nephew. The 'Miss Bruce' mentioned here is possibly Hamilton's aunt Elizabeth Bruce.

² A village in Renfrewshire.

³ Either Coates (Midlothian) or Coats (Lanarkshire). Both were on the turnpike road between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

⁴ Poor weather had led to a very late harvest in 1784.

LETTER 16

Edinburgh [22nd July 1786]^[1]

Dear Willie

I have the satisfaction to tell you that Lady Pringle was safely delivered of a boy^[2] about 15 minutes ago. I shall write again soon.

Yours ever
James Pringle

Edinburgh Saturday ½ past 5 evening.

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ There was no date on the letter, although '22nd July 1786' has been written on the back in pencil, apparently by an archivist.

² Norman(d) (1786-1870).

LETTER 17

Edinburgh 1st August 1786

My Dear Mr Hall

Since I wrote you the short note on Saturday the 22nd, I have the pleasure to tell you that Lady Pringle has been as well as can be wished, and so has young Normand her son, a fine little thriving fellow as can be, red-haired like most

of the rest. I am now writeing beside her and she desires to be kindly remembered to you.

She was a good deal distressed last night with Lunardis Balloon,^[1] which, after he had made his flight, I believe not far beyond Arthurs Seat, was brought into our square, marched round it, then he came into the middle of the green,^[2] descended [*sic*] out of his carr, then led it to the door of the raills opposite to your sisters house,^[3] fastened it to the rack, and let it fly up by a roap to the height of our highest houses, and there it became stationary, for there was not a breath of wind, for about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour, and till it was dark, when he pulled it down and let out the air. It was truly one of the finest shows I ever saw, and though the huzzas of many thousands were very hard upon the Lying in Lady,^[4] yet she thought it very pretty for all that. She saw it from her bed every bit as well as we did who stood at the window. I imagine this will be his last flight in this place.

Our accounts from Ann at Wooler^[5] are now very favourable. I hear she has had a most kind visit from your sister and Miss Peggy,^[6] it was truly very friendly of them. Pray have you heard of Sir James lately?

I cannot say when I will be at Stichel, but I hope soon, for I have a great deal to do there.

I am Dear Willie
your affectionate humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Vincenzo Lunardi (1754–1806) was an Italian aeronaut who had found fame in Britain through his balloon flights. His demonstration of 31 July 1786 was his third flight from Edinburgh, the other two taking place the previous year. On all three occasions he ascended from Heriot's Hospital Green, only a few minutes' walk from George Square, but on this flight merely travelled a couple of miles in a south-easterly direction due to a lack of wind.

² George Square had a large communal central garden or as Sir James calls it in the Scottish fashion, 'green'. See Figure 1.

³ Isabella Hall lived at no. 22, on the west side of the square.

⁴ *i.e.* Lady Pringle, who was recovering from the birth of their son Normand.

⁵ A town in Northumberland about 25 miles south east of Stichel. See the Introduction.

⁶ This was perhaps Margaret Hall (1761–1800), the illegitimate daughter of Alexander Hall (William Hall's brother) and an enslaved Indian woman. Born in Sumatra, where Alexander Hall was stationed with the East India Company, she was sent to Scotland after her father died in 1764. Known by the family as 'Peggy', she lived with her aunt, Isabella Hall.

LETTER 18

Edinburgh 12th August 1786

Dear Mr Hall

I had the pleasure of your letter three days ago from Dunglass, and have Lady Pringle's commands to join in our thanks for your kind congratulations and good wishes. She is now so well as to be in the drawing room for fresh air every day for an hour or two, as to young Normand, he is a fine thriving little fellow as can be. Our accounts too continue to be very favourable from Wooler.

I think I recollect that Mr Mason wrote me that he had put your name to Miss William's Poems.^[1] I shall send you out 2 copies, and get 12 shillings from you when we meet. I have remitted all the subscriptions I obtained here, which were considerable.

I am Dear Sir
your affectionate cousin and humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ *Poems* by Helen Maria Williams (1759-1827), published in 1786 in two volumes. As Sir James thought, William Hall was among its subscribers.

LETTER 19

Stitchel 17th June 1787

My Dear Sir

I have not heard a single word about you for some months past, pray be so good as to let me hear from you.

I got home on Monday last with my poor daughter Ann, who is not one bitt the better, what over worse for our English jaunt, she was exceedingly happy to get home, but I am sorry to say that I think her rather worse than when we did get home, she is a good deal weaker, thinner she cannot be, for she is a perfect skeleton, I must allways carry her where ever she wants to be, she cannot walk [a]cross the room, we think she was tolerably well yesterday, and I hear from the lady who sits up with her, that she has had a tolerable good

nights rest. You may well believe Lady Pringle is much distressed on her account, indeed she is not well herself. She is plying the bark.^[1]

I am Dear Mr Hall
your very affectionate and faithfull humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ *i.e.* taking infusions of cinchona bark as a medicine.

LETTER 20

Stitchel 4th August 1787

My Dear Sir

My heart bleeds to inform you that my Sweet Beloved Child Ann by Almighty Gods Pleasure, was delivered of all her pains this morning about half past one o'clock. We have reason to hope that she died without much immediate pain, for she spoke and was sensible till within a minute or two of the melancholy crisis, when she went off without a single throw.

We propose the burial to be on Wednesday next at one o'clock after noon, and beg you will come and do the last sad duty to my Dear Child.

If Sir James Hall is gone to Edinburgh, my servant need not go to Dunglass, for I have wrote to Sir James also at Edinburgh.

I am Dear Sir
your afflicted cousin and faithfull humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

LETTER 21

Holy Island^[1] 23rd July 1788

Dear Mr Hall

It is so long since we mett that I long much to see and hear from you, pray write me a line to let me know how you do, and direct to Stitchel for we are

to leave this place tomorrow. Lady Pringle, Eliza, Margaret and I have been bathing for a month past, there is one comfort at least, that none of us are worse than we were, and truly to say the truth better need not be, but physicians will be obeyed.

By a letter I had from Sir J. Hall I find Mr Hamilton is in Scotland, and was lately with you, if he is so still pray remember us all to him in the kindest manner, and though we hear his stay is to be but short in this country we hope to have the pleasure of seeing him at Stichel before he leaves the Island again.

I must be in Edinburgh on Monday next to shoot for The Kings Prize,^[2] and for that purpose propose to be there on Friday or Saturday next, but intend to be back at Stichel before the end of next week, when I hope to have the pleasure of hearing of you, Mr Hamilton and your sister, who I hear returned from Inverkeithing^[3] with him. We had sad weather here at first, but of late pretty good.

Mr Stuart and family go to Allanbank^[4] on Saturday. All here join in kind service to you and all with you.

I am most affectionately yours
James Pringle

Addressed to: William Hall Esq at Whitehall

¹ A tidal island off the coast of Northumberland. Also known as Lindisfarne.

² An annual archery prize shot for by members of the Royal Company of Archers. A member of the company since 1778, Sir James had been made president of its council in 1783. He had previously won three of the company's other annual prizes: the Silver Arrow (1784), the Edinburgh Arrow (1784) and the Silver Bowl (1786).

³ A burgh and parish in Fife.

⁴ Allanbank, near Allanton (Berwickshire). It was the seat of Sir John Stuart (1714-1796), 3rd baronet.

LETTER 22

Stichel 10th August 1788

I thank you My Dear Sir for your letting me hear of your health and am very glad to find that you are so far recovered, for I thought you was by no means well when I saw you last. I think you are in the right to take care that you take as little unnecessary fatigue as possible.

I do not remember one single person at Halifax,^[1] I imagine there is hardly one there now that was in the place when I was in that country. I fancy the best way woud be to get information what Regiment is there and write to some of the officers concerning the enquiry you wish to make.

I dined yesterday at Fleures^[2] where I met Mr Baillie^[3] and sons, who had seen Mr Hamilton frequently. He spoke of being this way next week. I could wish he woud write me when he is to come that I may not be away from home, it woud be an additional pleasure if you woud come allso. Kind service to you from all here.

I am sincerely yours
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Halifax, Nova Scotia. Sir James' former regiment, the 59th Foot, had been stationed in Nova Scotia from 1763 to 1772.

² Floors Castle, near Kelso (Roxburghshire), the seat of the duke of Roxburghe.

³ Probably George Hamilton Baillie of Mellerstain (see Letter 13, note 9).

LETTER 23

Stitchel 4th March 1789
Evening 10 o'clock

Dear Mr Hall

I have this moment got your letter of this mornings date.

As to the Merse politicks I really can inform you very little. I heard that on the 1st Thursday of last month at our meeting of the Bowmen of the Border, or rather after the meeting was over, at least after the reckoning was paid, politicks turned the topic of conversation, but in another room from what we had dined in I believe, for I had come away, so that I know only from hear-say what passed; but the outlines as far as I was told was, Sir Alexander Don's^[1] declaring himself a candidate for Berwickshire at the next election, and Mr Baillie Junior of Mellerstain declareing himself allso a candidate, if Mr Home^[2] declined offering himself again; but now I am told that as Mr Home has declared that he will offer himself at [the] next election, Mr Baillie will not, but on the contrary will adopt Mr Homes side. I have heard nothing more of the

matter. I did hear that Sir Alexander Don had gone east the Merse, but I understood it was concerning an address to The Prince of Wales,^[3] for he sent me a paper to sign, a requisition to the sheriff to call a meeting for that purpose, but I declined signing it, and heard no more about it.

I have not the least notion how Lord Marchmont^[4] will incline, if His Lordship takes any part at all, which I doubt very much. My doubt arises only though from his time of life, and his having given over all outward appearances, at least, of interfering in any publick concerns, so much so that I really cannot think of troubling him upon this subject. As to my own part, I say as Sir James Hall do[es], that I will take no active part in the matter; if you do, in offering yourself as candidate, I likewise say as Sir James Hall says, I will concur with you in that measure, but cannot answer for any other till I know what it is. I imagine Mr Home's interest when joined by Mr Baillie's will be very powerfull, but I am truly speaking at random, for I know very little of the matter.

I do think that if you intend to undertake the busyness, as you mention in your letter, it would come most properly from you to write to Lord Marchmont, and endeavour to know if His Lordship means to take any part or not; if you do, and if you think proper, you may let His Lordship know what I say with respect to yourself.

We are all in perfect good health here, and have the most delightfull weather.

The fireside join me in kind service to you.

I am My Dear Sir
your affectionate and faithfull humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Sir Alexander Don (1751-1815), 5th baronet. His residence was at Newton Don, near Kelso.

² Patrick Home of Billie and Wedderburn (1728-1808) was the sitting MP for Berwickshire. He intended to resign his seat at the next election but was persuaded by family and friends to stand again. This change of mind is referred to in Letter 24.

³ A Regency Bill had been introduced earlier in the year so that George, Prince of Wales, might act as regent during his father's illness. By the time Sir James was writing this letter, however, the king had recovered and the proposal dropped.

⁴ Hugh Hume-Campbell (1708-1794), 3rd earl of Marchmont.

LETTER 24

Stitchel 20th March 1789

Dear Mr Hall

I was very sorry to hear at Greenlaw on Monday last that you were kept from being at the meeting by a cold, I hope it is now gone, and that we will hear by the bearer that you are quite well again.

I told you in Edinburgh that I had wrote to Lord Marchmont concerning the politicks of the county in the event of a general election; at the same time I mentioned you as ready to take an active part in case of meeting with encouragement, very particularly from His Lordships friends, but that you was not very sanguine as to yourself, if there was an other who woud undertake it.

I had a letter by this days post from Lord Marchmont, in answer to mine. The contents is as follows as to what I wrote to His Lordship, "It is you and such as you I must leave to decide on the subject you mention; I can form no opinion. For I neither know the state of the country, nor Mr Baillie's reason for changing his mind; You know what has been my object in the county, I need not therefore repeat, that whomever you and the other independent gentlemen in the county shall select, I shall prefere [*sic*]." So far as to my question, the rest is compliments etc.

I send this on purpose to you in case it may have influence on your intended schemes, and I beg you will let me hear by the bearer, what your opinion is, of His Lordships letter; for my part I think he seems to decline takeing any part at all; at his time of life and in his situation I don't wonder at it. I coud wish you to keep the contents of His Lordships letter to our selves.

Do you still continue your intention of going South?

All in this house is in very good health, and desire to be kindly remembered to you.

I am Dear Mr Hall
your affectionate cousin and humble servant
James Pringle

Addressed to: William Hall Esq of Whitehall, at Whitehall

LETTER 25

Stitchel 23rd April 1789

My Dear Sir

I cannot let this opportunity slip of asking you how you do, and telling you that we are all quite well here, little Normand has just recovered from inoculation. He had a great number but of the best kind, and is now as well as ever he was.

Lady Pringle has a view to Dunglass now that the days and roads are both mended, but the particular time is not yet fixed on, have you heard any thing of that family lately? We have no news here about.

This go[e]s by John Turnbull, who has been not less than 18 years my servant, and has taken it in his head to leave us, which I am sorry for, not only that I looked upon him as a good servant, but that I hate the notion of a new one. It seems he has taken a house in Ey[e]mouth,^[1] for what purpose or view I cannot say.

Pray let us hear of you. My last accounts of my Aunt Margaret^[2] were very unfavourable. All here join in kind compliments to you, and I am

your affectionate humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ A village and parish on the coast of Berwickshire, about thirty miles north east of Stitchel.

² The aforementioned Margaret Pringle of Lochtoun.

LETTER 26

Stitchel 20th June 1789

Dear Mr Hall

If we all continue in good health Lady Pringle the two girls and I intend paying our respects to you at Whitehall early next week, perhaps on Tuesday, or Wednesday. I fancy the Lady means to pay a visit at Nisbit^[1] and Captain Swintons,^[2] so we cannot be positive about the day. Our view is to go over to Dunglass from your house.

I make no doubt of your weather being as good as ours, and your corn and grass better but that is needless.

I am most affectionately
your obedient humble servant
James Pringle

PS: If it is more convenient for you that we should be at Whitehall on our way back from Dunglass it would be the same to us.

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Probably Nisbet House, near Duns (Berwickshire). It was the home of Margaret and Anne Carre, daughters of the late George Carre (c.1700-1766), Lord Nisbet.

² Captain Archibald Swinton (1731-1804), who lived at Kimmerghame House, near Duns.

LETTER 27

Stichel Saturday Morn [?September 1789]^[1]

A thousand thanks My Dear Sir for your horse, as well as for the kind hospitable and friendly reception we met with from you. The ladies got well home through a bad road yesterday to dinner. They were much delighted with their visit at Nisbet.

Our turnip land is in a very sad condition, however we have had 2 dry days, and foggie as this is at present I hope it will also turn out dry.

Our Silver Arrow^[2] is to be shot for at Edinburgh on Monday, and I have thoughts of going in from Greenlaw to day in the R. Charlotte^[3] but will be out again on Tuesday or Wednesday. We found Lady Lochtoun here, and I fancy I will remain till Monday.

Yours ever most affectionately
James Pringle

The lad will bring my bows which were forgot.

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The letter was simply dated 'Saturday Morn'. 'September 1789' has been written on the back in pencil, apparently by an archivist.

² An annual archery prize shot for by members of the Royal Company of Archers. Sir James had won the prize in 1784.

³ The Royal Charlotte Post Coach, which ran between Edinburgh and London. Greenlaw was one its stops.

LETTER 28

Stitchel 25th September 1789

My Dear Mr Hall,

Your letter without a date I found here yesterday when Lady Pringle and I returned from Edinburgh where we had been for eight days. We came by Torsonce, where we found my Aunt Margaret wonderfully well indeed.

I wish I had known your inclinations at the last meeting of the Bowmen of the Borders, and I woud certainly with much pleasure have proposed you, in that case you woud have been balloted for on the 1st of October, the day appointed for our Ball. As it now stands our forms won't admit of your being chosen then, but in the name of the Society I hereby invite you to our Ball, where I am sure you will be a wellcome guest, you will see by the advertizement [*sic*] that the dinner is an ordinary.^[1] I shall take the opportunity to propose you if you still like our institution. I am to take a room for that night for myself, and will take one also for you, if any thing prevents your comeing, the damage in the room [*illegible – word lost in binding*] is not great. But pray come here a day or two before Thursday.

We are all in good health and danceing. Plight the lasses are this moment at a ding dang^[2] practiseing on your account. The Lady and they join in kind service to you. Theres but brittle harvest weather.

I am My Dear Sir
your affectionate humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ An ordinary dinner consisted of a number of courses, served at a fixed price.

² An informal singing session.

LETTER 29

Stitchel 11th May 1790

Dear Mr Hall,

I had the pleasure to receive your letter of the 7th by last post, and I have Eliza's directions to join her thanks to mine both for yours and Mr Boswell's^[1] polite and kind invitations, of which you will be so good as to acquaint him when you meet, but we are sorry we cannot avail ourselves of it at present. Her mother has wrote that the chinkcough^[2] is in our square, and as Eliza has never had it, (nor indeed, any of the bairns except Katharine) she wishes her not to come to town, and if I do [*interlined: go*] which perhaps may be tomorrow to a Veteran Club, Eliza goes to Mellerstain; Miss Bettie was here and passed the whole of yesterday with us, they are all well at Mellerstain.

I hope you will be at our next meeting of the Bowmen of the Border, on the 1st Thursday of June. You and Sir James were admitted unanimously last Thursday.

What exceeding cold weather there is, notwithstanding I am cutting very rank grass for my horses, and might have done it nearly in as great luzuriancy [*sic*] the 2nd of April when Eliza and I came out of Edinburgh.

What think you of this war with Spain?^[3]

I beg you will remember me in the kindest manner to my worthy friend and schoolfellow Mr Boswell. I will be sure to see you both some time this summer, if all continues well. I have a notion our young ones won't be long in Edinburgh oweing to the chinkcough.

I am My Dear Sir
your affectionate and faithfull humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ James Boswell (1740-1795), the biographer of Samuel Johnson. Boswell and his father Lord Auchinleck were friends of Sir James' uncle, the aforementioned Sir John Pringle; the two families were also distantly related. Sir James goes on to refer to Boswell as his schoolfellow, which suggests that he attended Mundell's school in the West Bow, Edinburgh.

² More usually 'chincough', now known as whooping-cough: a highly infectious bacterial disease of the lungs and airways that causes coughing spasms.

³ A dispute over the seizure of British ships in the Nootka Sound by the local Spanish authorities had escalated and by the time Sir James was writing both sides had mobilised their navies. Tensions continued to simmer over the coming months, but war was averted when Spain failed to gain the support of its allies and was obliged to seek a diplomatic solution.

LETTER 30

Stitchel 25th June 1790

Dear Mr Hall

I write this merely to let you know we are all well here, we came home from Edinburgh on Saturday last, all except Robert poor man who is left boarded with his master of the High School, I hear he likes his situation better than expectation. When your turnips etc. etc. will permit we will be very glad to see you here. Thursday next is a meeting of the Bowmen of the Borders.

I fancy the Merse election^[1] will be soon unless it interferes with that of Roxburgh.^[2] I propose to attend, do you think of being there?

The Lady and her daughters join in their kind service to you. We are all (the Lady excepted) going to a play at Kelso tonight bespoke by the Mellerstain family.

I saw the Duke of Roxburgh yesterday. Mr Smith is so well recovered as to have been out in a chaise two days for an hour and a half each day.

What delightfull weather there is, have you heard of Dunglass lately?

I am My Dear Sir

your affectionate cousin and most obedient servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The election for Berwickshire was held on 1 July, with the aforementioned Patrick Home of Billie and Wedderburn being elected unopposed.

² The election for Roxburghshire was held on 24-25 July, with Sir George Douglas of Springwood Park (1754-1821) being elected by five votes.

LETTER 31

Edinburgh Sunday night [3rd October 1790]^[1]

Dear Sir

I had taken my place in the Royal Charlotte to have attended the meeting to morrow, but Lady Pringle is so much distressed with a cold and sore throat, which has stuck by her for weeks past, that I cannot think of leaving her till I see her somewhat better. I dare say my presence at Greenlaw is of no

importance, I understand that the turnpike part of the Bill is already determined upon,^[2] and that part which relates to the Statute Labour I understand is to be similar to what we have adopted in Teviotdale, and I think a preferable mode to any we formerly had.

I am My Dear Sir
your affectionate humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The letter was dated simply 'Sunday night'. William Hall has written on the back page 'Oct. 3^d 1790'.

² A proposal to amend the Berwickshire Turnpike Act of 1772 had been met with both support and opposition among the county's landowners. Meetings were held over the next two years to discuss the issue.

LETTER 32

Edinburgh 12th October 1790

Dear Mr Hall

According to your order I took a room for you in Kelso, as soon as I went out of this town 3 weeks ago this day, as I was told at Mellerstain that there was hardly such a thing to be got, there was such a demand; Lady Harriet Don^[1] recommended me to a Miss Eccles, nearly opposite to Mrs Redpath, it is in a very quiet back close, but had I known what I know now, that there are plenty of rooms to be got, I would have taken one for you nearer the Dancing Room, however I hope you will find it convenient enough. Penny pies; a guinea a room.

There was a plan of having our Bowmen Ball in the Race week,^[2] but that plan is laid aside, as we found that several ladies would gladly have attended the Bowmen Ball, who did not mean to be there upon account of the Race week, and thought that it would not have been decent to come to our Ball, the very day after the Hunters Ball,^[3] so that our next meeting is on the first Thursday of January but no day yet appointed for our Ball.

I came here on Saturday with Robert for the High School, and should not have been surprized had I found an increase to my family, but that has not yet happened, though looked for daily, I can't say I ever saw Lady Pringle in better looks and health, for as bulky [*sic*] as she is.

Lady Helen Hall^[4] has given my two lasses a most friendly and kind invitation to come and stay a while at Dunglass. Whither we will get it made out after the Race week I cannot say, but if we do, we will not pass your Hospitable Door without paying our respects to you and those with you, to whom and yourself Lady Pringle joins me in kind service.

We have had of late very fine harvest weather, and a good deal done with us, but this day is a perfect storm of wind, I have not heard a higher for some time. Little news stirring, more appearance of war every day.

Was Andrew Stuart an acquaintance of yours, it is said he is to be married to a [*interlined*: Miss] Stirling a daughter of Sir W. Stirling,^[5] a lass about 22 or 23; and my friend Andrew about our own age so I don't despair [*sic*] yet of seeing a Lady Whitehall. I should sing, O, Be Joyfull.

I suppose I shall be kept here until the little squaller makes its appearance, and then I must out to attend the lasses at Kelso, where I hope to meet you, till when and forever, I am

your affectionate
James Pringle

Addressed to: William Hall, Esq, Whitehall near Chirnside by Berwick

¹ Lady Harriet Don (d. 1801), daughter of the 13th earl of Glencairn, was the wife of Sir Alexander Don, mentioned in Letter 23.

² A horse racing event was held each year at Caverton Edge, near Kelso. The Bowmen Ball was held each year by the Bowmen of the Borders, of which Sir James was a member.

³ The ball held by the Caledonian Hunt Club at the Cross Keys Hotel during the Kelso race week. See the Introduction.

⁴ Lady Helen Hall (née Douglas, 1762-1837) was the wife of Sir James Hall, 4th baronet. They had married at Dunglass in 1786.

⁵ Andrew Stuart (1725-1801), a Scottish lawyer and MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, had married Margaret Stirling, daughter of Sir William Stirling of Ardoch, on 9 October 1790.

LETTER 33

Edinburgh Monday noon [25th October 1790]^[1]

My Dear Sir

Lady Pringle was delivered yesterday about 5 o'clock in the evening, after a most severe labour from Thursday night, I may say without an interval of ease

for 5 minutes at a time; the poor infant was dead born. However I have the pleasure to tell you that Lady Pringle had a very good and quiet nights rest. I can't say I remember her to have had a better on similar occasions.

My kind service to Miss Hall and Miss Peggy, with information of the above events.

I have not heard yet a word of the Kelso Balls, nor whither you was there.

I am Dear Mr Hall
your affectionate humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The letter was dated simply 'Monday noon'. William Hall has written on the back 'Oct. 25th 1790'.

LETTER 34

Stitchel 26th November 1790

Dear Mr Hall

I had the pleasure of your letter of the 21st by last post, wishing to know our motions.

I am sorry to say that we cannot move your way this season; there are more than me sorry, our lasses had cheered themselves with the thoughts of a jaunt to your house on their way to Dunglass, but my being kept in Edinburgh so long with their mother, has set aside that plan, much to the disappointment of every one of the intended party, but we all live in hopes of its taking place some time next Summer.

I left Edinburgh on Monday, was at Mellerstain all that night, and came here next day when I found your letter.

We have settled every thing to march off en caravan for Edinburgh on Monday. I doubt much if we can make it out in one day, indeed if the weather does not mend, we must take the sheaf from the mare, for we won't be able to pass Eden^[1] at Mellerstain if it continues to rain as it did yesterday, and still does in a degree; our roads too are shocking.

I cannot argue about the repair of the highways in our county, but I have ever been, and am daily more and more convinced that without turnpikes we will never have good roads, I don't mean in Berwickshire only, I wish most

sincerely that there were [an]other two toll bars betwixt this and Etall Coal,^[2] one of them shoud be wellcome at my white gate.

I left Lady Pringle on Monday vastly well, lowness of spirits is her only drawback. I hope the sight of the bairns next week will give them a phillip.

All my lasses and lads here greet you well.

Yours affectionately
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The Eden Water.

² The colliery at Etal (Northumberland).

LETTER 35

Edinburgh 22nd December 1790

Dear Mr Hall

Your letter of Friday last gave great satisfaction in this house as well as to many of our neighbours in the square, very particularly Captain Swinton.^[1] All here join in wishing you and those with you a merry Xmass [*sic*] and many happy new years.

Yours most affectionately
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ Captain Archibald Swinton (see Letter 26, note 2) had a townhouse at no. 14 George Square.

LETTER 36

Edinburgh 12th January 1791

Dear Mr Hall,

Our old cousin and good friend Mrs Pringle of Lochtoun died this morning about seven o'clock. If ever the melancholy event of death was a deliverance,

it was remarkably so to her. You know she has been in a distressed state of health for many years but for five weeks, you cannot conceive what she has suffered, none but Mary Airth and those who now and then saw her in that time, can have any notion of it.

Colonel Pringle and I got Frank Anderson and Mr Davidson, and sealed up her drawers this forenoon.^[1] It seems she had told Mrs Airth that she wished for her body to be kept 8 days, but upon her saying that her brothers had only been kept six she acquiesced [*sic*], so Colonel Pringle and I fixed next Monday for the burial, only near relations and necessary people to be asked. Your sister has this moment been here and says she is to write to you tomorrow.

All here in good health and join in kind service to you. We were happy to hear by Miss Hall that you were much better as to have been abroad.

This is sad weather for invalids so don't venture too much. There is a perfect storm sprung up within those two hours.

Yours faithfully
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ This was done so no one could look at, or tamper with, a deceased person's will before it was officially read.

LETTER 37

Edinburgh 19th January 1791

Dear Mr Hall,

We did the last sad duty to our departed friend Mrs Margaret Pringle on Monday. There were 14 Gentlemen asked to the burial, but the day was so exceedingly tempestuous, that severals sent excuses. Sir James Hall, Mr John Pringle, (the colonel could not come out he was so ill of a bowell complaint) Mr G. Fullerton, Mr F. Anderson, Mr H. Davidson and myself returned to her house, where we opened her papers, and found by her will that my second son is heir to the estate of Lochtoun, and I am appointed her executor, neither of them of much greater value than what they derive from the donor, at least for the present when the lease of the estate is out, to be sure it will rise considerably. She has left a legacy of £50 to each of Captain Sandilands's two daughters, a legacy of £80, and an annuity of £20 dureing life to Mrs Airth. Nothing can be more proper or satisfactory than this, and, by a most kind letter she [*interlined:* Mrs Airth] showed me from you, I am sure [*interlined:* you] will

highly approve of. She has also left an annuity of £5 and a legacy of £5 to her maid Effie, whom you will remember, that is all. I think taking in legacies and annuities, the estate will be burdened with a debt of nearly £3000, so that little John is at present but a poor laird.

In your last you don't seem to think much of the terrible weather we have had here, I dare say you would think something of Monday, such a night and such a forenoon I don't remember. I hear just now that there was some hurt done by a lightning [*sic*] that night or day.

I have seen neither James nor Mrs Hamilton yet but both of their beautiful daughters.

I am My Dear Sir
your affectionate cousin and obedient servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

LETTER 38

Stichel Thursday night [14th July 1791]^[1]

Dear Sir

We were all, the lasses particularly, rejoiced [*sic*] to see your servant this forenoon, and in proportion regret the cause of your message this evening, but we still hope that you will be so well as to come amongst us tomorrow.

I have been a month with my daughter Eliza at Gilsland waters,^[2] we returned yesterday, but am sorry to say that the waters have not had the wished for effect. All the rest of us are well and join most heartily in our kind compliments to you.

I am most affectionately yours
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The letter was dated simply 'Thursday night'. William Hall has written on the back 'July 14 1791'.

² Gilsland (Cumbria) was the site of a mineral spring and an associated spa resort. Pringle and his daughter had perhaps stayed at The Shaws, a hotel built in the 1760s to cater for the increasing number of visitors coming to take the waters.

LETTER 39

Stitchel 12th August 1791

Dear Sir

We were much disappointed at your not coming to the Ball at Kelso, which was a very good one but not throng. As you at that time was in some degree a complainer, all here hope to hear that you are now quite well, so pray send us a line to let us know about you.

I am pretty close kept at home to ride out with Eliza, who is some better but by no means well yet.

Do you know any thing of Sir James Hall or his Lady and bairns, or about your sister and Peggie, for they may be at Jerusalem for any thing we know about them, how they do or where they are.

Every one here desires to be kindly remembered to you.

Yours sincerely
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

LETTER 40

[Stitchel]^[1] 3rd October 1791

A thousand thanks to Mr Hall from all the family at Stitchel for his kind attention to them in the plentyfull supply of different kinds of fruit, all of which was excellent, a few of the peaches a little bruised. They had the pleasure of seeing Miss Hall for a night on her road westward.

There is to be a ball at Selkirk on the 14th where Katharine is to be Queen, Tibbie said she woud perhaps be there. Mr Hall woud be a welcome guest there allso.

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The letter has no place date, but the wording suggests that it was sent from Stitchel.

LETTER 41

Mellerstain Thursday morn [January or February 1792]^[1]

Dear Mr Hall

I am very sorry that you have been at the trouble to send your servant so far, and that I was from home when he came, so that he has been detained longer than otherwise he woud have been.

I am much concerned too that you shoud think there were so many irregularities committed that day of our last meeting upon the Turnpike Bill; I truely cannot charge my memory with all the transactions of that days meeting, but I must acknowlege that I then understood that the Bill (to which I gave my assent) was agreed upon by the meeting, though not unanimously, and I then also understood that the Bill thus agreed upon, was to be sent to Parliament without the sanction of any other meeting. After haveing said what is above you cannot expect that I can sign either the reasons of protest or the petition against the Turnpike Bill. I am very sorry allso that there shoud have been so much difference of opinion upon a matter of such moment to the county.

A thousand thanks My Dear Sir for your kind wishes, Lady Pringle and all the Bairns are in very good health. Katharine, Eliza, Margaret and I have been here these 2 days past, but we go home to day.

I most heartily wish you a good journey to London and am Dear Sir

your very affectionate and faithfull humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The letter was simply dated 'Thursday morn'. William Hall has written on the back 'Jany or Feby 1792'.

LETTER 42

Stitchel 5th October 1795^[1]

No wonder My Dear Friend that you was angry at me for not writeing to you with the man who went for the tup, but the reall fact was that I did not know he was to go away so soon, or even that day at all, till I met him half a mile from the house as I was walking out with Mr Todd of Drygrange,^[2] but I now take this opportunity to thank you kindly for the finest animal we have seen

hereabout, for my own part I am by no means a judge, but folks of skill says he is capital.

I hope by this time you have got your kirn^[3] and have as good a crop as in this neighbourhood, better need not be, though we are never wholly content, for I hear there are complaints of the wheat being not gifty.^[4]

By a letter from your sister to one of our lasses, we understand she is to be at Dunglass, and not certain when she returns, nor can we say when we can get your length, as we expect a visit of [*illegible*] Pringle and George Fairholme,^[5] after that the Kelso Balls will come on, then the Selkirk Ball, where Eliza is Queen, so that our lasses have a wonderful deall on their hands, however I believe some of them are to write to Miss Hall or Miss Peggie.

What uncommon fine weather we have had till this day, when it has rained since eleven in the morning, and now I am just come up waddeing [*i.e.* ?wading] through dirt and darkness from a fine Ranty^[6] Kirn at James Hogarth in Baillieknow,^[7] the whole house, man woman and bairn, except the lady who stays at home with one man servant, till I after dancing seven reells came and relieved him, it is now ½ past ten and they are not home yet. I am affraid I shall have a wett ride tomorrow to the head court at Jedburgh.

Have you heard of Sir James Hall and family of late. I had a long letter on Sunday from worthy old Mr Mason, as well wrote though he has but one eye now, and as chearfull and pleasant as if he were but forty year old, I believe he is 86 or 87. Our good neighbour Mr Baillie has been very poorly again. He has got some what better and thinks of a jaunt to Wooler for change of air.

I am Dear Mr Hall
your very affectionate humble servant
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive.

¹ William Hall has written at the top of the first page: "Sir Js Pringle in return for a tup sent him Oct. 5th 1795'.

² Thomas Tod (1726–1800) was a Writer to the Signet. His main residence was at Drygrange, near Melrose (Roxburghshire). His son Archibald (who was also a lawyer) married Sir James' daughter Eliza in 1802.

³ A celebration with feasting and dancing, to mark the end of the corn harvest (Scots).

⁴ Prolific, or of good yield (Scots).

⁵ George Fairholme (1730–1800). In 1785, he had bought the estate of Greenknowe (Berwickshire) from Sir James' cousin James Pringle of Bowland.

⁶ Merry, or boisterous (Scots).

⁷ James Hogarth was the tenant of Baillieknow, a farm on the Stichel estate.

LETTER 43

Stitchel Tuesday [13th October 1795]^[1]

My Dear Friend

A thousand thanks for your very kind letter of the 18th, and as many for your noble animal. They, judges for I am none, say a finer animal never was, I have heard much of the high price of tups, but till yesterday I never heard of ewes at such a rate, as they were sold at on Friday last at Chillingham Mains,^[2] £7.12 – for ewes the lowest sold for three. I wonder what things will come to.

As to the Balls at Kelso I know nothing, poor Kattie had a tooth drawn yesterday in preparation, she got sweet rest last night, for the first of 4 or 5 past. There is no thought of a Bowman Ball for most of the families in this neighbourhood, Admiral Dickson,^[3] Newton Don, Springwood Park, Mackerston,^[4] Dr Wilson^[5] are all in deep mo[u]rning for children or brothers, and Mellerstain all at Wooler or attending their mother, but no doubt there will be balls next week the hunt [having] begun yesterday, such rain as it was, many of us had wett skins at poor Dr Watson's of Kelso burial, which was in Hume church yard.

I have been just out at my shearers, it is melancholy to see the corn growing standing or rather sticking to the ground, and the sheaves that have been cut for many days growing to one another.

The Lady and all this house join in our kindest good wishes for you and all with you.

I am My Dear Mr Hall
yours sincerely
James Pringle

The cover sheet does not survive

¹ The letter is simply dated 'Tuesday'. William Hall has written on the back 'in answer to the Tup sent him Oct. 13th 1795'.

² Chillingham (Northumberland) is about 30 miles south east of Stitchel.

³ Admiral William Dickson (c.1728-1803) of Sydenham House, near Stitchel.

⁴ Newton Don, Springwood Park and Mackerston (Makerstoun) were all estates near Stitchel.

⁵ Probably Dr Andrew Wilson of Kelso.

FURTHER READING

The original letters are held by the National Records of Scotland: NRS, GD206/2/453, Letters to William Hall of Whitehall, 3rd son of Sir James Hall, 2nd Bart.

For a contemporary description of the parish of Chirnside, see *First (Old) Statistical Account of Scotland*, 21 vols, Edinburgh, 1791-99, XIV, 1-50. For the parish of Stichel and Hume, see volume III, 290-293. See also the entries for Chirnside and Stichel in *The Gazetteer of Scotland*, printed by Francis Ray, Dundee, in 1803. County descriptions, with a focus on land types and use, can be found in Lowe, A. *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Berwick*, London, 1794; and Ure, D. *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Roxburgh*, London, 1794.

More information about Stichel and the Pringle family can be found in the following works: *Records of the Baron Court of Stichill 1655-1807*, ed C B Gunn, Edinburgh, 1905, Appendix VII. Some notes on the members of the Pringle family; *Diary of George Ridpath, Minister of Stichill 1755-1761*, ed J Balfour Paul, Edinburgh, 1922; *A Collection of Writings by the Rev George Gunn Minister of Stichill 1851-1900*, Alnwick 1901.

For a brief biography of Sir James Pringle, see *The History of Parliament* online: [Pringle, James \(1726-1809\), of Stichill, Roxburgh](#).

See the notes to the Introduction for other relevant works.

SOURCES IN LOCAL HISTORY

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