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THE CORRESPONDENCE OF WILLIAM LAIDLAW, PART II: FRIENDS, 1790–1795

Transcribed and introduced by
Sally Gerrard



THE EUROPEAN
ETHNOLOGICAL
RESEARCH CENTRE

The Correspondence of William Laidlaw,
Part II: Friends, 1790-1795

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PREFACE

William Laidlaw was a lawyer – in Scottish parlance a 'writer' – who lived in Peebles for most of his adult life. He was born in Selkirkshire in 1771, the son of a prosperous tenant farmer. William belonged to a well-connected 'middling' family whose relationships extended across the Borders and into Edinburgh. He was the fourth surviving child of five, along with elder brothers James and Walter, sister Mary and younger brother Robert. In 1785 the family moved to Broadmeadows, near Yarrow, where they remained for almost a decade. The Laidlaws' nearest neighbours were the Parks at Foulshiels. The families had known one another for at least two generations but had not been neighbours since they had tenanted neighbouring farms north of Galashiels in the 1740s and 1750s. William Laidlaw and Mungo and Alexander Park became firm friends. At fifteen, William was apprenticed to writer and town clerk Andrew Henderson. Under the terms of his apprenticeship, William went to live in the Hendersons' house on Selkirk High Street. Mungo was already apprenticed to local doctor Thomas Anderson by then and as the Andersons' house was less than five minutes away from William's new home, it was easy for the two boys to spend their free time together.

A large number of letters written to William Laidlaw by his friends have survived, eighty-one in total, written between 1790 and 1795. The world contained within them was a product of a changing Scotland. During the eighteenth century, improvements in agriculture, education, trade and communications widened the opportunities available to families such as the Laidlaws, Parks, Hendersons and Veitches, who appear throughout the correspondence. Their circumstances and routes to advancement varied. The Laidlaws remained rooted in tenant farming, while increasingly investing in the education and advancement of the next generation. The Parks combined successful farming with the accumulation and lending of capital: Mungo and Alexander's grandfather Archibald, himself the son of a miller, acquired a local reputation as a 'rich man'. The Hendersons advanced more rapidly. Andrew Henderson the elder, William's master in Selkirk, and his brother John were the sons of a butcher who secured legal apprenticeships for them; both became lawyers and served as town baillies. The Veitches prospered through trade and civic life. By the 1790s, these different paths had brought their children into the same increasingly prosperous, educated and professional social world.

The effects of this increasing prosperity were not confined to sons. The daughters of these families were educated and participated in the same widening social world, although the opportunities available to them were necessarily different. Most would be expected eventually to marry and manage households

of their own, but this was not the only course open to them. Nancy Henderson and Annie Veitch, both of whom feature prominently in the surviving correspondence, remained unmarried and established independent working lives, the former through teaching and dressmaking and the latter in trade.

Most of the surviving letters were written by Mungo and Alexander Park. There are also letters from Alexander Anderson and his brother John, sisters Agnes and Wilhelmina Henderson, William's cousin Alexander Somerville and others. William and his friends had spent years together in Selkirk. The letters were written after their paths began to diverge. At seventeen years old, Mungo Park enrolled at the University of Edinburgh to study medicine. Two years later, Alexander Park and Alexander Anderson also left Selkirk for Edinburgh: Park to study law and Anderson medicine. William remained with the Hendersons in Selkirk until 1792, when he too left for Edinburgh, to work for his cousin James, a Writer to the Signet, in his office on Castle Hill. When he arrived in Edinburgh, the Park brothers had left for London and Alexander Anderson remained only for a few weeks before returning to Selkirk to take up a position in his father's practice. Friends from Selkirk, meanwhile, wrote to William in Edinburgh; notably the Henderson sisters, to whom he had become something of an adopted brother, and his cousin Alexander Somerville.

Through the letters, the lives of the friends who wrote to William are illuminated, among them, Mungo Park, a talented writer who hoped to see something of the world; Alexander Anderson, excitable and clearly enthralled by the culture of city life; Alexander Park, ambitious and steadfast. Very few letters written by William himself have survived: a letter to his brother Walter; a draft concerning his sister Mary; a copy of a letter preserved in the minute book of Peebles Presbytery. As a result, William often appears only in reflected light, through the correspondence and observations of others. What emerges is a man of apparent contradictions. He was capable, trusted and intelligent, yet also persistently unreliable.

This is visible throughout his life. William could be remarkably constant, if he chose to be. He maintained a regular correspondence with Mungo Park over several years and remained closely connected to the Park family long afterwards. Alexander Park repeatedly relied upon him in personal and practical matters and seems to have regarded him with genuine affection despite occasional frustration. William appears to have responded most strongly to relationships that were personally meaningful to him.

The contrast with his behaviour in more formal settings is striking. Family obligations, institutional demands and opportunities requiring sustained commitment were more likely to be resisted, delayed or abandoned altogether. William chose independence early on in his career. Rather than remain under the patronage of Andrew Henderson, through whom he might reasonably have expected advancement, he determined to make his own way. The deputation offered by Alexander Park in 1795 provides another good example – having

secured the office of Commissary Clerk of Peebles, Alexander repeatedly urged William to accept appointment as his deputy. The position conferred obvious advantages for an aspiring writer: an assured income and a secure professional future. William was nonetheless reluctant to engage with the proposal – and ultimately declined.

A similar pattern can be seen in his dealings with the kirk in Peebles following the birth of his illegitimate son to Helen Lauder in 1802. William avoided engagement with ecclesiastical authority for several years, behaviour so unusual for the period as to verge upon open defiance. When eventually obliged to answer before the presbytery, he did not deny responsibility for the child, but neither would he submit to the standard process of discipline and repentance. Instead, he attempted to frame the matter as a practical question of support and maintenance, resisting further scrutiny.

William's relationship with alcohol appears often in the surviving correspondence. Reports of drunken wagers and entire days spent drinking as a young man, together with complaints concerning his conduct later in life, suggest a pattern of excess that persisted well beyond youth. Drinking was hardly unusual amongst his contemporaries; what distinguishes William is the extent to which it continued to shape his reputation. Whilst those around him had moderated their behaviour with time and experience, William's habits remained sufficiently conspicuous as to attract comment.

Again and again he appears to have chosen autonomy over security, even when the latter was plainly within his reach. In doing so he secured a degree of personal independence, but sacrificed many of the advantages that his education, connections and friendships might otherwise have afforded him.

William's life followed a different course from those of the friends whose letters fill this volume. Mungo Park became an explorer of international repute; Alexander Park a writer, banker and landowner; Alexander Anderson a surgeon whose career led him from Selkirk to Gosport and ultimately to Africa. William successfully established himself as an independent writer in Peebles, yet his life retained a degree of irregularity that set him apart from his contemporaries. He never married or raised a family, and he spent his last years living with his sister Mary in Peebles.

William Laidlaw was a valued friend and an able professional, but a man nonetheless who never entirely reconciled himself to the expectations and structures that shaped the world he inhabited.

Sally Gerrard

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The EERC is grateful to the National Records of Scotland for permission to reproduce copies of the correspondence. The front cover image is reproduced courtesy of the National Galleries of Scotland (D3314). Drawn in 1793 by David Allan, it shows the High Street, Edinburgh, as viewed from the Netherbow. The tall building in the distance, facing down the street, is Creech's Land, which stood close to the entrance to Writer's Court, where Mungo Park and his Selkirk friends lodged while studying at the University.

EDITING

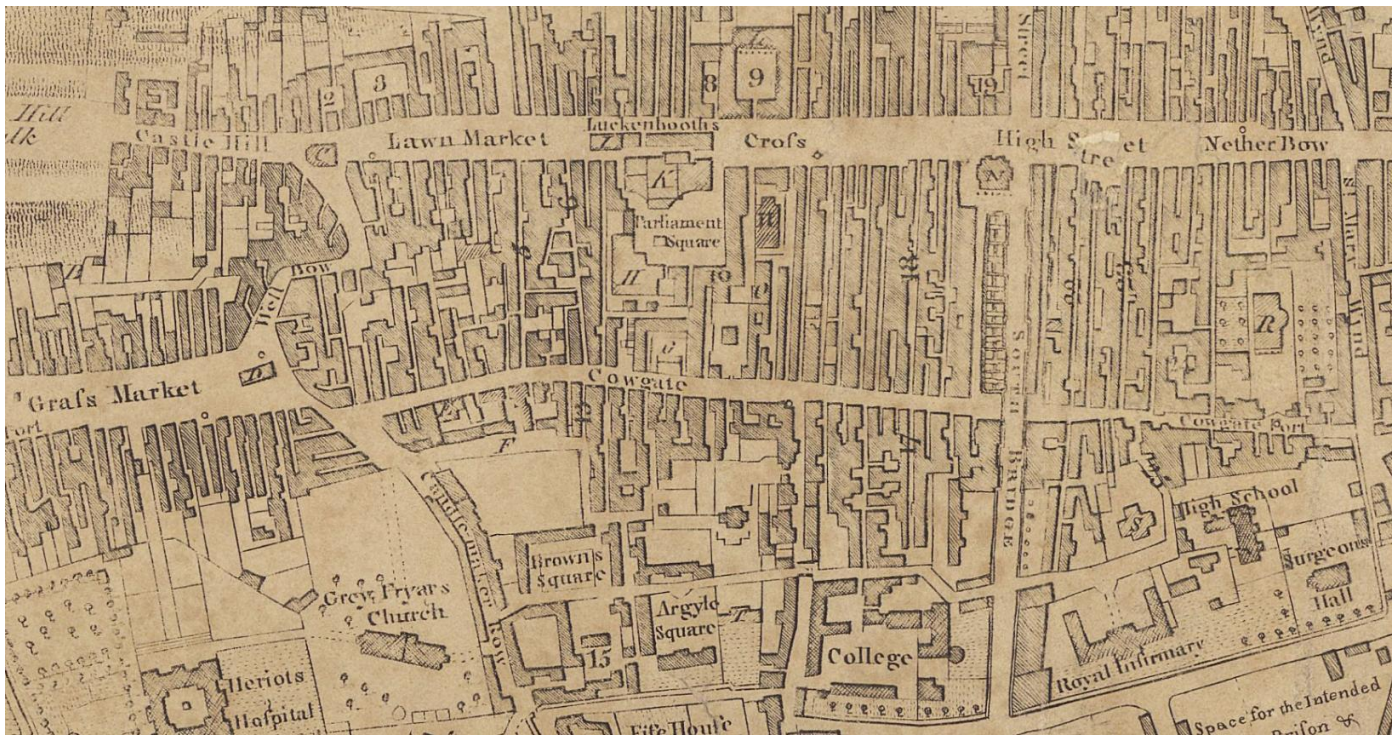
The letters have been presented in a standardised format. Headers provide the name of the sender, and a number by which each letter can be identified. The salutations and valedictions have been reproduced as they appear in the originals, but the dates when the letters were sent have been standardised and placed immediately after the headers.

The original spelling has been retained. Its standard varies across the letters, reflecting not only the aptitude of the writer, but also an inconsistent approach typical of the period. An example of the latter is the use of both 'received' and 'receaved' in Letter 3. The letters also contain a number of now archaic forms common to the period, as well as some features that would have been considered old fashioned even at the time. Examples of both include using *ei* where the digraph *ie* would now be standard (e.g. 'freinds' and 'greif'); ending words with a double rather than a single consonant (e.g. 'att', and 'thankfull'); adding an extra consonant to some words (e.g. 'affraid'), and omitting them in others (e.g. 'apear'); inserting a silent letter *e* at the end of some words (e.g. 'tooke'), and omitting it at the end of others (e.g. 'conclud'); using in- at the beginning of words that nowadays would begin *en-* (e.g. inclosed); and using the letter *t* to represent the 'sh' sound (e.g. 'conclution', and 'pation').

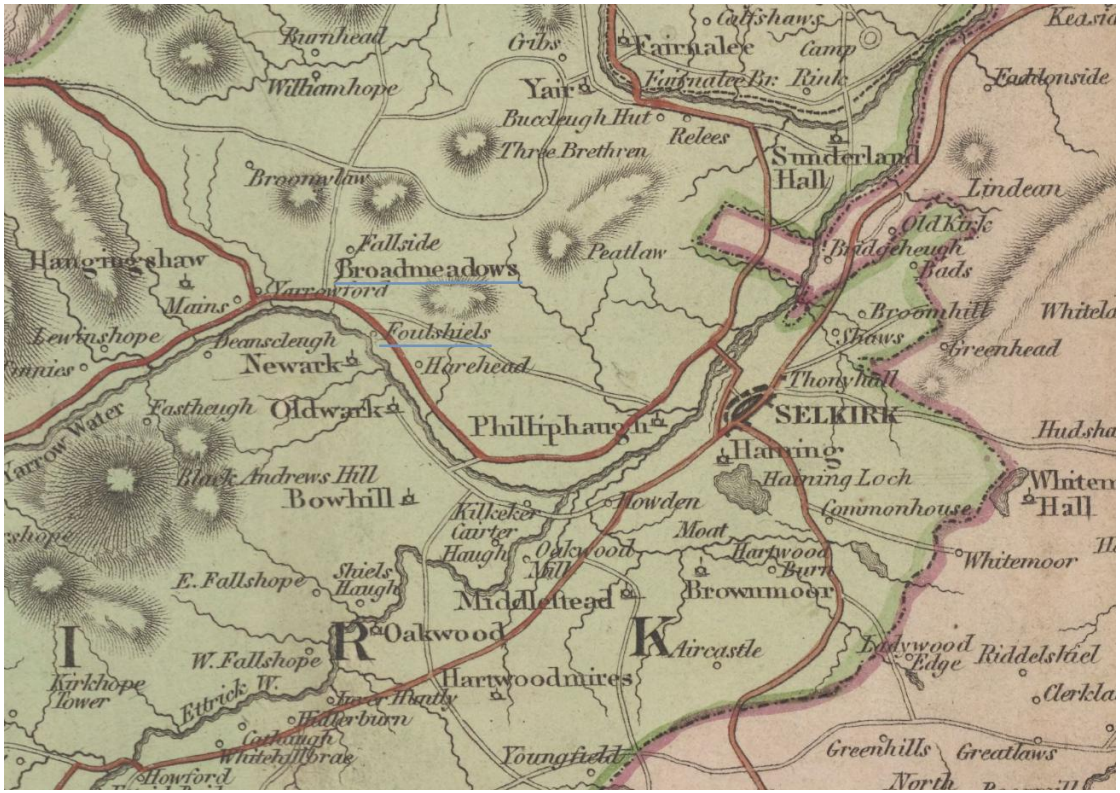
To prevent the text from becoming congested with editorial comments, words that have been misspelled but are readily recognisable have not been annotated. Familiar archaisms have similarly gone unmarked. Missing letters have been inserted in [ ] only when the meaning of the word would otherwise be unclear. Sic has been used sparingly, mainly to indicate irregular or archaic spellings that might otherwise be mistaken for transcribal or typographical errors. For misspelled words that are not immediately obvious, or that might be confused with another word, the correct form is provided in [*i.e.*].

The correspondents sometimes referred to common friends by their initials. To retain the mood of familiarity evident in the letters, these initials have not been expanded other than in a footnote on their first appearance in the text. Abbreviations general to correspondence of the period, such as the omission of *-ugh* in 'though' and of the letter *e* in the suffix *-ed*, have been silently expanded. When one of the correspondents used a profane or vulgar word, he followed the common practice of writing only part of the word (e.g. 'D___l'). Here, the missing letters are added in [ ] when the identity of the word is in little doubt. Otherwise, a suggestion is provided in an endnote.

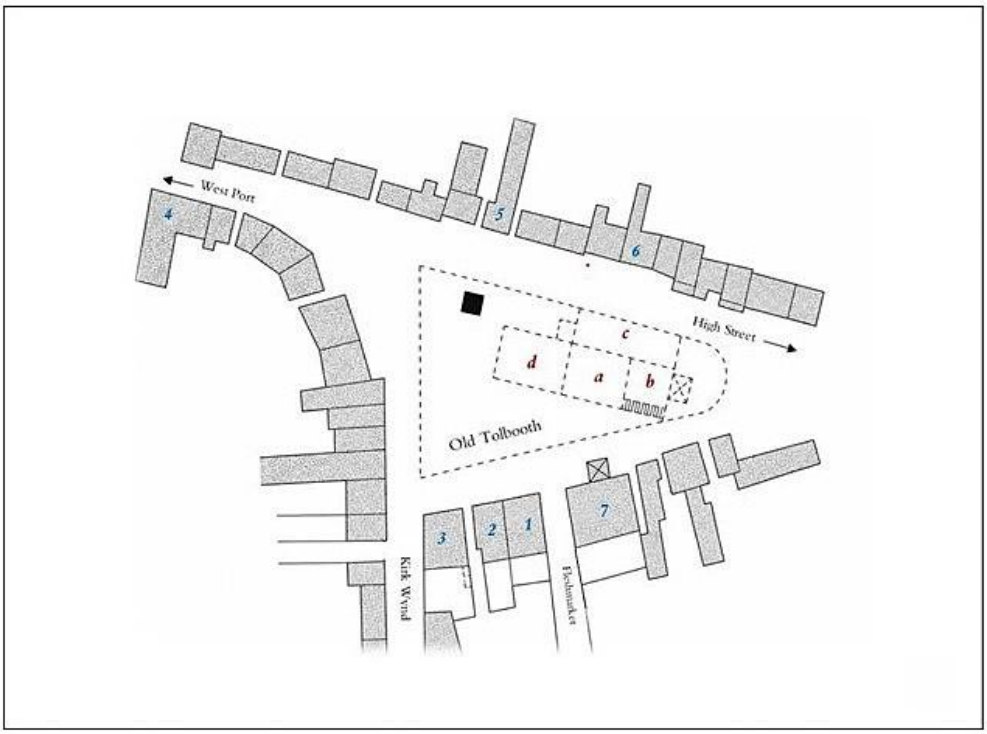
The original punctuation has been retained. It should be noted that the correspondents sometimes omitted the apostrophe from possessive nouns and from contractions such as 'don't' and 'can't'.



Map 1. A detail from Thomas Kitchin's *Map of Edinburgh* (1773).
Writer's Court, where the four Selkirk students lodged, is marked '8'. The Royal Exchange, where William Laidlaw's brother worked, is marked '9'. Other buildings in the immediate vicinity include Parliament House ('H'); the Tolbooth ('I'); and St Giles' ('K'). The University ('College') and Royal Infirmary are shown not far to the south.
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



Map 2. A detail from John Ainslie's *The Environs of Edinburgh* (1812).
Broadmeadows and Foulshiels, the farms tenanted by the Laidlaws and Parks, respectively, have been underlined in blue.
Middlestead, the location of the ball mentioned in Letter 2, is shown to the south west of Selkirk.
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



KEY

1. Alexander Park's house
2. John Henderson's house
3. The French Coffee House (1810-1814)
4. James Dun's Inn
5. John Laing's house
6. Ebenezer Clarkson's house
7. The Town house (built 1804)

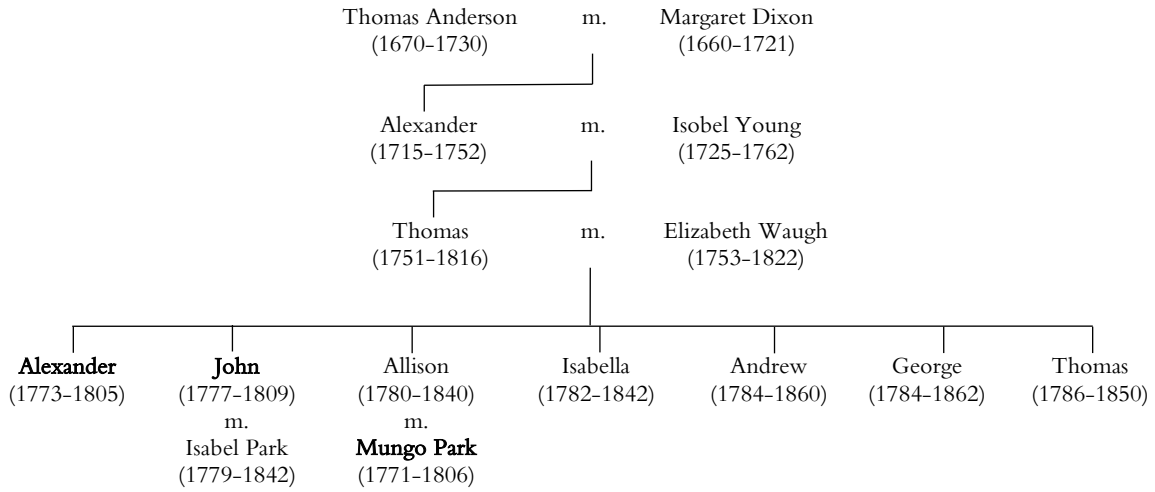
The Old Tolbooth (demolished 1803-1804)

a. Courtroom
b. Prison
c. Fleshmarket
d. Ebenezer Clarkson's old house

■ Public Well ⊠ Spire

Map 3. A plan of Market Place, Selkirk, in the early nineteenth century.
(Courtesy of Sally Gerrard)

FAMILY TREES



Note: The names of the correspondents have been given in bold here and in the tables below.

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

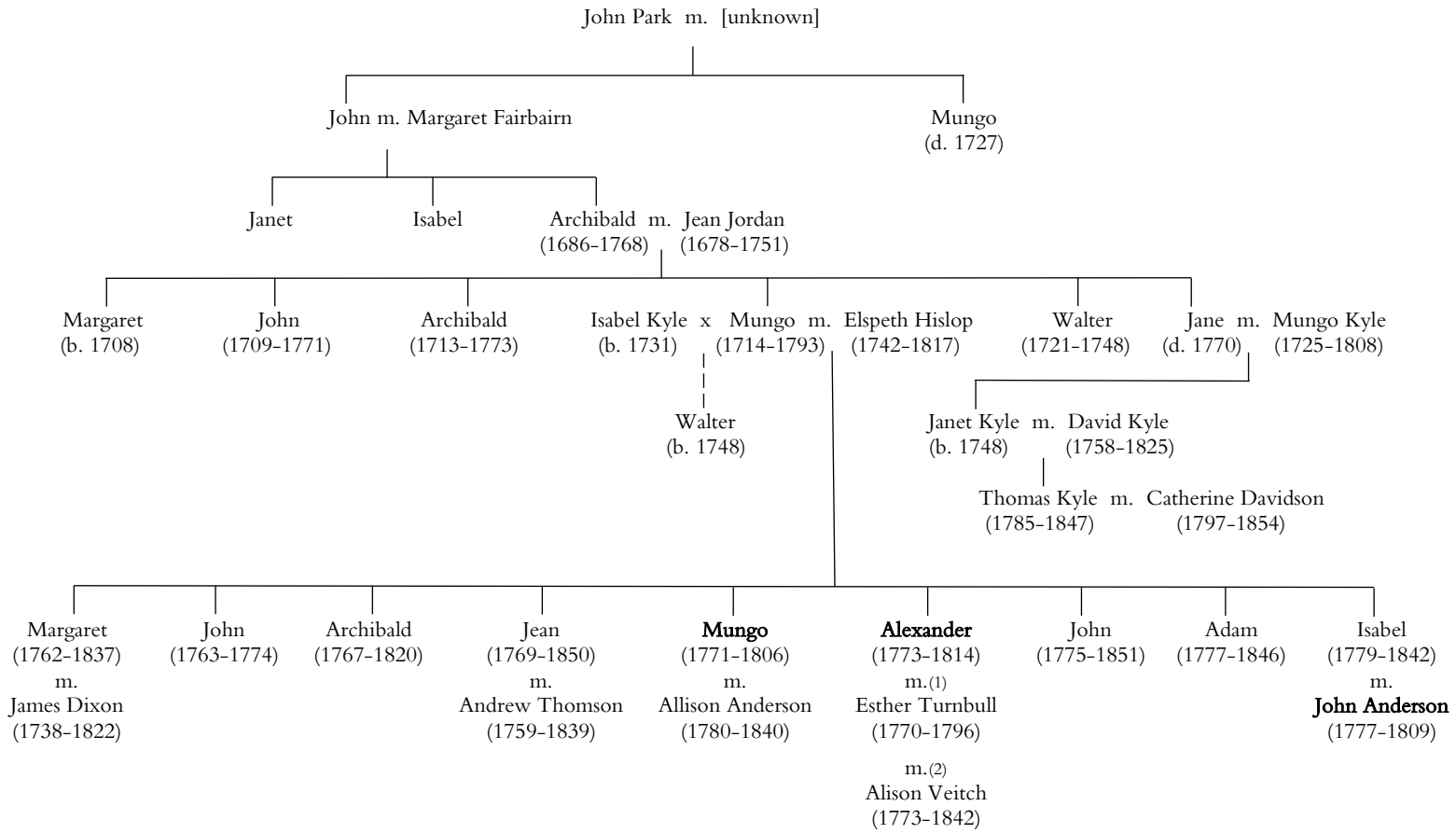


Table 2. The Park family tree. (Compiled by Sally Gerrard)

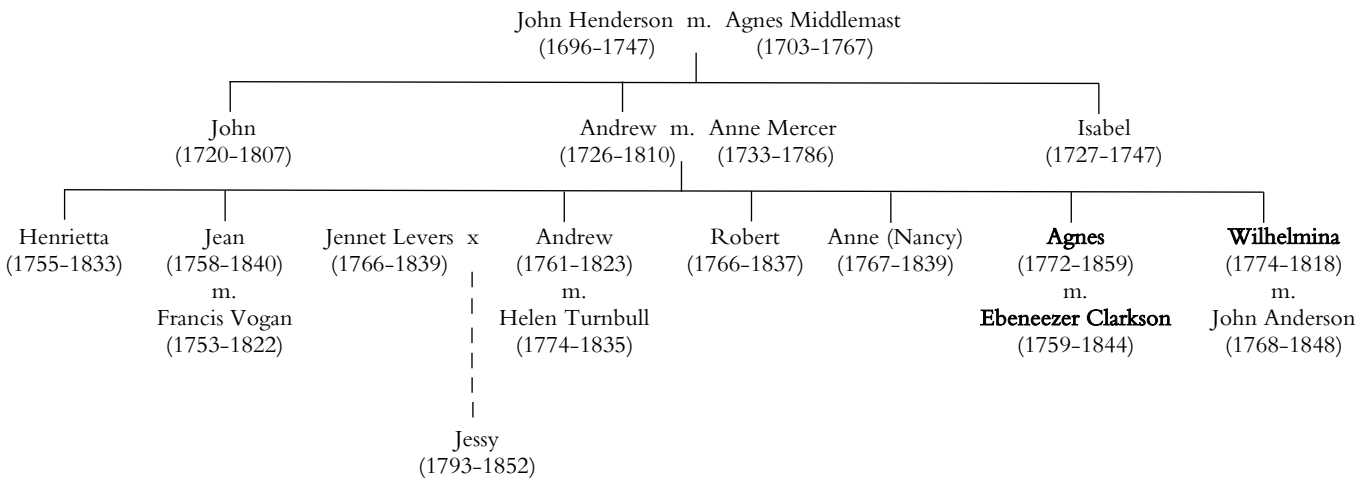


Table 3. The Henderson family tree. (Compiled by Sally Gerrard)

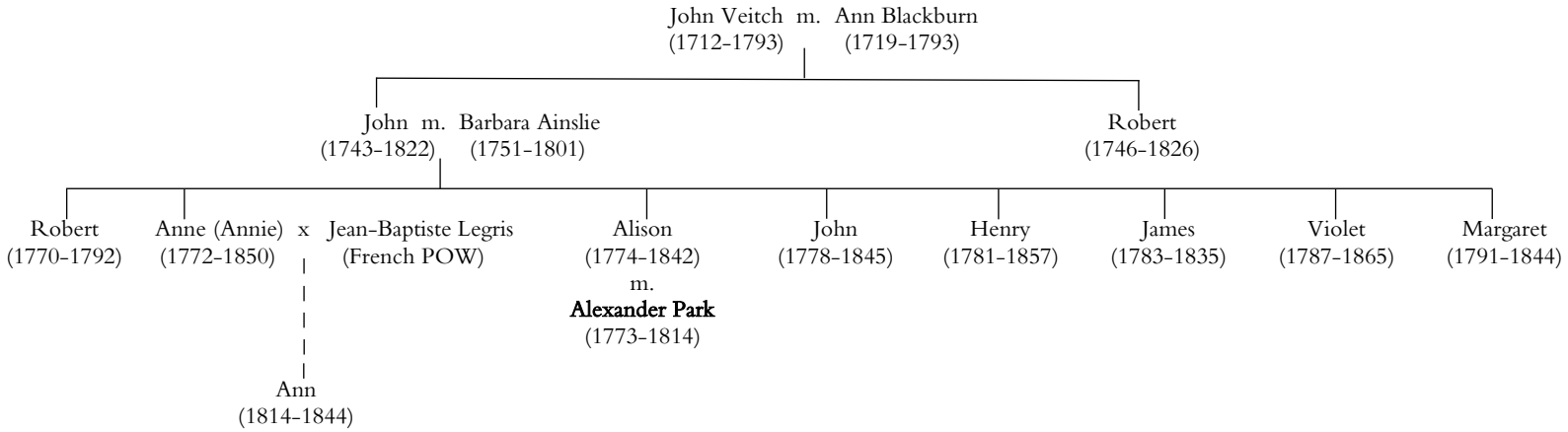


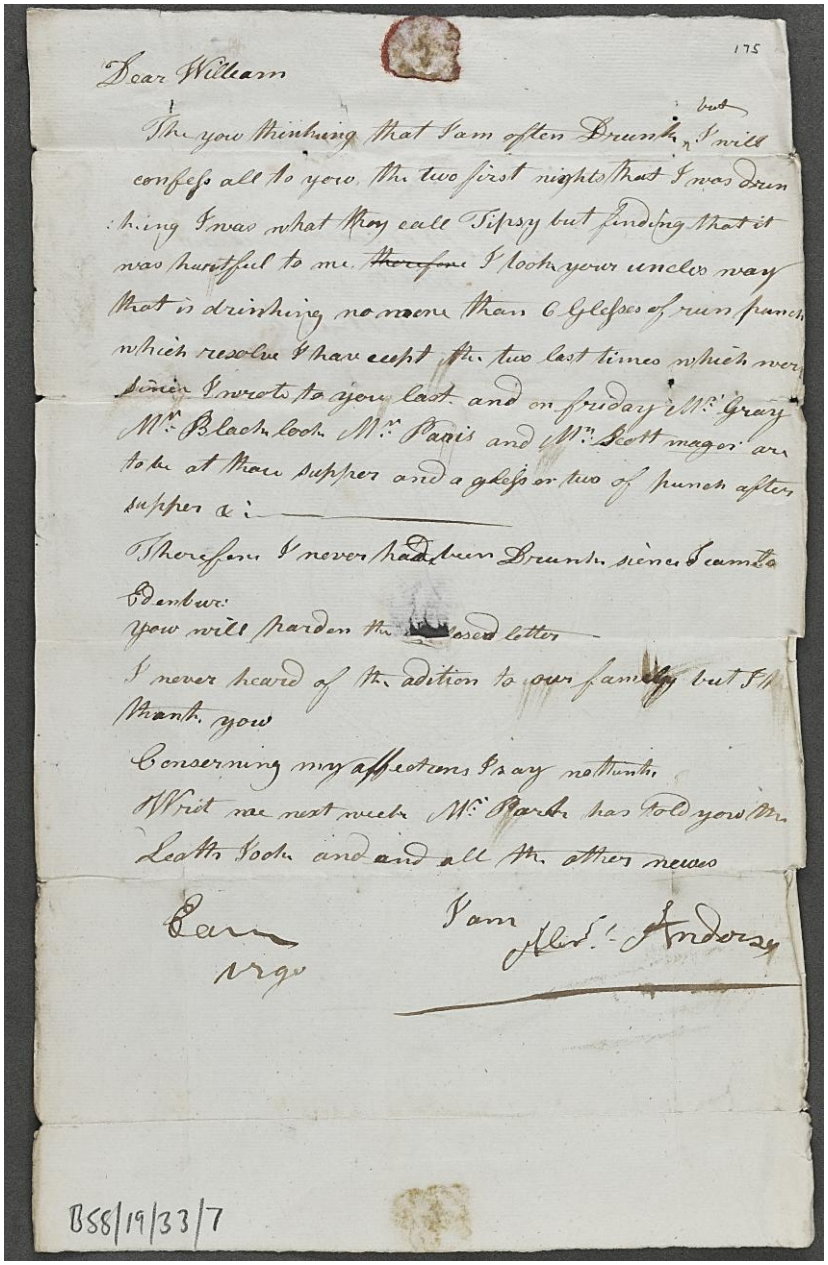
Table 4. The Veitch family tree. (Compiled by Sally Gerrard)

FACSIMILES

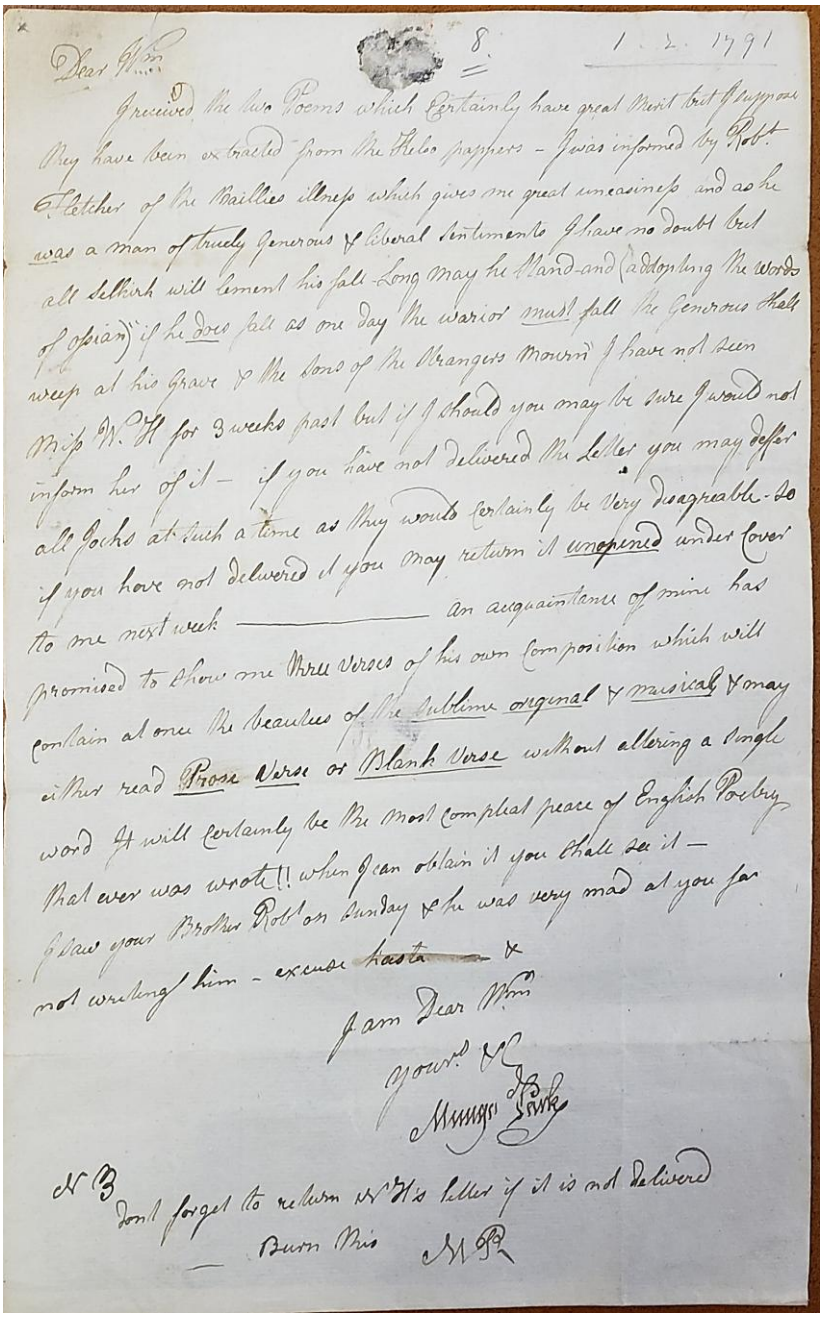
The following selection provides an example of the handwriting of each of William Laidlaw's nine correspondents. The reproduced pages from the letters also show the different approaches that were taken at the time to presenting the date when the letter was written. The selection opens with an example of a cover sheet from the collection.



Facsimile 1. The cover sheet of Mungo Park's letter of 8 June 1791. A name, occupation and town was all the address that was required for it to reach its recipient. William Laidlaw would have added the note on the right for his own reference. The pencil annotation at the top of the page is a later archival reference. (Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Facsimile 2. Alexander Anderson's letter of 28 December 1790.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Dear Wm

8. 1 Feb. 1791

I received the two Poems which certainly have great merit but I suppose they have been extracted from the Edin. papers – I was informed by Robt. Fletcher of the Baillies illness which gives me great uneasiness and as he was a man of truely generous & liberal sentiments I have no doubt but all Selkirk will lament his fall – Long may he stand and (adopting the words of Ossian) "if he does fall as one day the warrior must fall the Generous shall weep at his Grave & the sons of the Strangers mourn" I have not been with Miss W. H. for 3 weeks past but if I should you may be sure I would not inform her of it – if you have not delivered the Letter you may defer it for all Jocks at such a time as they would certainly be very disagreable – do if you have not delivered it you may return it unopened under Cover to me next week ——— an acquaintance of mine has promised to shew me three verses of his own composition which will contain at once the beauties of the Sublime original & musical & may either read Prose Verse or Blank Verse without altering a single word It will certainly be the most compleat piece of English Poetry that ever was wrote!! when I can obtain it you shall see it – I saw your Brother Rob on Sunday & he was very mad at you for not writing him – excuse haste &

I am Dear Wm

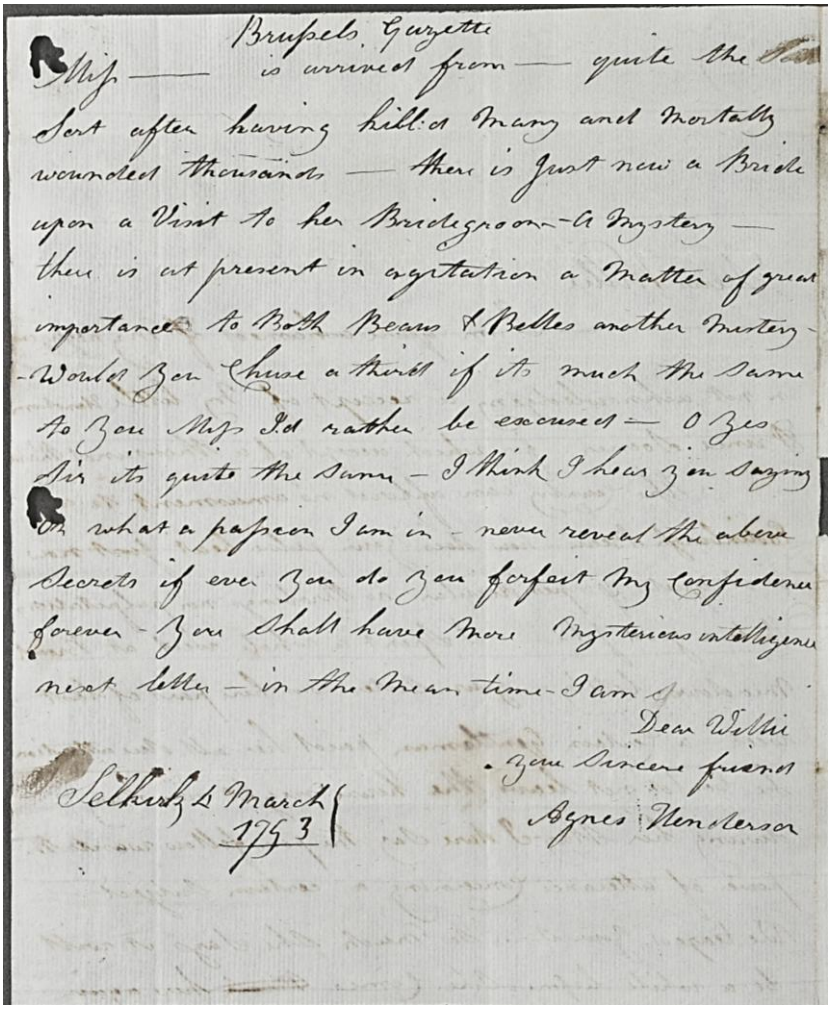
yours &c

Mungo Park

N B Don't forget to return me his letter if it is not Delivered

Burns Wm M P

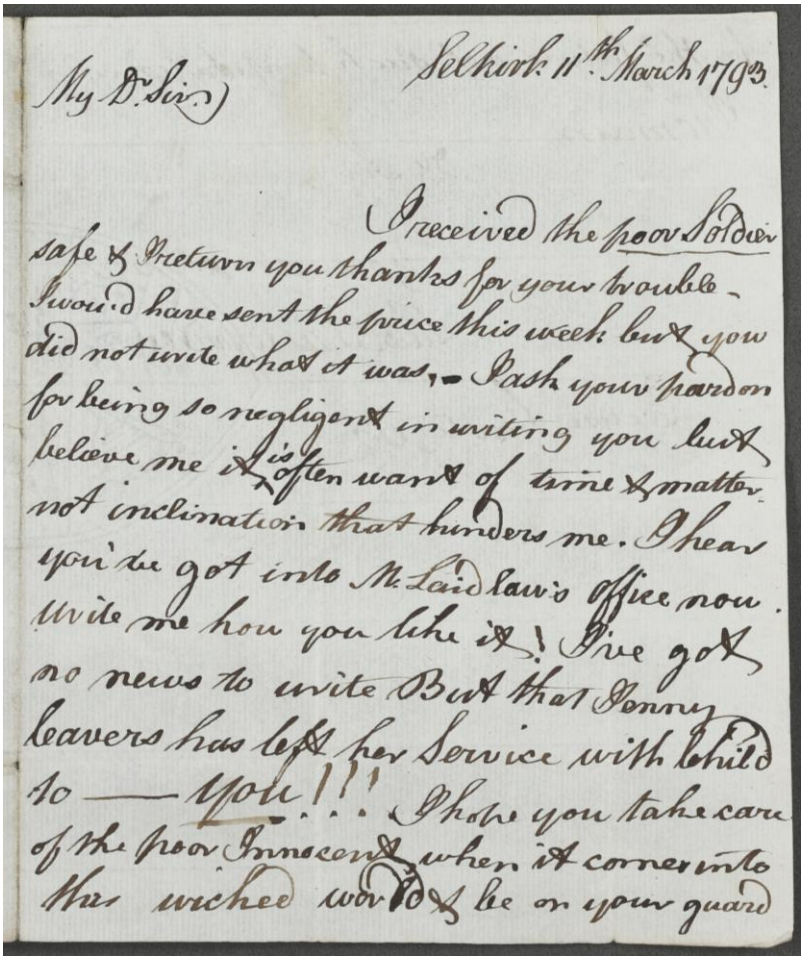
Facsimile 3. Mungo Park's letter of 1 February 1791.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Brussels Gazette
Miss —— is arrived from —— quite the
Sort after having killed many and mortally
wounded thousands —— there is just now a Bride
upon a Visit to her Bridegroom — A Mystery ——
there is at present in agitation a Matter of great
importance to both Beaus & Belles another Mystery —
Would you Chuse a Ticket if it is much the same
to you Miss I'd rather be excused — O Yes
Sir its quite the same — I think I hear you saying
Oh what a papoon I am in — never reveal the above
Secrets if ever you do you forfeit my confidence
forever — You shall have more Mysterious intelligence
next letter — in the mean time I am
Dear Willie
Your Sincere friend
Agnes Henderson

Selkirk 4 March
1793

Facsimile 4. The second page of Agnes Henderson's letter of 4 March 1793.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

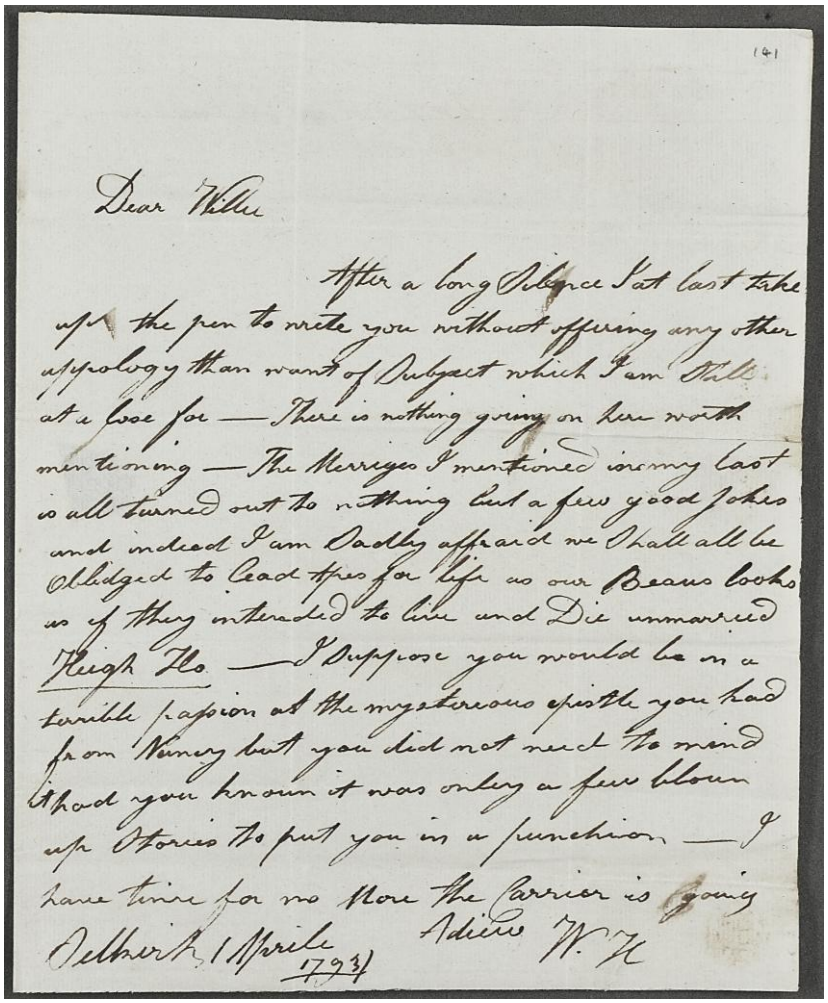


My D. Sir,

Selkirk 11th March 1793.

I received the poor Soldier safe & return you thanks for your trouble. I would have sent the price this week but you did not write what it was. — Ask your pardon for being so negligent in writing you but believe me it is often want of time & matter not inclination that hinders me. I hear you're got into Mr. Laidlaw's office now. Write me how you like it! I've got no news to write But that Jenny Leavers has left her Service with Child to — You!!! I hope you take care of the poor Innocent when it comes into this wicked world & be on your guard

Facsimile 5. The first page of Alexander Somerville's letter of 11 March 1793. (Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

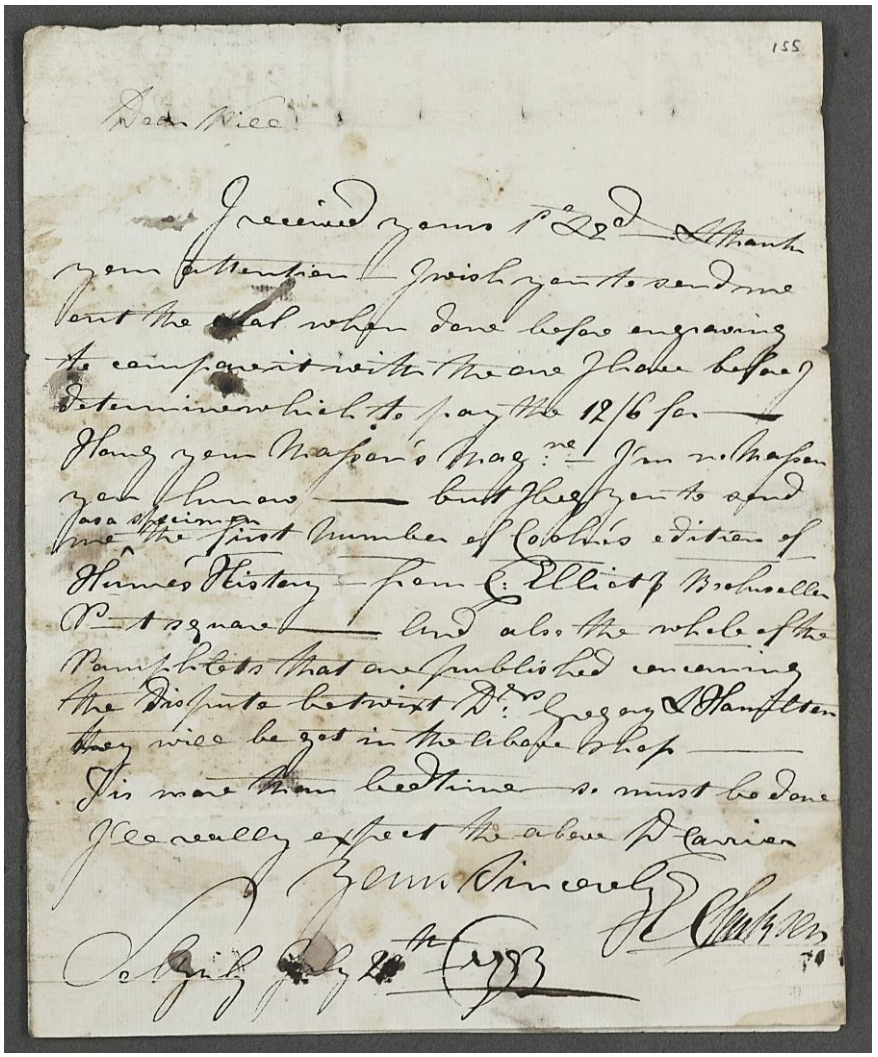


Dear Willie

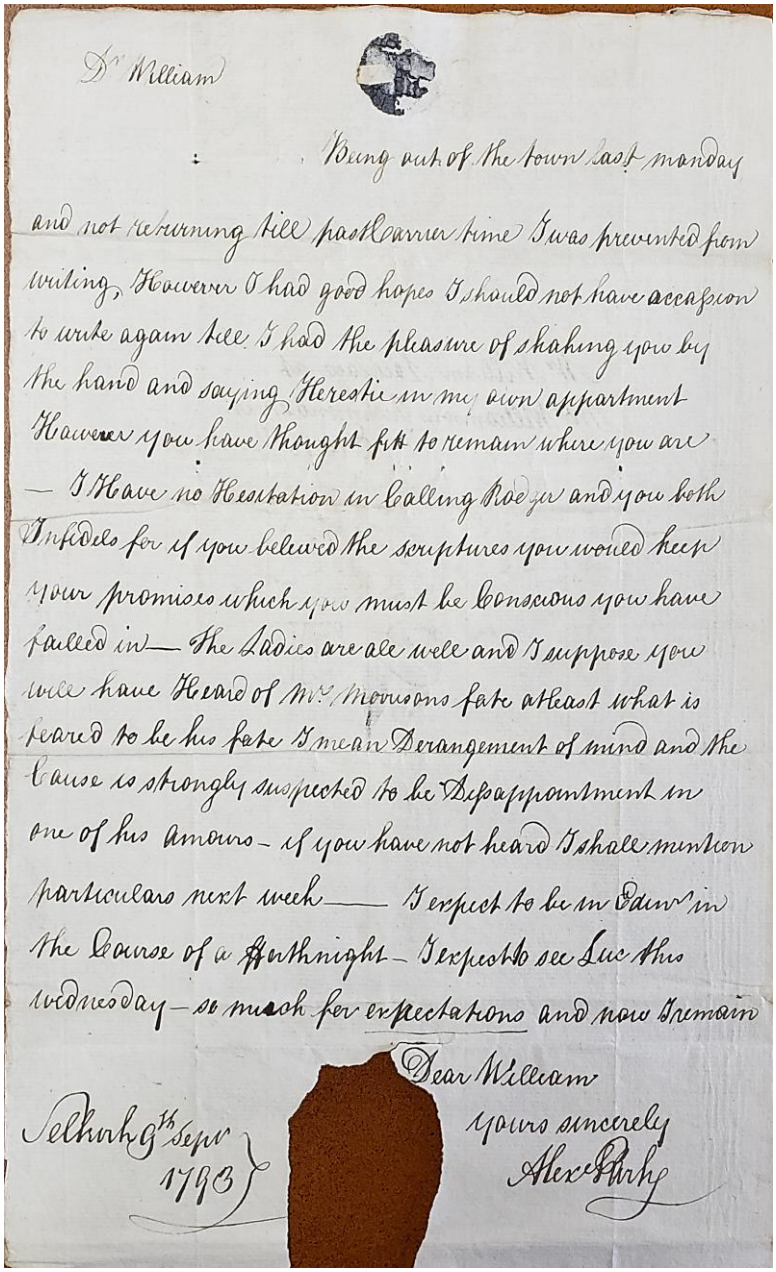
After a long Silence I at last take up the pen to write you without offering any other apology than want of Subject which I am quite at a loss for — There is nothing going on here worth mentioning — The Marriages I mentioned in my last is all turned out to nothing but a few good Jokes and indeed I am Sadly afraid we shall all be obliged to Lead Apes for life as our Beaus looks as if they intended to live and Die unmarried Heigh Ho — I Suppose you would be in a terrible passion at the mysterious epistle you had from Nancy but you did not need to mind it had you known it was only a few blown up Stories to put you in a punction — I have time for no More the Carrier is going Adieu W. H

Dalkeith 1 April 1793

Facsimile 6. Wilhelmina Henderson's letter of 1 April 1793.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Facsimile 7. Ebenezer Clarkson's letter of 20 July 1793.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



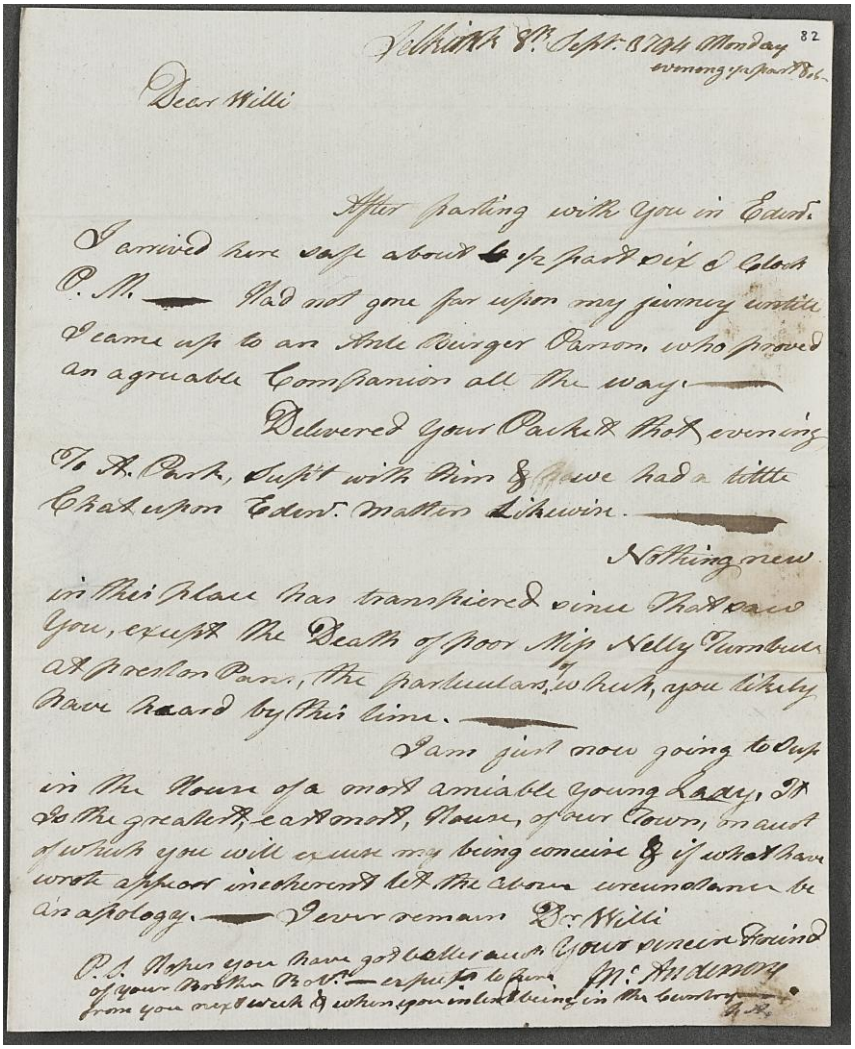
Dr William

Being out of the town last monday and not returning till post carrier time I was prevented from writing, However I had good hopes I should not have occasion to write again till I had the pleasure of shaking you by the hand and saying Here sir in my own appartment However you have thought fit to remain where you are — I Have no Hesitation in calling You sir and you both Infidels for if you believed the scriptures you would keep your promises which you must be conscious you have failed in — The Ladies are all well and I suppose you will have Heard of Mr Morisons fate atleast what is feared to be his fate I mean Derangement of mind and the Cause is strongly suspected to be Disappointment in one of his Amours — if you have not heard I shall mention particulars next week — I expect to be in Dalw in the Course of a Fortnight — I expect to see Luc this wednesday — so much for expectations and now I remain

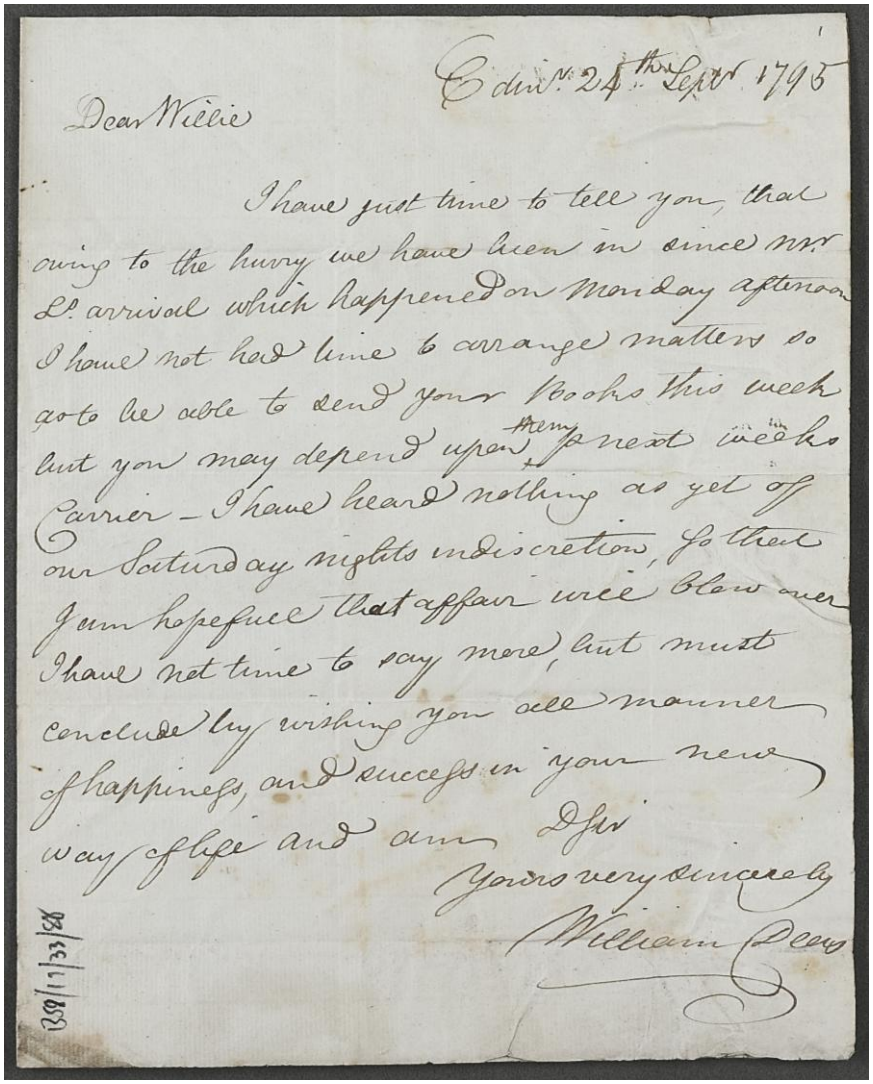
Dear William
yours sincerely
Alex Park

Selkirk 9th Sept
1793

Facsimile 8. Alexander Park's letter of 9 September 1793.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Facsimile 9. John Anderson's letter of 8 September 1794.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)



Edin.r 24.th Sept.r 1795

Dear Willie

I have just time to tell you, that owing to the hurry we have been in since Mr L.d arrival which happened on Monday afternoon I have not had time to arrange matters so as to be able to send your books this week but you may depend upon them the next week by Carrier – I have heard nothing as yet of our Saturday nights indiscretion, so that I am hopefull that affair is ere blow over I have not time to say more, but must conclude by wishing you all manner of happiness, and success in your new way of life and am Dear Willie

Yours very sincerely

William Deas

GD1/133/8

Facsimile 10. William Deas' letter of 24 September 1795.
(Courtesy of the National Records of Scotland)

INTRODUCTION

'Mungo's Tail, how it Sownds': Edinburgh, 1790–1792

In the first days of November 1790, Mungo Park left Selkirk for Edinburgh to attend a new year of study at the University Medical School. Mungo's arrival that winter would mark something of a change, as he was returning to Edinburgh not alone, but with his younger brother Alexander and Alexander Anderson, the eldest son of Mungo's former master, Selkirk surgeon Thomas Anderson. The two Alexanders, as they were known within their circle of friends, were both seventeen years old and attending university for the first time. The transition from rural Selkirkshire to Edinburgh should have been familiar enough to Mungo, yet he describes it in his first surviving letter to William Laidlaw as overwhelmed by 'hubbub and confusion' (Letter 2) as though finding himself in the city had momentarily exceeded his capacity to maintain any sense of order.

In this letter, written shortly after his arrival, Mungo offers no account of Edinburgh itself, other than to state, with a characteristic play on words – 'Suffice it at present that we are here! with!'. Instead, it is almost entirely concerned with a recent social occasion at Middlestead, near Selkirk, where the three young men had attended a ball on 5 November in company with Park siblings Archibald and Jean, William's elder brother Walter, the Turnbulls from Hassendean Bank near Minto, and others from their social circle. Mungo promises explanation, adopts a mock-poetical tone, and sets out his letter to William in 'Verses'; then, he narrates not the so much the ball but its aftermath: who rode together the following day; who refused a particular seat by the fire; what Mungo overheard 'in a sort of semi listen'. Mungo's narrative is extended into a second letter, written the following week, recounting events that occurred before the ball: his fishing excursion with brothers Archibald and Alexander, the sudden disappearance of Alexander with Esther Turnbull, and the later discovery that they had been sitting together 'up the Hill among the fairns' (Letter 4) for several hours. Mungo insists that he will 'say nothing', even as he ensures that implicitly, everything has been said.

The Middlestead ball itself belonged wholly to this world of Selkirk society. Hosted by the laird of Middlestead (and sheriff of Selkirkshire) Andrew Plummer, it was a grand social occasion attended by the local gentry and 'middling' folk. The presence of the Parks and Laidlaws at this event, in the company of other prominent Selkirk families such as the Andersons, Hendersons and Veitches, demonstrates their standing in local society. The ball also had connections with the world to which Mungo was returning as a student.

The laird's father, Dr Andrew Plummer, had been one of the founders of the Medical School in Edinburgh and knew both William Cullen and Joseph Black, two renowned professors there. There is no discussion of university life in Mungo's first two letters and no suggestion that the ball was experienced as anything other than a local event. Nevertheless, the social world Mungo carried with him to Edinburgh was already threaded into the intellectual institutions that were expected to shape his future.

These initial letters illustrate how correspondence between Mungo and William functioned as an extension of their friendship and social life, creating by proxy shared experiences and sustaining judgement and intimacy across distance. William's part in the correspondence is absent – nonetheless, he is not a passive recipient: he is asked to observe, to listen, and to report back. The discussion of the Middlestead ball is a direct continuation of in-person conversations between William and Mungo prior to Mungo's move to Edinburgh; pursued here in writing not because he was now detached from Selkirk society, but because he remained entangled in it.

Also attending the Middlestead ball were Nancy Henderson and Annie Veitch, two young women with whom the nineteen-year-old Mungo had very different relationships. He had romantic hopes for Nancy, probably as a potential spouse; and a somewhat combative relationship with Annie Veitch, who from his letters and those of his brother Alexander emerges as an independent, sharp-witted young woman not afraid to speak her mind. Mungo had clearly sparred with Annie during the Middlestead ball, which he frames in a double entendre, intentionally conveying the awkwardness of the situation whilst emphasising the value of his own narrative against hers:

> I am extremely happy to hear that Miss V's venom is spitting and I think I have paid her home in her own coin for the seat of pain on the satee [*i.e.* settee] that night – o rare! Mungo's Tail how it sownds! (Letter 4)

In the aftermath of the Middlestead ball and, indeed, throughout the letters written to William whilst at university, Mungo was concerned for his reputation in Selkirk society; a concern particularly focussed through the opinions of these two young women: 'write me what the V..s are saying of my behaviour at the Ball, but in particular what N. H. is thinking of it' (Letter 2).

The Middlestead ball and its aftermath also frames the temporal span of William's surviving letters from his friends, beginning here with the introduction by Mungo to the budding relationship between Alexander Park and Esther Turnbull and ending with their marriage in 1795.

The 'hubbub and confusion' Mungo wrote of on arriving in Edinburgh was not least due to living in Writer's Court, at the legal and ceremonial heart of the Old Town, where he shared upper-floor lodgings fronting the High Street



Figure 1. An illustration of Writer's Court. The Star and Garter tavern is on the left. The archway to the right led to the Royal Exchange. (From the *Evening News*, 21 December 1912).

with his brother Alexander, Alexander Anderson and their friend Andrew Scott, another native of Selkirk. The Court itself was densely occupied by a range of tenants: their neighbours included an artist, a cloth merchant, a dancing teacher, a doctor, a milliner, and an auctioneer. It was also home to Mrs Barker's School for Young Ladies, a boarding school that offered instruction in 'all kinds' of needlework, writing and arithmetic, French and music – all for £30 per annum, a sum equivalent to a skilled tradesman's yearly income. Mrs Barker's school catered to the daughters of Edinburgh's professional and mercantile families and represented a literate, aspirational urban culture. Writer's Court also housed the Signet Office, the Sun Fire Insurance Office, and St Andrew's Masonic Lodge. Fronting the High Street at the entrance to the court was the Star and Garter tavern, the façade of which was adorned with fluted pilasters and thistle-moulded finials.[1] Known colloquially as 'Hunter's Tavern' in the 1790s, it was frequented by writers, magistrates and advocates and frequently hosted meetings and dinners for diverse societies and clubs including The British Wool Society, The Queen's Household and The Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

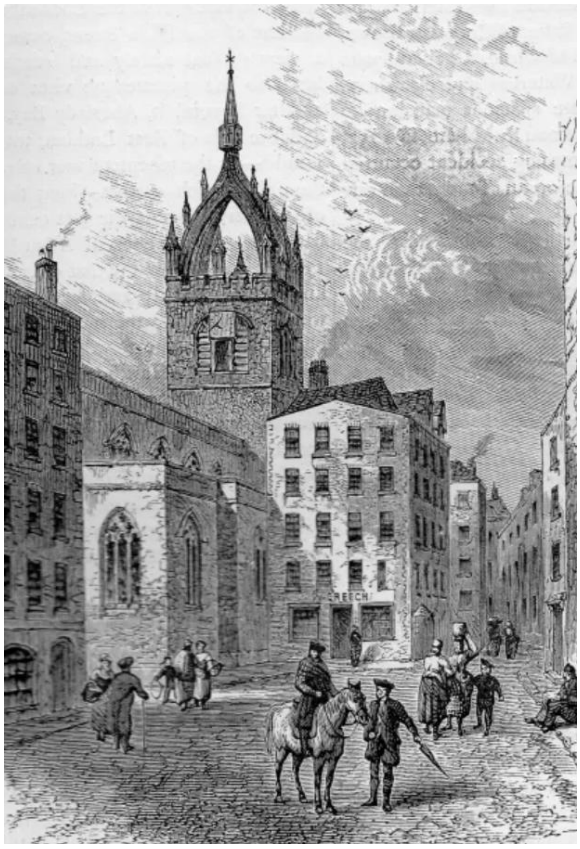


Figure 2. An illustration showing the western end of the High Street, Edinburgh. The entrance to Writer's Court was to the immediate right. Note how the street was greatly narrowed by the Luckenbooths. (From William Creech's *Fugitive Pieces*, 1815)

A pend leading from the court opened directly through an archway on to the High Street opposite William Creech's bookshop at the east end of the Luckenbooths. The kirk of St Giles and Parliament House were only a few steps away. So, too, was the Tolbooth. A symbol of municipal authority, it housed both the council chamber and the burgh's prison. It was also the scene of executions. The High Street narrowed as it passed the Luckenbooths and the Tolbooth, creating a bustling thoroughfare through which daily life was funnelled. The sound of street traders crying their wares and the bells of St Giles' chiming the quarter hours would have added to the general noise of the crowd.

The apartment at Writer's Court was also at the heart of what might be termed the lived infrastructure of the Edinburgh Enlightenment: booksellers, printers, debating societies, various clubs, and the University were all within a few minutes' walk. While the proximity of the University would have been appreciated by all four of the Selkirk students, Mungo in particular would engage with the wider intellectual life of the city.

The apartment in Writer's Court contained several rooms, including a dining room, bedrooms and a kitchen. The frontage block, which housed it, was a substantial stone 'land', rising four principal storeys with garrets above. Commercial premises occupied the ground level; above them rose residential floors accessed by a scale stair from within the court. Contemporary advertisements demonstrate that fourth-storey lodgings in Writer's Court typically comprised four or five 'fire-rooms'[2] with a separate kitchen and closets; and perhaps a pantry, garrets and cellar rights. Such apartments were described in advertisements as 'well finished' and 'well lighted' indicating self-contained dwellings of respectable standing.

The likely internal arrangement would have been typical of High Street tenements. Principal rooms faced the street in regular vertical bays; rear rooms and the kitchen lay towards the court or interior; ancillary spaces were distributed along a narrow passage. The dining room would almost certainly have occupied one of the rooms facing the High Street. From the upper-floor apartment, the High Street below would have appeared compressed and theatrical, animated by constant movement. Elevation provided both light and air above the congestion.

Upper-floor apartments in the Old Town carried no inherent stigma; indeed, they were often valued for their outlook and relative quiet above street level. Rental evidence confirms this. In secondary districts such as the Pleasance, or in the newly built Rose Street of the New Town, three-room flats with a kitchen typically rented at £8–£9 per annum, while single garret rooms might let for little more than £1 or £2 yearly. By contrast, a fourth-storey High Street dwelling above shops in 1795 commanded £17 per annum, with garret and cellar attached. A Writer's Court frontage flat of four or five 'fire-rooms' would therefore have stood towards the upper end of the urban rental scale. The Park brothers and Alexander Anderson were the sons of prosperous, respectable fathers, and their residence in Writer's Court reflected both their social background and the professional futures anticipated for them.

The apartment in Writer's Court was more than a lodging for the Selkirk friends: it was the axis around which their city life turned. Repeatedly in the letters 'our room' recurs as a place of writing, reflection, supper and reception. From there Mungo watched the Masons' procession flare along the High Street; the Selkirk visitors 'landed' there to receive their New Year's hansels; and it was there that tea was drunk, letters composed, trunks packed and newspapers shared. It was a place of late-night punch, rent anxieties, mock assaults and elaborate plans for escorting the Misses Henderson and Veitch to the circus. In many respects it was a home from home, an extension of Selkirk life occupied by Mungo and Alexander Park, Alexander Anderson and Andrew Scott.

The Selkirk connections extended beyond the apartment itself. There were regular visits to 'Archibald's', an inn on Candlemaker Row belonging to William's paternal aunt, Isabell Laidlaw, and her husband Thomas Archibald.

Robert Laidlaw, William's youngest brother, who was apprenticed to the ironmonger John Muir and employed in his shop at the Royal Exchange, was also a frequent visitor.

Although the journey from the Royal Exchange to Writer's Court was little more than a stone's throw, it could nevertheless be eventful. On the evening of Tuesday 4 January 1791 Mungo wrote to William:

> […] your brother Robert was here just now and as he came down the street he saw a large quantity of [bloo]d upon the pavement which was the melancholy remains of a slatter who had just fallen from the house and was killed on the spot (Letter 16)

Approaching along the High Street for supper with his friends, Robert had encountered the aftermath of the accident and immediately brought the news upstairs. '[…] upon Robert relating the story to us round the board,' Mungo continued, 'Mr Lang being in his lugs took a singing, his face turned pale, he shut his eyes […]'. Two days later, the *Caledonian Mercury* reported that journeyman slater James Chalmers had been blown from a house in Writer's Court during high winds, leaving behind at home a wife and three children.

Only William was missing from the group of male Selkirk friends in Edinburgh, and he was frequently missed. 'It is often our wish and even saying that if William Laidlaw was amongst us,' Alexander Anderson wrote, adding, 'we often wonder what William Laidlaw will be about' (Letter 23). Mungo expressed a similar sentiment whilst reflecting on the many letters exchanged between Edinburgh and Selkirk, musing that, 'a person may sit at his ingle edge at Edinburgh and […] converse with his freind at Selkirk as is weekly verified in the many letters which are sent to and from the above mentioned citties […] where you will be just now […] sitting at the […] fire side,' affectionately adding postscript, 'I think I have not mist [*i.e.* missed] you', just to ensure that William knew he had (Letter 10). William is imaginatively inserted into the Edinburgh room, just as Mungo imagines himself present at the Selkirk fireside. The correspondence sustains a double geography: Writer's Court and Selkirk are continually superimposed.

The contrast between Alexander Anderson's and Mungo Park's letters to William reflects a difference in temperament. Anderson's correspondence is intimate and frequently intoxicated in tone and structure; he delights in mock-legal citations, theatrical confession, and social exuberance. Mungo's letters are often consciously constructed, narrative in tone and acutely observational, even though he frequently claims to have written spontaneously – a rhetorical device intended to demonstrate verbal fluency and quickness of wit. He constructs scenes with controlled narrative clarity, often positioning himself slightly outside the action rather than within it.

Mungo's account of the St Andrew's Day Masons' procession on 30 November 1790 provides a vivid example of this narrative composure:

> I am just now returned from viewing the grand procession of Measons but such another procession! As many torches as (if laid end to end) would reach to Philhophaugh; at once in a blaze – as many Measons as could build a second Edinburgh or demolish the old one, all in a row – as many spectators as, as – L[ord] knows how many – as many broken heads as could make one claw. (Letter 6)

The letter is grounded in immediacy yet animated by exaggeration. Mungo's repetition of 'as many' creates both rhythm and scale; the scene expands until it threatens to overflow before contracting again into comic detail. The reader sees the blaze of flambeaux, senses the density of the crowd and hears the implied tumult. Even in apparent spontaneity, Mungo is arranging his material.

Eighteenth-century correspondence frequently operated within a semi-public sphere. Letters were commonly read aloud, circulated amongst family and friends, and often adopted rhetorical and narrative strategies closer to print culture than private confidence. William's correspondents knew that their letters would likely be shared in Selkirk unless they contained explicit instructions to the contrary. In one letter, Mungo imagines William 'telling over the letters' to friends at home. His correspondence is therefore often consciously performative, written with a wider audience in mind.

The Masons' procession was a civic spectacle. As the *Caledonian Mercury* reported three days later, more than eight hundred masons participated, including members of Edinburgh lodges and deputations from across Scotland. Having assembled in Parliament House to elect office-bearers for the coming year, they processed by torchlight along the High Street, accompanied by the City Guard and a detachment of the 42nd Regiment. By 1790, Scottish Freemasonry had long evolved beyond its origins in stonemasons' guilds and now drew heavily from the professional and mercantile classes for its membership – yet the language and imagery of the builders' craft remained. Mungo's claim that there were 'as many Measons as could Build a second Edinburgh or demolish the old one' relies upon precisely this ambiguity, playfully conflating the two. Mungo did not merely witness the procession; he transformed it into narrative. A firework exploding near the apartment becomes the cue for a comic account of Andrew Scott staggering across the room crying, 'O Desperate! The like of that! I am shot!!!'. Friend Mr Parish's attempt to join the crowd similarly becomes a miniature tale, ending with a blow from a sailor's 'tarry fist'.

The Christmas and New Year period brought the social events of the season – but also spectacle and disaster within this compact Edinburgh world. In the early hours of 24 December, in a letter entitled 'Christmas News' (Letter 14), Mungo wrote of dining at the house of Mr Parish. Supper consisted of 'an excellent Yarrow salmon' and plenty of festive cheer. By ten o'clock the next morning he was suffering the predictable consequences: 'my head eachs [*i.e.* aches] consumately – Scrub – I can scarcely go to class'. But go he did and was on his way home again when catastrophe intervened. Leaving Dr Black's lecture, Mungo heard a loud, thunderous noise, and taking his usual route past the site where masons were erecting the new 'English Chaple' behind the Royal Infirmary, he saw immediately the commotion. The scaffolding on the third storey of the half-built St Peter's Episcopal chapel had given way.[3] Chairs bearing the injured were already being carried towards the Royal Infirmary. Entering the surgeons' ward, Mungo encountered a terrible scene: 'groans and crys on all sides – not less than six measons all mangled in the most fearfull manner'. Worst of all, a man struck in the face by a falling freestone from some fifty feet, so disfigured that even his young wife initially took him for a stranger until she recognised his coat and cried, 'he's mine! he's mine!', before fainting from the trauma of the moment. The unfortunate mason survived only nine hours.

The *Caledonian Mercury* reported the essential facts of the accident the next day: seven masons working on the scaffold; six falling when it collapsed; one clinging to a projecting stone until assistance arrived; the injured conveyed to the Royal Infirmary; one dying soon afterwards. Mungo's account is quite different, narrating the episode as a lived sequence: the thunderous sound, the sight of people running, the rush of chairs hastening toward the Infirmary, his own momentary decision to follow, and his shock on entering the ward and seeing the injured. Where the *Caledonian Mercury* aggregates, Mungo particularises, lingering over one mason, a single face, a single moment of recognition. Even his brief quotation from *Ossian* – 'Why dost thou build thy hall? Son of the winged days!' – lifts the scene fleetingly into the moral sublime before he returns, abruptly, to the cause of this horror: 'the weakness of the scaffold'. Providence is not invoked; the cause is mundane.

The contrast reflects differences of both approach and audience: the *Caledonian Mercury* reported the accident in a matter-of-fact style for a wider reading public; Mungo shaped it into a story for a familiar Selkirk circle accustomed to hearing letters read aloud and discussed. Still, the compositional sophistication of Mungo's account is unmistakable. Its time-stamped progression – convivial supper, hangover complaint, sudden catastrophe – creates dramatic structure, while the shift from comic exaggeration ('as fu as the Atlantic') to visceral immediacy ('O horror! horror! horror!') suggests narrative management.

The New Year brought the long-anticipated visit of the Selkirk 'Ladies' to Edinburgh and to the shared lodging in Writer's Court. Letters to William from Mungo Park and Alexander Anderson written during the first weeks of 1791 convey their thoughts and hopes for the visit. Alexander's excitement and anticipation is tangible: dinner at Leith, tea 'in our room', seats in the pit at the circus, and the unanswered question of 'what after?' (Letter 15). His letters are full of laughter and implied secrecy – 'I say nothing'. For Alexander, not long away from home, a visit from familiar friends was something to look forward to; alongside the excitement of playing host, which was perhaps still new enough to feel like an adventure.

Mungo's own interest in the visit was more particular. During the winter he had continued a discreet courtship of Nancy Henderson, seeking intelligence from William and weighing her reactions and opinions accordingly. Clearly, he hoped she would be among the visitors. But instead the party consisted of her younger sister Wilhelmina Henderson and friend Alison Veitch, properly chaperoned by Jean Henderson Vogan and her husband.[4] Their first act upon arrival was just what Alexander might have hoped for: 'The first place they landed was in our room,' he wrote to William (Letter 16). There the young men and women dispensed New Year's hansels[5] in gestures half comic, half symbolic. Mungo, who had been at the library when the ladies arrived and had missed the occasion, awaited his own hansel, believed to have come from Nancy: effigies of a parrot and a 'bubly Jock' (turkey-cock), which he described as 'very ominous birds indeed!' (Letter 16). The joke was clear enough; its precise meaning less so, leaving both Mungo and Alexander perplexed – '[…] as for the bubly jock,' Alexander wrote to William, 'I […] could not understand what was the meaning of it neither would they tell what was the intention of sending it' (Letter 18). By the late eighteenth century the parrot recognisably signified mimicry or gossip – but the symbolism of the turkey was a puzzle, leading Mungo to speculate at length about how to frame a suitable response.

Tea was to be taken in the apartment before the party headed out for the evening. Tea-drinking had become an established marker of polite society in Scotland, associated with refinement and domestic hospitality. Although its price had fallen during the century, tea still carried connotations of respectability and comfort.[6] That tea was proposed implies a degree of domestic competence and social confidence within the apartment.

The evening's entertainment lay at the 'circus' – that is, the Edinburgh Equestrian Amphitheatre. When Mungo, Alexander and their companions visited in early January 1791, they were attending an institution that was itself newly permanent. The Amphitheatre had opened in its purpose-built structure at the corner of Little King Street and Broughton Street a year earlier, the first dedicated circus building in Scotland. Together with the Theatre Royal, it formed part of a developing entertainment district that extended the sociable geography of Edinburgh towards the expanding New Town.

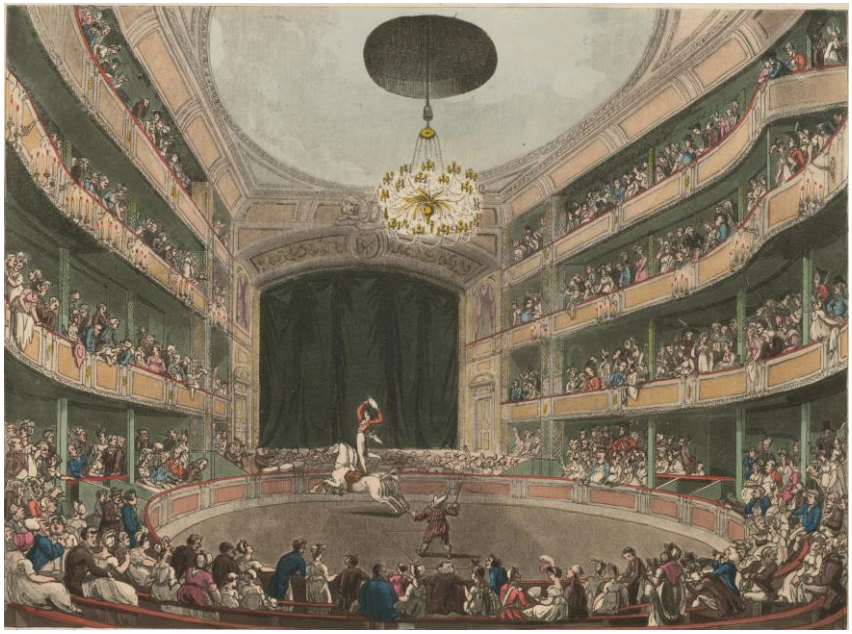


Figure 3. An illustration of Astley's Equestrian Amphitheatre, London. This venue was the inspiration for the 'circus' in Edinburgh, which was visited by the Selkirk friends in January 1791.
(From *Microcosm of London*, 1808-1810)

Contemporary advertisements present the Amphitheatre as an arena of eclectic entertainments and daring feats. The bill announced, 'Unparalleled Horsemanship by Master Giles, the Little Devil on Horseback', rope dancing by Signior Spinacuta, feats of tumbling, dancing by Mrs Parker, 'the Force of Hercules' by Pietro Bologna, comic interludes and a concluding pantomime, 'The Fairies' Triumph'. The Amphitheatre consciously borrowed prestige from Philip Astley's venue in London and quickly established itself as one of Edinburgh's most fashionable entertainments. Under the management of the rider and impresario William Parker, it offered not only public performances but also riding instruction and horse training, linking the venue to the wider culture of horsemanship that carried strong associations with military and gentlemanly accomplishment. Its social standing is suggested by the variety of events it hosted, including a lavish reception for the Freemasons held a few weeks before the Selkirk party visited.

For Mungo and his companions, admission to the Amphitheatre was itself significant. As Alexander Anderson noted, they expected to sit 'in the pit' – the cheaper seats – yet even this implied participation in a social world beyond the provincial milieu of Selkirk. The Amphitheatre offered a setting in which

young men from respectable but non-elite backgrounds could adopt the habits of fashionable urban life: escorting ladies and attending advertised spectacles in public spaces designed for polite company. In this sense, the visit reveals the ambitions and the social positioning of the group – sons of prosperous farmers and professionals, confident enough to attend Edinburgh's most fashionable entertainments, even if not to mingle among its wealthiest patrons.

The same winter weeks also saw the publication of a new periodical that Mungo followed with growing interest, *The Bee; or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*. The coincidence of his visit to the Amphitheatre with the appearance of this publication suggests an intriguing overlap between the cultural experiences that influenced him during this time. Advertisements for the performance attended by Mungo prominently announced the exhibition of the 'Albinos of Europe' whose authenticity, the notice claimed, was endorsed by the naturalist Joseph Banks. Only days earlier, on 29 December 1790, the first number of *The Bee* had been published in Edinburgh, containing among its opening articles a substantial discussion of Banks' scientific career and patronage of exploration.

Edited in Edinburgh by the agricultural improver and writer James Anderson and printed by Mundell & Son at Parliament Stairs, *The Bee* was presented as a weekly miscellany of essays, scientific observations, travel narratives and literary contributions. Designed to circulate ideas across the expanding readership of Enlightenment Britain, it exemplified the culture of the eighteenth-century periodical: a collaborative form that encouraged readers not merely to consume knowledge but also to contribute to it themselves.

Surviving correspondence shows the interest and enthusiasm that Mungo and his friends had for *The Bee*. Mungo, in particular, followed its progress closely, visiting Mundell's to enquire whether or not the first number was ready and shortly afterwards reporting that 'the first Bee of the hive' would be sent south to Selkirk, where William Laidlaw and their friends would read it. Copies circulated through the same routes as letters and parcels, moving between Edinburgh, Selkirk and Moffat, where William's elder brother James, a practising surgeon, was also a reader.

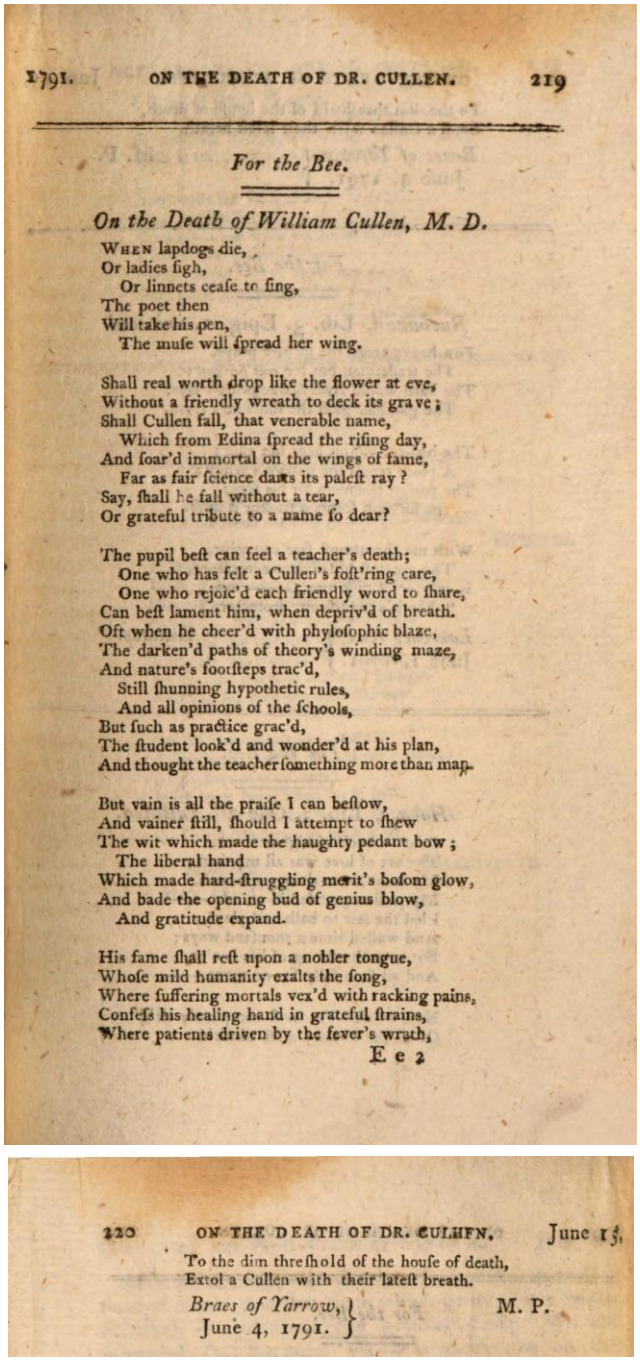
Mungo not only read the new publication closely but also sought out its editor, at one point calling upon Anderson at his house on Leith Walk and describing him approvingly as 'a very clever fellow' (Letter 27). Anderson was already well known as an agricultural writer and intellectual entrepreneur. For a young medical student interested in science, writing and improvement, he represented an inspirational figure. Mungo soon attempted to contribute to the pages of the periodical himself, beginning with a descriptive piece entitled 'The Stormy Night', perhaps written in response to a violent storm a few weeks earlier. When the poem was not accepted, he responded defensively, remarking to William that it was 'as well worth a place as the childish addresses to the Bee' (Letter 24).

The poem displays features characteristic of Mungo's later writing. Structured in three short stanzas, it describes a storm unfolding across land, mountain and sea: the sun sinking into a darkened horizon, streams roaring beneath the blast, and finally a sailor confronting the ocean as the wind 'howls in the rigging'. The imagery is concise and visual, placing solitary human figures within powerful natural landscapes. Even at this early stage, Mungo's descriptive instinct is evident in both poetry and prose.

Rejection from *The Bee* may have hurt Mungo's pride, but it did not discourage him. Soon he submitted another contribution, this time responding directly to material printed in the magazine's opening issue. The first issue of *The Bee* began with a substantial tribute to the recently deceased Edinburgh physician William Cullen, whose lectures had shaped a generation of medical students. Mungo's poem 'On the Death of William Cullen' adopts the voice of a pupil mourning the loss of a revered teacher. In doing so, Mungo not only placed himself firmly within Cullen's intellectual community but also expressed the admiration that many students had for their professor. When Anderson printed the poem in *The Bee* in June 1791, Mungo achieved a modest but meaningful entry into the world of public authorship. He also encouraged William to attempt writing for the magazine himself, suggesting that publication was viewed within their circle as a desirable accomplishment.

The contents of the early issues help explain why the magazine proved so stimulating. Anderson's miscellany ranged widely across the intellectual concerns of the Enlightenment. Among its articles were accounts of exploration and natural history describing figures such as the traveller John Ledyard and the naturalist Joseph Banks, both featured in the first issue. These pieces presented exploration as a scientific enterprise undertaken under learned patronage and directed towards the recording of observations and the collection of specimens that would expand knowledge. Mungo's later career would follow a strikingly similar trajectory. It might be an exaggeration to suggest that it was determined by *The Bee*. Nevertheless, in 1791, two years before his first voyage abroad, Mungo was reading a periodical that celebrated precisely the form of exploratory science he would later pursue and the man who would become his patron.

What is most striking, however, is the continuity visible in Mungo's writing itself. The descriptive clarity evident in his early poems also appears in his letters, whether recounting the torchlit procession of the Masons through the November night, the collapse of the scaffold at the Episcopal chapel, or the social theatre of visits and excursions in Edinburgh. In each case, the same qualities are present: vivid observation, careful narrative pacing, and a talent for framing experience as story – almost, perhaps, adventure. These are precisely the qualities that would later characterise Mungo's published travel narrative. Even at this early stage, he was practising the habits of description and narration that would become central to his career.



1791. ON THE DEATH OF DR. CULLEN. 219

For the Bee.

On the Death of William Cullen, M. D.

WHEN lapdogs die,
Or ladies ſigh,
Or linnets ceaſe to ſing,
The poet then
Will take his pen,
The muſe will ſpread her wing.

Shall real worth drop like the flower at eve,
Without a friendly wreath to deck its grave;
Shall Cullen fall, that venerable name,
Which from Edina ſpread the riſing day,
And ſoar'd immortal on the wings of fame,
Far as fair ſcience darts its paleſt ray?
Say, ſhall he fall without a tear,
Or grateful tribute to a name ſo dear?

The pupil beſt can feel a teacher's death;
One who has felt a Cullen's foſt'ring care,
One who rejoic'd each friendly word to ſhare,
Can beſt lament him, when depriv'd of breath.
Oft when he cheer'd with philoſophic blaze,
The darken'd paths of theory's winding maze,
And nature's footſteps trac'd,
Still ſhunning hypothetic rules,
And all opinions of the ſchools,
But ſuch as practice grac'd,
The ſtudent look'd and wonder'd at his plan,
And thought the teacher ſomething more than man.

But vain is all the praiſe I can beſtow,
And vainer ſtill, ſhould I attempt to ſhew
The wit which made the haughty pedant bow;
The liberal hand
Which made hard-ſtruggling merit's boſom glow,
And bade the opening bud of genius blow,
And gratitude expand.

His fame ſhall reſt upon a nobler tongue,
Whoſe mild humanity exalts the ſong,
Where ſuffering mortals vex'd with racking pains,
Confeſs his healing hand in grateful ſtrains,
Where patients driven by the fever's wrath,

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220 ON THE DEATH OF DR. CULLEN. June 15,

To the dim threſhold of the houſe of death,
Extol a Cullen with their lateſt breath.

Braes of Yarrow,
June 4, 1791. M. P.

Figure 4. Mungo Park's poem 'On the Death of William Cullen, M.D.'.
(From *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, June 1791)

Another institution that formed part of Mungo Park's Edinburgh life in 1791 was the Pantheon, a debating society that met in St Andrew's Chapel in Carrubber's Close, leading off from the High Street. Edinburgh at this time possessed a large number of debating societies, clubs and literary associations, and contemporary observers remarked that 'the excitement of debate was the passion of the hour'.[7] Societies like the Pantheon offered young men and women an opportunity to display their intellectual abilities before an audience. Alongside theatres, lecture halls and periodicals, debating societies formed an important component of the city's intellectual culture.

The Pantheon was founded in 1773. It held monthly debates where members and visitors could discuss questions ranging from literature and philosophy to social behaviour and public life. Meetings were open to the public on payment of a small admission fee, and the Edinburgh press frequently recorded attendances of several hundred people. Contemporary reports describe large audiences of ladies and gentlemen, suggesting that the debates formed part of Edinburgh's wider culture of fashionable entertainment. Like the theatre and the circus, the Pantheon was an arena of both intellectual exchange and urban spectacle. The proceedings were conducted according to formal regulations designed to maintain decorum – and to ensure those planning to attend knew the rules, they were regularly posted in the press ahead of meetings. Visitors paid sixpence for admission and were expected to observe strict silence while others spoke – speakers were not to be interrupted during their addresses, and expressions of approval or disapproval from the audience were permitted only briefly after each speech. Participants addressed the audience from a platform, presenting arguments or verses before spectators who ultimately voted on the question under discussion.

Mungo's letters to William show that he took part in this debating culture on at least two occasions during the spring of 1791. It was something he had long planned to do as he wrote to William on 22 February: 'If you recolect before we left Selkirk I half and more promised to speake in the Pantheon but as I had a great many things on hand I never could get as much time till last week' (Letter 24).

The first debate Mungo attended was on the question of whether the theatre or the circus was most worthy of public notice – a question that may well have appealed to Mungo, who attended both. His address was a success, delivered in 'Broad Scotts' to universal applause. Following this encouraging success, he spoke at a second debate on 3 March, one of fourteen speakers watched by no less than two hundred spectators. The question debated on that occasion – whether deformity constituted a greater barrier to marriage than either poverty or profligacy – illustrates the mixture of humour, moral speculation and social commentary characteristic of Pantheon discussions. Such propositions invited wit as well as reason, and the presence of a mixed audience meant that entertainment was often as important as philosophical rigour.

Mungo's second outing to the Pantheon was reportedly as successful as the first, the president telling him that 'he never heard any speak scotts verse so well since he was president' (Letter 27). The boast is delivered with typical self-awareness – Mungo quickly adds that he is his 'own trumpeter' – yet it nevertheless conveys the excitement he felt at his own success. Speaking at the Pantheon required confidence and quickness of thought, and the opportunity to present arguments before a large gathering would have been exhilarating – perhaps also intimidating – for a young man.

Participation in the society provided Mungo with another arena in which to exercise the talents already visible in his letters and poetry. Although the speeches themselves have not survived – Mungo remarked that he usually burned these – the experience probably encouraged the habits of narrative and argument that he was already developing in his correspondence. The Pantheon demanded precisely those qualities: clarity of expression and the ability to frame an argument persuasively before an audience.

Perhaps to atone for not sharing his speeches with William, Mungo wrote a letter containing what amounts to a mock debate composed entirely of questions (Letter 25). After observing that no correspondence could be maintained without news or questions, the 'debate' supplies a rapid series of interrogations in place of news itself: is Tibby Dunlop staying at Whitemorehall? has Laidlaw's dog Rover shed his hair? have the crows started to nest yet? and a host of other local inquiries. The questions then expand into deliberate absurdity – 'whats the colour of the Emporess of rusia's hair?' – before returning once more to Selkirk society.

Much of the humour lies in the satire of acquaintances – several questions concern Andrew Henderson the younger, 'the young Baillie', whose domestic arrangements are subjected to exaggerated scrutiny: whether his parlour lock is brass or iron, how many bars there are in his costly Carron grate, whether he goes out for his breakfast and how much that costs – all hinting at self-importance. William, who was living with the Hendersons and probably saw Andrew on a daily basis, would have appreciated the humour. The sequence concludes with a final question that he alone could answer: 'do you ever go to Mr Veitches?' – a reference to their favourite local pub, Veitch's Inn at the foot of the West Port in Selkirk.

Although written in jest, the letter demonstrates how easily Mungo could adapt the forms of public debate to private correspondence. Its structure resembles a rhetorical exercise: a proposition followed by a sequence of questions escalating from the plausible to the absurd. In this sense the mock debate reflects the same intellectual environment that shaped his participation in the Pantheon. Even casual letters to friends could become occasions for satire and rhetorical play.

During these same weeks, however, Park's correspondence reveals a more personal drama unfolding. His discreet courtship of Nancy Henderson appears

to have collapsed in late May 1791, leaving him wounded and defensive. His letters to William suggest embarrassment as well as disappointment; expressing the anxious hope that his name will not become a subject of gossip when Wilhelmina Henderson returns to Selkirk 'cram[m]ed full of Edinburgh news' (Letter 29). Within a few days his tone had hardened considerably, declaring to William that he could not recall the events without pain. This comment is accompanied by a quoted line from *Macbeth*, that some 'look like the innocent flower but are the serpent under it',[8] and a brief passage of Latin derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, describing how the disguise of Achilles once deceived those around him. Mungo adapts the original wording of the latter passage, replacing the reference to clothing with the word *vultus* ('expression' or 'face'), thereby transforming the line into a comment on deceptive appearances. Clearly, these references were to convey that he believed himself misled by outward charm.

Despite these dramatic expressions of resentment, his mood soon shifted towards something closer to self-mockery. Writing again a few days later, Park declared that although the streets of Edinburgh were now 'crowded with Ladies', they passed him like 'the dream of the hunter on the hills', for he had 'in a manner forgot the sex' (Letter 30). These words echo the melancholy imagery of Ossianic poetry, then widely read and apparently highly regarded amongst Mungo and his friends – but at the same time his exaggerated tone suggests that he was already aware of the theatricality of his own renunciation.

The culmination of this brief emotional episode came in a letter written in mid-June containing a short poem in Latin verse, titled '*Aire Incognite*' (Letter 31), a heading that itself may carry a hint of humour. In eighteenth-century usage, an 'air' referred to a melody, and lyrics were often printed in songbooks with headings such as 'Air: Unknown', indicating that the words could be sung to an unspecified tune. Mungo's title may therefore suggest that the verses were conceived as an improvised lyric – perhaps even a drinking song. Mungo's Latin is grammatically uncertain and clearly improvised; he himself cheerfully admitted that the language 'never comes weel by hand with me' even whilst claiming that the lines were composed hastily while his brother Alexander packed cloaks into their travelling trunk. A literal translation conveys the sense of the poem:

> Love, a disturbance,
> rose in the mind,
> openly or secretly;
> then it went on with force.
> With frequent bitter sighs of grief
> it draws me away from all maidens,
> leaving me weeping by its own will.
> Thus her favour passes away.

The poem presents love as a disturbance rising within the mind and producing painful sighs before ultimately leading the writer away from all women. The sentiment echoes his earlier declaration that he had forsworn women – but the clumsy Latin and improvised phrasing transform the complaint into a comic performance. Mungo's concluding explanation adds another small joke: he describes the poem as written 'quite extempour'. The spelling appears deliberately to play on the Latin *extempore* – improvised – while also hinting at the circumstances of its composition whilst drinking; as one of the 'productions of the bowl'.

The letter containing the Latin poem is the last surviving letter from Mungo Park's student days. It closes the small collection of letters written during the 1790-1791 session, which begins with his arrival in Edinburgh and ends with his preparations for departure. The surviving correspondence thus captures a single academic year, tracing his experience of Edinburgh from first arrival in the autumn to his return to Foulshiels in the summer.

With the onset of the summer break, the correspondence with William falls silent. The friends were reunited in Selkirk, and when the autumn came around again Mungo, his brother Alexander and Alexander Anderson returned to Edinburgh. No letters survive from the 1791-1792 session. The absence of correspondence during this year almost certainly reflects historic loss: letters were almost certainly written, read, and circulated, but have not survived.

'The World in Miniature': London, 1792-1793

In the spring of 1792, William Laidlaw left the Henderson household, having reached his majority and completed his apprenticeship under Andrew Henderson the elder. During the summer, he took lodgings at Ravenshaugh, near Prestonpans, where he joined his siblings, friends and other young men and women from Selkirk for an annual holiday. For several weeks each year, Prestonpans became a temporary enclave of the town's middling society. It offered opportunities for sea bathing (which was considered to be a healthy leisure activity); and the chance to socialise with more freedom than at home. William's brother Robert, who was still in Edinburgh, wrote on 16 July of joining him in Prestonpans along with family friend Jane Cramond. Other members of the Laidlaw family were also involved in this seasonal migration, and surviving correspondence from subsequent years shows that the holiday was well established, with lodgings sought and secured in advance for groups of friends and relations.

Mungo Park did not join his friends in Prestonpans that summer. Instead, he travelled through the Highlands of Scotland with his brother-in-law James Dickson. James and his family had probably travelled to Selkirk from their home in London earlier in the summer, perhaps staying at Foulshiels before James and Mungo set out on their journey.

William returned briefly to Selkirk at the close of summer 1792, residing with his family at Broadmeadows, before removing to Edinburgh towards the end of the year to take up a position as an underwriter – a junior clerk – in the office of his cousin James Laidlaw, who was a Writer to the Signet. Around the same time, Mungo and Alexander Park travelled south, accompanying the Dicksons on their return to their house in Bloomsbury. Both brothers were intent on seeking their fortunes in London, although they had different ideas about what that meant. Mungo was looking for a position that might enable him to travel and engage in the scientific work he loved. Alexander, meanwhile, wanted to practise in English law, an ambition shaped at least in part by his continuing attachment to Esther Turnbull, who wanted to live in Berwick in the event that they married.

The next surviving letter from Mungo to William was written from London on 31 October 1792 (Letter 32). It begins mid-discourse, the loss of an entire sheet suggesting that the original was of some length. His description of London as 'the world in miniature' and his encounter with its 'Literati' may initially give the impression of a young man from a rural background in awe at the scale and novelty of the capital. However, the letter suggests a more measured reaction. Mungo remarks that he sees 'nothing very extraordinary but bustle and confusion, a thing I never was fond of', a response that mirrors his earlier description of his arrival in Edinburgh in 1790. The letter points less to astonishment and wonder than to a familiar pattern of adjustment, in which the experience of entering a new and busy environment – whether Edinburgh or London – was framed in similar terms.

As in earlier correspondence, the novelty of his surroundings is quickly displaced by recollections of Selkirk. Much of the surviving letter turns not to London society but to shared experiences at home: an evening spent 'round the Board at James Dun's'; and more vividly, an outing to Lindean, recalled through the discovery of a fragment of a bake preserved in his pocket. Such moments suggest the persistence of local attachments even at a distance. London may be the world in miniature, but Mungo's own point of reference remained the small world from which he had come.

At the same time, the letter adopts a more reflective tone, invoking Providence and the 'grand chain of this world' as a means of situating his own uncertain position within a larger order. As yet unestablished in London, Mungo presents himself as both participant in and observer of a wider world, professing an indifference to 'the strife of little tongues' at home. This pose is only partially sustained, however, as he requests news – particularly of the Veitch sisters, whose opinions he claims not to value but nevertheless wishes to know. The attachment to home evident here is consistent with his earlier letters: Selkirk remains the framework through which he understands his surroundings.

Despite the uncertainty of his position, Mungo found in London the opportunity he had been seeking. His introduction to Joseph Banks – presented from his earliest biography as a fortuitous happenstance – was more likely the product of existing connections and prior awareness.[9] Mungo was already familiar with Banks and with the possibilities associated with his patronage, which aligned with his own interest in travel and natural history. It is entirely plausible that he did not merely encounter opportunity in London, but actively sought it out, which complicates the traditional portrayal of him as a provincial figure whose success depended largely upon metropolitan patronage. His actions instead suggest a degree of purpose in identifying and approaching a figure such as Banks. His subsequent appointment as assistant surgeon aboard the East India Company ship *Worcester*, with instructions to collect botanical specimens, reflects a more immediate and pragmatic objective: to secure a position that combined employment with the opportunity to travel and to participate, in however modest a capacity, in the collection and observation of the natural world.

Alexander Park's letters from the 1790-1791 session in Edinburgh have not survived, although his presence is often alluded to in letters sent by his brother and by Alexander Anderson. He also lived in the shared apartment in Writer's Court, attended lectures, and moved within the same social and intellectual circles as his brother and their companions. What Mungo and Alexander Anderson describe – the debates, visits, entertainments, and routines of student life – must equally have formed part of his experience. That he was himself writing to William during this period is clear; the absence of his letters simply reflects the contingencies of survival. By the time he reached London in 1792, however, Alexander was moving in a different direction. Having arrived with the intention of qualifying in English Law, he soon discovered that the process was more demanding than he had anticipated, complaining to William, 'I have now found out that unless I had served an apprenticeship of five years I am eternally debarred from practising as an English attorney' (Letter 34). Alexander was gravely disappointed by this 'dismal news' in which he saw an end to his plans for a life at Berwick. Although offered positions that were, by his own account, 'not at all dispicable', he was unwilling to commit to the years of study and expense required to establish himself in English Law.

Instead, Alexander resolved to return to university in Edinburgh for the summer session to qualify as a notary, before returning to Selkirk society in the autumn. Alexander had 'some guess of a place' (Letter 34). Through his close association with William, who had served his apprenticeship within the Henderson household, he would have been familiar with the family and their position within Selkirk society. The Parks and Hendersons also moved within overlapping circles. Andrew Henderson the elder – baillie, town clerk, and a prominent figure in the town's civic life – knew Alexander's father, whose financial dealings with the burgh placed him in regular contact with local

authority. Alexander was not an unknown quantity and clearly hoped to present himself as a promising young man with established connections.

What is striking about Alexander is the degree to which he sought to reinforce these advantages through purposeful preparation. His letters from London emphasise the diligence with which he improved his legal hand and recovered his Latin. He also undertook a course of mathematics before returning to Edinburgh in April to complete his studies and qualify formally as a notary. Alexander's plans suggest a calculated approach: by the time he re-entered Selkirk society, he intended to be equipped with the credentials and confidence required to attain advancement.

Mungo, meanwhile, was preparing to sail on board the *Worcester* for Benkulen in Sumatra. His letter to William of 2 February 1793, written on what he expected to be the eve of his departure, was brief. 'I have now got every thing ready,' he explained, 'and will be on board in less than a fortnight,' adding, with understated awareness of the situation, 'and if the Frenchmen do not lay hold on us I expect to be in the Downs from India in 13 or 14 months hence' (Letter 36). War with France had been declared only the day before; and although the news may not yet have been widely circulated, conflict had long been anticipated. Merchant vessels such as the *Worcester* accordingly sailed under armed escort. The risks of capture or engagement were immediate and understood.

In the event, the ship did not depart as soon as Mungo anticipated, but by the beginning of April it was ready to sail. Writing from London on 2 April, Alexander wrote to William that the *Worcester* was to sail from Portsmouth under convoy of two '74s' – two-decked gunships carrying seventy-four guns – providing a heavily armed escort and underscoring the dangers then attending maritime travel. This detail, offered almost in passing, reinforces the context of war that underlay Mungo's departure. For Alexander, it was a transitional moment: his brother, a cornerstone in his life, departed overseas, while he himself prepared to return north, looking forward to a renewed period in Edinburgh among familiar companions before re-establishing himself in Selkirk.

'The Little that the Just Man Hath is Blest': Selkirk, 1793-1795

Alexander Park's return to Selkirk in the summer of 1793 marked the beginning of a rapid and purposeful process of establishment. Having resolved upon a new course, he lost little time in putting it into effect. The intervening weeks had been spent laying the foundations of his professional life. The first surviving letter from this period, written on 22 July 1793, presents an account of progress already made – the early results of his preparations (Letter 44). It is notable above all for the speed with which events unfold. Within the space of little more than a week, he presented his petition to the sheriff-depute and commissary,[10] underwent examination, was found suitable and the following

week had been sworn into office. By the time he wrote to William Laidlaw, Alexander had already begun to acquire business, noting that he had 'two or three processes before the Sherriff' and expected more.

The process of recommendation, examination and appointment is embedded within a sequence of social interactions: a fair day, visits from friends offering the customary 'compliments' of drink and good wishes, and a dinner at the Henderson house from which formal proceedings followed. In Alexander's words, 'We dined in the Old Baillies and after dinner the examination took place and the report found me 'qualified'' (Letter 44). Advancement of course depended on qualification, but also on the successful negotiation of a closely interconnected professional and social world.

The role played by Andrew Henderson the younger in this process is particularly significant. At the age of thirty-one years he was already both a baillie of the burgh and a sheriff substitute, occupying a position of considerable authority within the legal and civic structure of Selkirk. Although still a comparatively young man, his rapid advancement had placed him among the town's leading figures, with judicial responsibility and influence over professional appointments. He was also a familiar figure to Alexander and his friends, the same 'young belie' satirised in Mungo Park's earlier letter to William Laidlaw. By 1793, however, he represented for Alexander both access to opportunity and an example of what might be achieved within the same system.

Although newly positioned, Alexander presents himself as already in possession of a degree of professional authority, describing the rapid sequence of events leading to his appointment as 'the track of my career' and framing his progress as the beginning of a coherent trajectory. The same self-assurance is evident in the way he recounts his dealings with authority. He soon found himself in disagreement with Henderson over the management of a process he had been given, noting that he 'coloured a little at my presumption' but insisting that 'while I have the text of law in my favour I am resolved to assert my independency' (Letter 44). Alexander was willing to assert his independence, but carefully grounded it in legal correctness, reflecting both his ambition and an awareness of the social limits within which it could be exercised. This episode is best understood not as opposition to authority – indeed, by the following week we learn that 'Mr Henderson and me are far from being at enmity we are upon the same footing as ever' (Letter 45) – but rather as a negotiation of status within an established hierarchy.

By the following week, Alexander was already at work, issuing precepts and managing a further two processes. At the same time, Andrew Henderson the younger and his father had arranged to dine with him in Edinburgh on 'the first day the court sits down' (Letter 45), an invitation indicating Alexander's acceptance within the circle of local civic authority. Alexander expected to see William at court and at dinner, too; a detail which suggests that William, in his capacity as a clerk within his cousin's office, appeared regularly in court.

Alexander also travelled to Edinburgh in early August 1793 to be admitted as a messenger-at-arms, an office which entitled him to serve legal documents and thus extend his practical authority within the legal system. Alexander's letters show that he hoped the visit would also afford an opportunity to see William in person, reinforcing the continued friendship between them. It was a moment of consolidation for Alexander, already in practice, already connected, and now moving to secure the additional credentials required to sustain and extend his position.

Alexander's assumption that William would be present at both the court and the subsequent dinner suggests that despite his removal to Edinburgh, William remained closely connected to the Henderson family and to the social and professional world they inhabited. It is within this context that the broader correspondence from this period must be read. Alongside Alexander's letters, a number of letters written to William during his time in Edinburgh survive from members of the same extended circle, notably the Henderson sisters, Agnes and Wilhelmina, and William's cousin Alexander Somerville, who was serving an apprenticeship to writer and town baillie John Laing. These letters, most of them written in the months following William's departure from Selkirk, provide a complementary perspective on the same network of relationships, shifting the focus from professional advancement to the social and domestic ties that continued to bind those within it across distance.

The letters of Agnes and Wilhelmina Henderson are notable for the fact that they are shaped as much by tone as by content. Written in the opening months of 1793, they are characterised by a mixture of playful familiarity and deliberate concealment. The sisters' letters demonstrate a shared understanding with William, long established, communicating through hints, teasing references, and partially withheld information. News was conveyed obliquely, often framed as 'mystery' as when Agnes alluded to 'a matter of great importance to both beaus and belles […] a mistery', only to refuse further explanation (Letter 38); while Wilhelmina similarly teased William with a 'mysterious epistle […] only a few blown up stories to put you in a punchion' (Letter 41). Personal matters were treated with a lightness that both obscured and revealed their significance, conveyed with humour and selective disclosure. This mode of writing does not reflect a lack of substance, however it may first appear; but rather a social code, in which meaning was dependent on shared experience and the careful management of what was made explicit.

Wilhelmina's letters, in particular, suggest a relationship characterised by familiarity and mutual ease, conveyed through shared jokes and a tone that at times borders on flirtation – as when she adopts the mock-formal signature 'your most Humble Rumble come Tumble Servant' or playfully accuses William of being 'rather plenty of your plaister' (Letter 35). William's romantic interest in Wilhelmina is implicit across the correspondence, and occasionally made explicit, as in Alexander Somerville's flippant report of her supposed

engagement: 'Well what the Devil have I got to say now I have no news but that it was reported that Miss W. H. was just about to be married on Mr Morrison (ah, Poor W. Laidlaw)' (Letter 47).

These letters provide valuable insight into the social dynamics of the group, placing particular emphasis on observation – of visits, conversations and personal interactions – through which relationships were assessed and interpreted. The sisters' perspective is both intimate and collective, recording the process by which reputation and expectation were formed. Set alongside the more direct and often ironic tone of Alexander Somerville's letters, their correspondence reveals different ways of describing the same social world. The Henderson sisters approach potentially sensitive matters with discretion, relying upon indirection and careful disclosure, whilst Somerville is generally more explicit. Together, the letters suggest that men and women often communicated social knowledge in different ways, each shaped by the conventions of their respective circles.

The letters of Alexander Somerville introduce a markedly different tone. His writing is informal and self-conscious, closer to speech than to the more composed and allusive letters of the Henderson sisters. The letter moves rapidly between topics: news of Mungo Park's imminent departure for India, requests for theatrical texts and popular tunes, and enquiries after mutual acquaintances in Edinburgh, including Alexander Anderson, James Rodger and George Laing.

These letters offer a detailed, if fragmentary, view of a closely connected social world in which reputation and personal conduct were continuously scrutinised and interpreted. Two overlapping narratives emerge from this correspondence. The first concerns the budding relationship between William's sister Mary and Andrew Henderson the younger.

The earliest indications of a possible attachment between Mary Laidlaw and Andrew Henderson appear in the letters of Agnes Henderson, who, describing recent social visits, remarks: 'I spent a whole week at Broadmeadows lately. Your sister was here part of last week – a certain Gentleman paid her all due attention he could not leave the house night nor day' (Letter 38). Wilhelmina, writing at the same time, also makes the connection. A further perspective on this developing situation is provided by a draft letter written by William on the reverse of a note from his brother Walter dated 17 June 1793.[11] This draft, almost certainly intended for Andrew, is framed in the language of sensibility. It opens with a reflection on the 'concord between the different motions incident to the human mind', before turning to a specific and recent encounter: William recalls witnessing Henderson's 'unexpected meeting and almost instantaneous parting' with his sister Mary, in which 'the agitation of mind […] visible in both your countenances' made a strong impression upon him.

The formality of the letter is to be expected, given William and Henderson's respective positions within their professional sphere. It represents a carefully composed – and frequently revised – attempt to articulate what is

elsewhere only hinted at: William here renders the situation explicit, albeit within a highly stylised framework that both elevates and distances it. Whether he was prompted to write by the encounter itself or by a growing awareness of its significance, the letter marks a moment at which the relationship between Mary and Henderson was more openly recognised and acknowledged.

The second narrative to emerge from Somerville's letters concerns the pregnancy of the Hendersons' domestic servant Jennet 'Jenny' Leavers. A 'scrape', as Somerville describes it in a letter of March 1793 (Letter 40) – a socially awkward problem left undefined but clearly understood by his correspondent. 'Jenny Leavers has left her service with child,' Alexander reports, bluntly, before mockingly attributing responsibility to William himself, adding: 'I hope you take care of the poor Innocent when it comes into the wicked world and be on your guard for the future against such temptations' (Letter 39). Whilst Alexander's accusation is clearly facetious, at the same time it is also an enquiry, however obliquely expressed. Somerville, whose letters are otherwise marked by a lack of restraint, evidently did not know the identity of the child's father, and his mock attribution to William may reflect an attempt to elicit further information as much as to amuse. That the matter could be treated in this way suggests that while Jenny Leavers' pregnancy was known within the community, its circumstances were not disclosed in full.

The implications of this 'scrape' become clearer when set alongside other documentary sources. Kirk session records confirm that Jenny gave birth to a daughter, Jessy, in July 1793, and that she was identified as the child of Andrew Henderson the younger. The baptism was conducted privately – an unusual occurrence, if not unprecedented. It suggests a considerable degree of discretion, facilitated by the presence of Patrick Tait and Robert Glen, both members of the town council, whose involvement reflects the close alignment between civic and kirk authority. More than a year later, in December 1794, Andrew appeared voluntarily before the kirk session of Selkirk to acknowledge formally that Jenny had 'some time ago brought forth a child to him in fornication', and to petition that the public rebuke ordinarily imposed might be mitigated – in consideration of a payment to be used for the welfare of the poor. The kirk session, taking account of his 'candid behaviour', accepted a monetary penalty of £2 2s in place of public censure and restored him to kirk privileges.

The timing of this appearance is significant: although Jessy had been born in the summer of 1793, Andrew did not seek formal resolution until the end of the following year, only a few days before his marriage. His delay suggests that the matter was addressed at a moment when its settlement had become necessary to the maintenance of his public position. The mitigation of public discipline afforded to a man of his standing allowed him to emerge from the potential scandal without lasting damage to his reputation. On 26 December 1794, Andrew married Helen Turnbull in the kirk, his father acting as his cautioner. His wedding was reportedly an event of some note. As Alexander Park wrote

to William on 5 January 1795, 'never was anything in Selkirk seen like Mr Henderson's wedding, it was sumptuous in the Highest Degree' (Letter 69).

Set against Andrew's social immunity, the position of Jenny Leavers appears starkly different, rendered all the more striking by the relative silence of the record. The kirk session minutes, while recording Andrew's admission, make no corresponding reference to her appearance, nor to the process of public rebuke that ordinarily accompanied such cases. This absence indicates that management of the situation began well before Andrew's formal acknowledgement, shaped from an early stage by considerations of discretion. That the pregnancy was known within the community by the spring of 1793 yet did not give rise to the usual disciplinary procedure, implies that the identity of the father was already understood within a more restricted circle, and the matter treated accordingly.

Jenny's removal from the Henderson household and her subsequent employment at Hartwoodmyres, then occupied by Mungo and Alexander Park's brother Archie, may be understood in the same way. Hartwoodmyres lay several miles from Selkirk and beyond the immediate gaze of the town, whilst still remaining within its wider social network. The arrangement provided a means of addressing the situation through existing social connections, removing the immediate difficulty without attracting public attention. Yet the limitations are equally apparent. There is no indication that Jessy was incorporated into her father's household, nor that Andrew played any visible role in her later life. Whilst he remained in Selkirk and continued his public career with little lasting consequence, Jenny's circumstances were defined by removal from her home and a far narrower range of options.

The anticipated relationship between Mary Laidlaw and Andrew Henderson, so evident in the letters of early 1793, appears to recede in the months that follow. By March 1794, Mary refers only briefly to a passing encounter with a 'friend',[12] whom she could not persuade to stop, though he promised to visit again. Her tone is noticeably cooler than that of her friends the previous year; and the absence of further romantic developments suggests that earlier expectations had shifted. While the surviving correspondence offers no clues as to the reason, the broader context makes it difficult to separate it entirely from the events surrounding Jenny Leavers and the child born in 1793.

The documentary sources reveal a social world in which personal relationships were closely observed and discussed; and subject to both informal and formal regulation. The process of Kirk discipline provided a framework within which such matters could be acknowledged and resolved, but its application was in practice shaped by social position and local relationships. For men like Andrew Henderson, it was possible to negotiate and contain the consequences of social and moral transgression, preserving both reputation and advancement. For women such as Jenny Leavers, and for the children born of extramarital unions, the scope for negotiation was far more limited.

Alexander Park, meanwhile, was enjoying the fruits of his carefully laid plans. In the months following his establishment in Selkirk, his legal practice expanded rapidly, as he wrote to William:

> I am happy to inform you that my business increases much beyond my expectation. On Wednesday I had the good fortune to call ten new causes in court, seven before the sherriff and three before the commissary and in the course of this and next week I expect to be able to call [an]other five. (Letter 50)

By the end of 1793 he was managing a significant volume of business, sufficient to allow him to move from his 'litle tenement' (Letter 44) in Selkirk and rent a 'whole house' (Letter 69) on the High Street, opposite the Henderson house, for entry at the ensuing Whitsuntide.

His professional success, however, was not matched by similar progress in his hoped-for marriage to Esther Turnbull. Their relationship, though clearly established, advanced unevenly, shaped in part by circumstances beyond their control. The death of one of Esther's sisters in late 1793 placed her in mourning, limiting opportunities for social visits. Alexander saw her less often. He was evidently affected by her grief, to the extent that it altered his own participation in social life. At the same time, the impending wedding of his sister Jean to Andrew Thomson brought the question of marriage more immediately before him: 'My sisters wedding is to take place on Friday first […] we shall have a merry bout – but Lucretia will not be there; poor Lucretia how can I be merry and her mourning' (Letter 50).

Alexander's letters from this period demonstrate his continued attachment to Esther, who is referred to as 'Lucretia' throughout his letters. Alexander was also experiencing a degree of uncertainty during a time of social constraint. It is within this context – of growing professional confidence, but unresolved personal hopes – that his dispute with John Crosby must be understood.

Crosby was evidently a long-standing friend, whom Alexander referred to as 'my brother' (Letter 51). Against this friendship stood their mutual pursuit of Esther Turnbull, leading to a sustained rivalry for her affections. Alexander, who had been absent from the district for much of the previous three years, clearly felt he had grounds for confidence; yet his position was not entirely secure. His letter of 17 November 1793 provides a vivid account of an encounter between the two men – the first for some time – at Hawick Fair. Recounting their meeting with evident satisfaction, he wrote: '[…] my rival Crosby was there, he had not seen me for three years – He was thunderstruck or rather he looked as if his 'Auld Friends Ghost had started up before him'' (Letter 49).

Alexander sets the scene, casting himself in the role of its central figure. His intimacy with Esther is emphasised, particularly when she is said to have been 'seeking' him, and more strikingly in the episode that follows, in which

the two rode together alone to Hassendean Bank, '*solus cum sola*', a phrase drawn from the Latin aphorism *solus cum sola non dicunt Ave Maria* (a man and a woman alone are not saying prayers). 'Unless you count the horses,' he adds, 'and spoil my Latin'. Crosby is framed as one whose efforts in love are ineffectual and self-defeating, remaining behind to drown his sorrows at the Tower Inn.

Alexander's perceived advantage over Crosby may help to explain his subsequent invitation to dine with him in Selkirk in early December, an attempt perhaps to sustain cordiality within a relationship that, though competitive, was historically rooted in friendship. It was a delicate balance, fraught with tension, which their encounter at Hawick had done nothing to resolve. Alexander was also by now anxious about his brother Mungo, from whom he had not heard since his departure on the *Worcester* in April. Eight months is a long time to live without news of a loved one, particularly in such perilous circumstances. Long-distance sea travel was highly unpredictable, with risks of illness and the very real hazards of bad weather and poor navigation. The war with France meant further uncertainty, bringing with it the additional danger of hostile encounters at sea. The war was on everybody's mind, as men throughout Scotland left their communities for service in the Army or Navy, attracted by bounties offered by the travelling recruiting parties which swept through the country. Alexander Somerville, writing to William Laidlaw in March, witnessed just such a recruitment event in Selkirk: 'It was surely a very affecting sight to see so many poor Devils torn from their country, their friends, their wives and families perhaps never to see them more!' (Letter 40).

Alexander Park's personal world had become less certain, even as his career flourished. In the absence of news from Mungo and amidst widespread uncertainty in the community about the fate of loved ones serving in the Army and Navy, he struggled, declaring to William in a letter dated 9 December: 'He must either be dead or in the red sea; and pray which of the two would you choice [*i.e.* choose]? If the one's worse the other is at least ill' (Letter 51). His remark conveys the sense of unease underneath his more immediate concerns. It was on this same day that Crosby arrived to dine with him at his tenement in Selkirk. It was close to Christmas, the season for friendly festivity. At first, the meeting went well, 'with much pleasure and festivity' (Letter 52), reminding them both of their longstanding friendship. But when the conversation turned towards marriage, the mood, fuelled by alcohol, quickly soured as Crosby 'sprung from his seat and at the same time from his reason and attempted to strike me sitting in my chair'. Crosby attempted to leave – but the situation rapidly deteriorated: '[…] when I was assisting him with his great coat he actually struck me – my passion rose I returned the blow and had the misfortune to knock him down and cut him severly upon the head'.

The altercation is presented as the result of Crosby's jealousy and loss of self-control, with Alexander portraying his own resort to violence as reactive

rather than deliberate. The consequences were immediate. Leaving Alexander's lodgings, Crosby mounted his horse and rode the 5 miles (8 km) to Burnfoot, the home of Alexander's sister Jean and her husband Andrew Thomson. The decision to ride there reflects the close-knit social world in which the dispute unfolded and ensured that its effects were immediately visible to those most directly concerned. Crosby's appearance, bloody and visibly injured, was so alarming that a messenger was sent to Selkirk to confirm Alexander's safety. Jean and Esther feared that he might be as badly hurt as Crosby, if not worse. What had begun as a private quarrel quickly became a matter of wider concern and discussion.

Alexander, embarrassed, described the incident to William as 'an affair which I am no less ashamed to have been concerned in than to think upon' (Letter 52). The next morning, he rode to Burnfoot to present himself – and no doubt his own version of the previous night's events. He vividly describes his first glimpse of Esther, who had endured a sleepless night, as a transcendent moment: '[…] it was the sun beaming through a shower – it was the most extravagant joy displayed in the midst of greif'.

Predictably, Alexander's troubles did not end with the fight. A letter written a week later reveals its wider social consequences. Although Esther's father had intervened to settle the dispute, the matter was far from settled. 'the news of the Dust had been before us,' Alexander wrote to William, astonished by the speed with which it had spread (Letter 53). The incident had provided 'fewel [*i.e.* fuel] to the ancient grudge bore here to Lucretia', whilst Alexander himself had become 'the very butt of the Ladies's ridicule and spleen'. Cast as the gallant defender of his mistress' reputation, Alexander found himself an object of mockery rather than admiration. Continually 'duned' (brought down), he became the target of jokes at his own expense. His closing words to William, loosely adapted from *Hamlet*, suggest resignation rather than victory: 'let the stricken Deer go weep […] so runs the worled away' (Letter 53).

The final stage of this unfortunate episode is recorded in a letter of 6 January 1794, which recounts the formal reconciliation between the two men (Letter 55). The quarrel is now referred to simply as 'the Difference betwixt Crosby and me', and its resolution described in measured terms. The meeting took place at Hassendean Bank and was mediated by Esther's father, whom Alexander refers to as 'my Bonus Pater'. Alexander and Crosby were obliged to shake hands, and so formally bringing the matter to a close.

The letters trace the dispute from private rivalry to public incident and finally to reconciliation. At every stage, the role of the surrounding social network is evident. The quarrel was not confined to Alexander and Crosby but discussed and ultimately mediated by family and friends. Outward harmony was restored, though not necessarily the underlying grievance: Crosby, as Alexander noted, still 'ever and anon' vowed revenge.

Alexander's difficulties within Selkirk society did not end there. Two weeks later he wrote to William of a further dispute, this time with the Misses Veitch, arising from what had begun as an informal evening visit: 'I had been in company and had taken a glass or two and passing there [*i.e.* their] house rather late I spied a light and in I popt' (Letter 55). By his own admission, Alexander had been drinking. On friendly terms with the sisters, he evidently thought little of calling upon them unannounced. At first, he was welcomed, albeit with mild reproaches for the lateness of the hour. The conversation remained amicable until it turned towards Esther. Annie Veitch abruptly informed him that 'although Lucretia thought much of me I was not from thence to inferr that any of the Ladys of Selkirk liked me'. When Alexander protested that he had never suggested otherwise, Annie reminded him of a remark he had allegedly made in company: 'if houses were as easily got as wives you could get ten in the town of Selkirk'. His plea that it had been intended as a joke did little to improve matters. 'I like no such jokes,' Annie retorted, before, as Alexander tells it, taking 'the whole say' and proceeding 'like a fury' from one reproach to another. Alexander left shocked and offended, describing the quarrel as 'an incurable breach'. In future, he resolved, he would limit himself to the barest civility, intending only to 'lift my hat and pass by' when next they met.

Annie Veitch's rebuke is striking, not least because Alexander records it in such detail. What he perceived as an unprovoked attack appears rather as a deliberate correction. Annie's objection was not simply to the remark itself, but to the assumptions it implied. Her refusal to dismiss the matter as a joke suggests a keen awareness of reputation and a willingness to defend it openly. This is consistent with a broader pattern visible throughout the correspondence, in which women emerge as active participants in the formation and policing of social opinion. That the exchange unsettled Alexander so deeply suggests that Annie's influence within the community was both recognised and effective.

Yet, as with his quarrel with Crosby, the breach between Alexander and the Veitch sisters did not endure long, in spite of his initial determination never to speak to them again. However resolved he believed himself to be at the time, in reality, Alexander was neither inclined nor, in practical terms, able to sustain such distance. The Veitches occupied a central place within Selkirk society and avoidance was not easily maintained. Within a month, their friendship was restored, and he was again on terms 'as good […] as I would ever wish to be' (Letter 56).

Veitch's Inn stood at the foot of the West Port on the Edinburgh–Carlisle road, at once the principal point of arrival into Selkirk and within easy reach of the town's main thoroughfares. Before the tenure of John Veitch, Annie and Alison's father, the inn was operated by Henny Chisholm, the wife of town Baillie John Laing. In March 1782, the inn was advertised for lease in the *Caledonian Mercury*, stating:

> The house is most conveniently situate upon the turnpike-road, at the entry to the town; and the stables and other offices are very commodious. […] and if the tenant inclines to keep post-chaises, he may be accommodated with some very good acres for hay.

It was already operating as a coaching inn, a role for which it was ideally placed. It was a substantial property and a profitable business, offered as a going concern. John Veitch was in a good position to sustain and develop such a commercial enterprise. The son of a prominent merchant, he was already established in the same profession and also sat on the town council, giving him both commercial and civic standing in the community.

Veitch's Inn functioned as a focal point for the middling and professional inhabitants of the town, including William Laidlaw, Alexander and Mungo Park and their friends. The frequency with which the inn appears in their correspondence reflects its role as a habitual meeting place, where friendships were maintained. The inn, as a hub of social interaction, was also a place where news congregated. This helps to explain Annie and Alison Veitch's ability to circulate information and monitor and influence reputation. The inn might be seen as a mirror for local society.

This is illustrated by a well-known anecdote concerning a visit by Robert Burns to Selkirk in May 1787 whilst on a tour of Lowland Scotland. According to James Hogg, Burns and his companion Robert Ainslie, arriving wet and travel-worn, 'like twa droukit craws', were admitted to the inn but refused entry to a company already assembled within on account of their unkempt appearance. Only later was Burns' identity recognised, a mistake which one of those present, Ebenezer Clarkson, was said to regret for the rest of his life.[13] The story, though shaped by later retelling, turns on the ease with which judgement might be formed on limited grounds, and the embarrassment that could follow when those judgements proved misplaced. In reality, Robert Ainslie was the second cousin of John Veitch's wife Barbara, so it is entirely plausible that he, at least, was already known to their hosts.

The commercial success of the inn is suggested by its role as the venue of choice for local sales, meetings, dances and dinners. It appears to have flourished under the tenure of John Veitch, acquiring a prestige that is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the records of the Forest Club, founded there in 1788. The Forest Club was a coursing and dining club for the local elite. It held monthly meetings from April to November, with dinner upon the table at three o'clock and all formal business concluded by six – followed by drinking and conversation until late. Attendance at the meetings was regulated – fines were imposed for absence – and membership controlled by ballot. Veitch, as innkeeper, provided dinner at a fixed rate of £1; and assumed responsibility for practical arrangements, including notifying the presiding members in advance of each meeting. The records of the Club reveal the extent to which this relationship was formalised.



Figure 5. A painting of Veitch's Inn, Selkirk, by Sally Gerrard, based on historical descriptions.

Wine was ordered in bulk from Thomson & Co., wine merchants in Leith, and stored at the inn, with Veitch receiving an agreed allowance per bottle for its handling and service. Even the ownership of empty bottles was subject to negotiation – the Club agreeing in 1793 that Veitch could keep them – a resource that could be recycled and that had more value than might initially be supposed. The scale of provision for the Forest Club – amounting to several hundred bottles across a season – points to sustained and organised consumption.

Veitch's Inn was an integral part of the social world in which Alexander moved: a place of habitual resort from which he could not easily withdraw. In the meantime, he was enjoying a new level of acceptance within the Turnbull household following his dispute with Crosby. A week after his argument with Annie Veitch, he rode over to Hassendean Bank to visit Esther for the evening. It was 24 January 1794, a night long remembered in southern Scotland as the beginning of the 'Great Storm'.

Contemporary accounts describe a storm of remarkable violence, bringing heavy snowfall over several days and causing widespread devastation. Thousands of sheep were lost, many buried where they stood. James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, witnessed the aftermath and later recalled:

> Whole flocks were overwhelmed with snow, and no one ever knew where they were till the snow was dissolved, and they were all found dead […]. To relate all the particular scenes of distress that occurred during this tremendous hurricane is impossible – a volume would not contain them.[14]

The storm also claimed the lives of shepherds and others caught in the open. Alexander, having spent the evening with the Turnbulls, found himself 'storm stayed' through Saturday and into Sunday (Letter 56). At eleven o'clock that morning, he set out for Selkirk, in spite of Esther's attempts to dissuade him, as she 'entreated threatened wept and held', fearing for his safety. His concern was that his friends and family, unaware of his whereabouts, might think him lost. The decision proved to be a misjudgement. As Alexander later recounted, he and his horse soon became disoriented in the storm, and it was not until the evening that he reached Selkirk. The journey of 8 miles (12.8 km), which would ordinarily have been little more than an hour, took seven. Alexander eventually arrived home at 6 o'clock in the evening. He escaped with no worse than the effects of exposure – 'two frosted toes and a skinless face' – but was, by his own admission, fortunate to have survived at all. Writing to William a few weeks later, he described the scale of desolation following the storm:

> The storm in this part of the country has committed great devastation both amongst sheep and herds in Etterick and Yarrow, 2 herds have lost their lives and scarce a farmer but has lost a score or two of sheep – in Lammarmuire it is said 20 herds have perished. (Letter 56)

Alexander's next letter to William, dated 10 March 1794, opens in a pensive mood (Letter 57). Having received no word from his friend for several weeks, he reflects on the long duration of their friendship, clearly concerned that it might fall into neglect. His tone is more serious than usual, perhaps due to a heightened awareness of the fragility and impermanence of life following his recent scrape with mortality. Within his own social circle, John Tait, an elderly writer and former town baillie, whose decline Alexander had noted the previous year, had died, life having left him 'almost without him knowing it was gone'. This peaceful passing stood in stark contrast to the fate of Esther's sister Nelly, who was terminally ill. A letter written later in the year to William from Alexander Anderson's brother John confirms that she died at Prestonpans that summer. Death, it must have seemed, was ever at the door.

At the same time, his position within the Turnbull family had strengthened. Esther and her parents had come to Selkirk to dine with him, a gathering which suggests a growing degree of acceptance and, with it, a promise for the future. After dinner, at around seven o'clock, Alexander, accompanied by Esther and Alexander Anderson, went to the Misses Veitch's shop at the end of the Kirk Wynd to purchase crockery. There he amused himself by introducing Esther first as his aunt and then as his 'good mother of Hassendean Bank' – a 'good jock' which, as he noted, caused visible embarrassment to the sisters. The episode is characteristic of Alexander, at once reflecting the informality of his renewed friendship with them and his tendency towards social missteps. Whether intended as playful teasing or simply a spontaneous

moment of self-amusement, the effect was to place Esther conspicuously within the social arena where her reputation had so recently been under scrutiny. Alexander left the shop having purchased some stoneware vases. With Whitsun approaching, and entry into his own house imminent, such items formed part of the process of furnishing a new domestic space, marking a further step in the consolidation of his position.

Alexander, still worrying about their friendship, asked William to visit him in Selkirk. The March Fair came and went. William did not come, then or on any other day, in spite of Alexander's hopes. In late March, Alexander attended an evening of live entertainment at James Dun's 'New Rooms' at the top of the West Port. He wrote to William, enclosing a copy of the bill in the hope that he could persuade him to attend – but still, William did not come.

One Saturday in April, Alexander returned home from visiting Esther at Hassendean Bank to find a letter waiting for him. He wrote joyfully to William to tell him the news:

> […] the Post brought me a letter – would you wish to know who it is from – it is signed Mungo Park and dated from St Helena on his way to England. He has never had a days illness since he left Scotland, likes his situation well and we expect to hear from him in England in the course of a month. (Letter 60)

After months of uncertainty, the effect was immediate. 'I was so happy to hear of his welfare,' Alexander wrote, 'that after assembling my acquaintances we adjourned to Veitches and got drunk on the occasion'. The anxiety which had underwritten his earlier letters fell away at once. For the moment, at least, all was well.

For Mungo, returning home was less straightforward. Disembarking from the *Worcester* on 2 May, Mungo straightaway travelled from Gravesend to London; however, on reaching the Dixon's house, he found himself unable at first to knock: 'it required a great effort before I could lift the knocker […] I felt the same sensation […] as a criminal feels when the verdict of the jury is opened and Death or Life hangs in the next moment'.[15] When the door was opened by his sister Peggy, her mourning dress told him all he needed to know. Their father had died during his absence, a few days short of a year earlier, when Mungo was still in the first stage of his voyage. The news was not unexpected, but its immediate confirmation, combined with the sudden transition from 'the Bustle of a sea life to the stillness of the fire side', entirely overwhelmed him with grief and a sense of dislocation, leaving him unable to do anything for a time, 'a mere inactive lump'.

After he had recovered himself, Mungo's first act was to call on Sir Joseph Banks, presenting him with anatomically descriptive watercolours of fish and plant specimens which he had made and collected whilst away. During this

meeting, Mungo learned that Banks already had an opportunity in mind for him: that he might travel to Africa under the auspices of the African Association, accompanying a consul to the Gambia and proceeding inland towards 'Tombuctoo'.

Mungo's description of the proposed expedition suggests that it was still little more than an idea. His grasp of the details is uncertain: he conflates the role of the African Association with that of a government consul and identifies his point of departure as Fort St Joseph on the Senegal, rather than on the Gambia. More revealing, however, is the way in which he frames the venture. It is presented as a relatively short expedition, one that allowed him to return to Scotland beforehand and offered the prospect of distinction. 'If I succeed,' he wrote, 'I shall acquire a greater name than any […] ever did!' – a remark carrying a note of characteristic exaggeration. His conclusion was practical: he could see 'no reasonable opposition against accepting it'.[16]

This initial response is informed less by ambition than by immediacy and circumstance. Banks' proposal was simply an opportunity – novel, uncertain and not fully realised. It stands in marked contrast to the account Mungo would later give in his book, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, where his decision is framed as the expression of a longstanding desire for discovery. In May 1794, by contrast, it appears as something encountered rather than sought, accepted not through design or long-held ambition, but because, at this stage, he saw no compelling reason to refuse it.

Mungo's return to Scotland was brief. Writing to William Laidlaw on 23 June, Alexander Park offered a hurried apology for his recent silence:

> I beg ten hundred pardons for not acknowledging your favour long er[e] this […] I can only now say that I am in existence and must then shut the letter. My brother Mungo has been here and is now gone […].
> (Letter 61)

After months of expectation, the long-awaited reunion is recorded almost in passing, its brevity reflected in the letter itself. Promising further detail, Alexander signed off, the letter, like the visit, quickly ended.

He wrote again a week later, confirming the brevity of Mungo's stay and also the disruption it had caused to Alexander's usual routine. For the previous fortnight he had been fully occupied, to the extent that he had not even found time to visit Esther at Hassendean Bank. The reunion with his brother had taken precedence over all else. Yet the letter quickly returns to the familiar pattern of Alexander's life in Selkirk. Social events are discussed at length: the Common Riding, a traditional event commemorating the Battle of Flodden in 1513; and the prospect of a dance at Veitch's, for which Alexander expected to act as manager. Amongst all this, news of Mungo is reported almost incidentally: his plans were now settled: he was to leave London in August,

'with an intention to make Discoveries in the interior of Africa' under the commission of the African Association. Alongside this, Alexander's thoughts returned, as before, to Esther. His absence from Hassendean Bank had been keenly felt, and he now looked forward to his next visit, remarking that his feelings remained 'Semper Eadem'. Life, for him, had resumed its course.

For Mungo, however, the sense of transition remained. In July, with his anticipated departure approaching, he wrote to William from London, having had no opportunity to see him during his brief visit to Scotland. Although he anticipated further correspondence between them, this letter was intended as something more lasting: a reflection and lament on friendship, memory, and change which would serve as a memorial should he not return. The recent removal of the Laidlaw family to Hundleshope only weeks before lends it an added poignancy: Broadmeadows stood empty and the familiar landscape was already irrevocably altered. Looking back on their shared past, and forward to an uncertain future, Mungo wrote:

> […] how differand [*sic*] – sadly differant! is the only friendship I can now enjoy, from that which blissed our meetings and walks about Selkirk, and crown[e]d the night at Broadmeadows or Foulshiels, or a moonlight parting at the Quarryhole – of joys departed perhaps never to return how painfull the rememberance. (Letter 63)

Scotland itself was already receding, its places and friendships fixed in memory as he stood on the threshold of the unknown.

As it turned out, Mungo did not set sail for the Gambia until 22 May 1795, two years to the day after his father's death.

With Mungo's departure, the correspondence turns decisively back to Selkirk, where Alexander Park's life was entering a different phase. If Mungo's trajectory led outward into uncertainty, Alexander's was now directed inward – towards settlement, the consolidation of his career and, above all, marriage.

A letter of 1 September 1794 offers a vivid glimpse of the social and emotional dynamics at work in the months preceding the marriage. Esther, recently returned from Prestonpans, where her sister Nelly had died, had been brought into Selkirk through a network of familiar households. 'Mr Lang carried her the length of Bankhouse,' Alexander wrote, 'and when there Miss H came up in a chaise […] and brought her to Selkirk' (Letter 66). For Alexander, who had just been dining with a friend, her arrival at that moment was unexpected. Watching from his window as the chaise bearing Esther drew up on the High Street, he found himself momentarily overcome: 'Conceive my situation for my pen will not attempt to describe it'.

The meeting that followed the next morning at the Hendersons' was no easier. Alexander, attempting to adopt the manners expected of him in a social situation he clearly found awkward, instead found himself paralysed by self-

consciousness: 'I attempted to be polite and chearfull but it was forced […] I was confused, and the whole wheels of the conversation made a solemn pause' (Letter 66). The silence was broken only by 'the usual peal of laughter from the Master of the House', allowing the conversation to resume. Even in this moment of apparent intimacy, Alexander appears to have felt awkward and uncertain, his confidence faltering in the presence of the woman he was soon to marry.

Nevertheless, at this stage in their courtship, Alexander and Esther's future was already assumed. William Laidlaw's role in assisting Esther whilst in Prestonpans was not unremarked: Esther, Alexander reported, 'says she will never can make any return till she have the pleasure of thanking you in her own house in Selkirk' (Letter 66). The practicalities of that transition were already underway. Alexander asked William to procure 'one of the fashionable Ladies' hat belts' from Edinburgh, intending it as a gift for her. As usual, William acted as intermediary between Selkirk and the capital, his role essential even in absence. Through such small acts, the framework of a future household began to take shape.

At the same time, Alexander continued to prosper. His movements between Selkirk and Edinburgh, Hassendean Bank and the surrounding area depended upon ready access to horses, which in this period were obtained through a mixture of hire, exchange, and ownership. When Alexander returned to Selkirk in 1793, living in a small tenement, he probably relied upon hired horses – readily available through local post houses like Veitch's Inn and stablers; from where they could be taken for a journey and returned when no longer needed. Such arrangements formed part of a wider system of managed movement, linking towns like Selkirk to Edinburgh and beyond. The Laidlaw's Galloway, for example, travelled regularly between Hundleshope, Peebles and Edinburgh, carrying whichever member of the family needed her at the time.[17] During the course of the next two years, however, Alexander's financial circumstances were changing for the better. The renting of an entire house and his increasing professional demands made more permanent provision both possible and necessary. In the summer of 1794, Alexander bought a horse of his own, writing to William:

> I am in great hopes of seeing you here on Thursday and you must make it a point to stay with me that night that we may have an opportunity of cracking over the occurrences that are now past. If you can't come let me know how long you stay at Hundleshope and I shall endeavour (as I have now got a horse of my own) to see you. (Letter 65)

Hiring a horse for a day's riding would have cost Alexander a few shillings. Purchasing one represented a more substantial commitment. The price of saddle horses varied according to age, experience, and condition, but a serviceable

animal might be acquired for between £5 and £10 – a significant portion of what Alexander could expect to earn in a year at this stage of his career. Ownership also brought continuing costs, including feed and stabling. His ability to maintain a horse therefore marked a significant development, signalling a measure of independence in travel and a corresponding consolidation of status.

By the beginning of 1795, Alexander's intentions regarding marriage were resolved. Writing on 12 January, he reported securing a new house which he was already preparing 'for the reception of my Lucretia' (Letter 70). The decision to marry in the summer had been made and Alexander was looking ahead to June with a mixture of 'Pleasure and Anxiety', anticipating the culmination of a courtship that had begun almost five years before, when the Turnbulls stayed at Foulshiels to attend the Middlestead ball.

Alexander expected objection from William – 'I hear you saying its too soon, wait another year?' he wrote (Letter 70). But he also had an answer for William, insisting that 'when Love and opportunity invites' the proper course is to accept. His argument is reinforced by a further consideration: marriage offers not only happiness, but stability, guarding against the many errors into which a young man might otherwise fall. The appeal to Providence completes his justification, ultimately presenting his decision to marry, not as impulsive, but as timely and necessary. A brief reference to the recent marriage of Andrew Henderson, described as happy and well-matched, provides a contemporary example against which his own choice might be measured. Yet, as with earlier occasions, William's position remains uncertain. His anticipated doubt, and absence from similar events, form a counterpoint to Alexander's resolve.

As spring arrived, so preparations for Alexander and Esther's wedding progressed. Writing on 13 April, he reports a joyful visit to Hassendean Bank, where he was received by Esther and her companion, sixteen-year-old Nelly Scott, who was to be Esther's 'best maiden'. Alexander's happiness and excitement are palpable: marriage to Esther was no longer the subject of uncertainty or negotiation, but a tangible prospect to which he could look forward with certainty. She had become his partner in a shared future. 'Lucretia and myself,' he wrote, jointly extending an invitation to William, 'say that no man shall be more welcome than my Friend to whom I write and we both hope he'll accept the invitation and make it [h]is home at all times' (Letter 71). Their household is imagined as already formed, the hospitality offered to William assured.

By June, the final preparations for the wedding were underway. Alexander travelled to Edinburgh, where he spent time with William and a circle of old friends – James Rodger, George Lang and Andrew Scott, with whom he had shared lodgings in Writer's Court almost five years earlier. Though mentioned only briefly, the gathering has the feel of a final reunion before marriage: a return, however temporary, to a world he was about to leave behind.

William played a practical role in the preparations. Alexander entrusted him with the purchase of the wedding ring and relied upon him to arrange provisions for the wedding dinner. These tasks drew upon William's access to Edinburgh's commercial networks and placed him at the centre of the wedding arrangements despite his absence from Selkirk.

By the middle of the month, the wedding was imminent, and the tone of Alexander's letters reflects a marked narrowing of focus. Writing on 16 June, he offers only a brief apology for his silence, explaining that 'the thought of the happy day ingrosses all my attention' (Letter 74). The date now fixed – 'Friday eight days' – his attention turns to the practical details that remained to be settled. William is asked to send 'a code [*i.e.* cod] fish and six good haddocks' by carrier from Edinburgh, a request accompanied by a more personal note: 'Lucretia is very fond of fish and I promised her both these kinds on that day'. The letter closes with instructions to inform their mutual friends of the date, extending an informal invitation to the celebrations.

By the summer of 1795, Alexander Park stood on the threshold of the personal and professional life he had long worked towards. His marriage to Esther imminent, his attention was nonetheless divided between domestic happiness and professional advancement. On 19 June he wrote to William to tell him that he had applied for the commissary clerkship of Peebles, a post carrying greater income and standing. His application rested upon the support of powerful patrons, and Alexander was careful to cultivate them: 'I have applied to Mr Pringle M.P. for the county here […]. He has wrote to the Duke of Portland, Duke of Queensberry and Duke of Buccleugh in my favour' (Letter 75).

Marriage and promotion appear as parts of the same upward course. Characteristically, Alexander was keen to assist his friend. Although pursuing the appointment himself, he assured William that he would not stand in his way should William's interest prove stronger, adding that he would rather see the office in his hands than those of a stranger. If successful, he even proposed appointing him as depute. Throughout his career, Alexander had benefited from patronage and personal connections, and he sought whenever possible to help William do the same.

Unbeknownst to him, however, William was pursuing prospects of his own. Writing from Edinburgh a few days earlier, he urged his brother Walter to support his application for what he believed to be the vacant town clerkship of Peebles. The letter reveals a man increasingly frustrated by the slow progress of his career, still confined to the role of underwriter. William appears to have pinned his hopes on obtaining the clerkship. Success promised independence and advancement; failure meant continued uncertainty. Unlike Alexander, however, he lacked influential patrons and was forced to rely upon local connections and incomplete information.

William's brother Walter soon replied, having attempted to act on his behalf, but his reply can only have brought disappointment. The vacancy William hoped to secure did not in fact exist in the form he imagined. The offices had already been filled. Beyond vague assurances from the Laidlaws' landlord, Robert Campbell, that some small legal business might be directed his way if he set up in Peebles, there was little encouragement to offer. The contrast between the two friends is difficult to miss – both sought advancement in the same town; both hoped to establish themselves professionally. Yet where Alexander moved through established networks of influence with growing confidence, William's footing remained uncertain; opportunity appeared briefly before him only to disappear again.

On 26 June Alexander and Esther were married. William, although invited, did not attend. Three days later Alexander happily wrote to William: 'I am now actually matramonised' (Letter 77).

The wedding celebrations seem to have been lively enough. Of the evening's festivities, he records only that there had been dancing, drinking, and merriment, before adding: 'after this I can say no more – I was absent'. Beneath the light-hearted remark, however, lay a more reflective mood. The excitement of the wedding was already giving way to something steadier. With the guests departed, Alexander looked forward to what he called a 'little circle', expecting in domestic life a more 'rational enjoyment and substantial happyness' than could be found in the irregular habits of bachelorhood.

Alexander's transition to married life was followed almost immediately by professional success. Within days he was able to report that his application had succeeded and that his commission was being prepared. The achievement marked the culmination of years spent patiently establishing himself in local civic life. His first instinct was again to think of William, urging him to accept a deputation in Peebles. The opportunity, he insisted, was genuine and potentially transformative. Similar offers had been made before. Alexander had previously attempted to secure openings for William through acquaintances and professional contacts, believing that his friend's abilities deserved a firmer footing than life had so far provided. Now, as commissary clerk of Peebles, he was in a position to offer practical assistance.

This time there was an edge of concern beneath the encouragement. Speaking of others who had failed to prosper, Alexander remarked briefly that they had struck upon 'the rock upon which they all founder (inebriety)' (Letter 78). Alexander's comment, easily overlooked, is the most direct expression of anxiety regarding William's conduct in the surviving correspondence; and the only time that Alexander came close to stating openly a concern which is alluded to elsewhere. William did not reply to Alexander's letter. In itself, this was not unusual – but the importance of the matter at hand persuaded Alexander to press the matter again. The opportunity, he warned, might never

present itself a second time. Delay would only place it beyond reach. The offer was kept open, but not indefinitely.

The final surviving letter from Alexander Park, written on 20 July before he departed on a round of 'southern visits' following his wedding (something akin to an extended honeymoon), combines the ordinary concerns of married life with one last appeal. At Esther's request, he commissioned William to purchase a fashionable hat in Edinburgh, then turned once more to the unanswered question: 'I expect a particular answer about Peebles and in hopes that you have come to the resolution […]' (Letter 80).

The correspondence ends with Alexander newly married, newly appointed, and optimistic about the future, still hoping to draw his friend into the same sphere. Whether or not William ever answered is unknown. If he did, the letter has not survived. What remains is the record of Alexander's repeated attempts to help a friend whose path increasingly diverged from his own.

'Mr. Mungo Park (the Affrican Traveler)': after the letters, 1797–1810

Mungo Park arrived in London early on Christmas Day 1797, two years and seven months after his departure for Africa. Arriving whilst it was still dark, and reluctant to disturb his sister's household so early in the day, he wandered through the gardens of the British Museum. A number of years later, James Dixon told Park's biographer, John Whishaw, happened next:

> It happened that Mr Dixon, who had care of those gardens, went there early that morning upon some trifling business. What must have been his emotions on beholding at that extraordinary time and place, the vision, as it must at first have appeared, of his long-lost friend, the object of so many anxious reflections, and whom he had long numbered with the dead![18]

In reality, the news of Mungo's return from Africa had been known to Joseph Banks since October, around the same time that Mungo purchased passage from Antigua[19] aboard a mail ship for £73. As this was over twice the money Mungo had, he promised the rest on arrival in Falmouth and wrote to Banks to ensure the sum was advanced.[20] Given the friendship that existed between Banks and Dixon, it seems likely that Dixon too knew that Mungo was making his way homeward. Still, the sudden appearance of his friend in the museum gardens, emerging from the darkness like a ghost after more than two years' absence, must have come as quite a shock.

Mungo remained in London for the next six months, working with the African Association to prepare a summary account of his travels. An abridged version was circulated amongst members by the end of May and entered the public domain a month later. By the time he finally returned to Scotland in June 1798, he was already becoming a figure of considerable public interest.

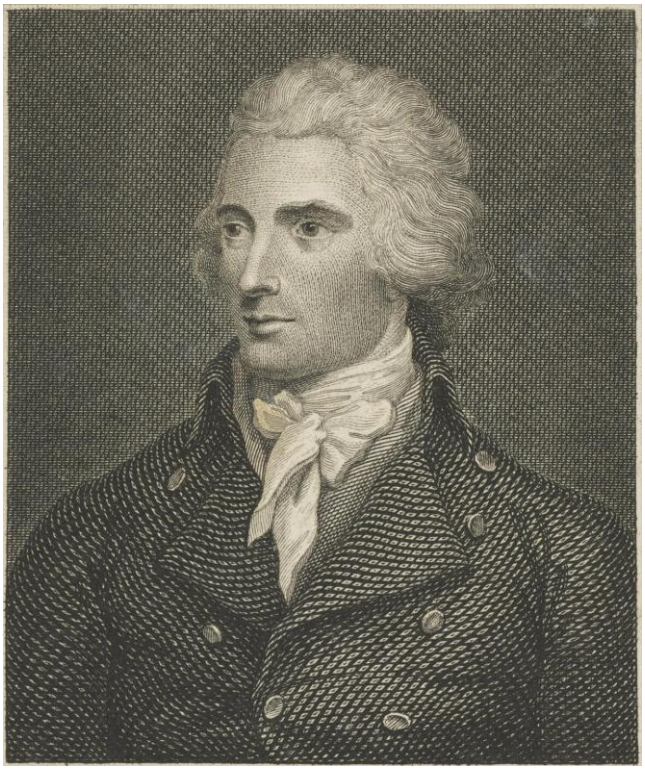


Figure 6. An engraving of Mungo Park, based on a portrait by Henry Edridge. (Courtesy of the National Galleries of Scotland)

A great deal had occurred in his family sphere whilst he had been away, and much would have appeared unfamiliar to him even though the letters from home had kept him informed of developments at Foulshiels and beyond. Whilst he had been in Africa, his brother Alexander had married Esther Turnbull. The following spring a son, named Mungo after the brothers' father, was born. Tragically, Esther died not long afterwards, most likely from complications following childbirth. At the age of twenty-two, Alexander found himself a widower. Esther's loss must have been keenly felt. Their attachment had endured for five years before their marriage and formed one of the central relationships of Alexander's young life. After less than a year together as husband and wife, she was gone. His widowhood was not to last indefinitely, however: he was already making preparations to marry for a second time when Mungo returned. His intended bride was none other than Alison Veitch, a match which Selkirk society might have anticipated, even if Alexander had not.

At Foulshiels, there remained only Elspeth Hislop, Mungo and Alexander's mother, and their younger brother John, who had taken over the management of the farm following their father's death in 1793.

Alexander Anderson had remained exactly where Mungo had left him. Whilst Mungo's life had been transformed by his years in Africa, Anderson had continued to practise surgery alongside his father in Selkirk. Some years earlier, whilst Mungo and Alexander Park sought their fortunes in London, he had remained in Edinburgh to complete his studies. Writing to William Laidlaw in February 1793, Mungo observed, 'You may tell Anderson he need not be affraind [*i.e.* afraid] of Surgeons Hall and if he had been here last week I could have assured him of an Indeaman, for there is now a scarcity of mates' (Letter 36). Opportunities existed for a young surgeon wishing to pursue a career at sea, just as Mungo himself had done. Indeed, his comment suggests that he could already imagine his friend sharing in such adventures. There is little evidence that Anderson ever entertained ambitions of that kind himself, however. Having qualified, he returned home to Selkirk to join his father's practice, following the path that had been intended for him from the outset. As Thomas Anderson's eldest son and eventual successor, his future was already mapped out.

Mungo's return home in the summer of 1798 must have been a happy one. Reunited with family and friends after more than two years abroad, he settled once again into familiar surroundings. He was, however, far from idle. Using the journals and notes he had carried home from Africa, and his memory to supply any gaps, he worked diligently to complete the account of his travels. The Park family later remembered him as being 'employed on his papers during the whole of the mornings [...] allowing himself little or no recreation, except a solitary evening walk on the banks of the Yarrow'.[21]

Nonetheless, Mungo still found time to visit friends in Selkirk, amongst them the Burgher Secession minister, the Reverend Dr George Lawson. As a child, Mungo had been considered by his parents for a career in Lawson's church, and the two men appear to have remained on good terms, as did Lawson and the Laidlaw family. Mungo spent many hours in the minister's house at the foot of the High Street, where they discussed his adventures and smoked cigars together.[22] Conveniently, the Anderson house stood directly opposite, making it a simple matter to call upon them at the same time; whilst his brother Alexander lived only a short distance further along the High Street. More than five years had passed since they had shared their student lives in Edinburgh. Now, for the time being at least, they found themselves together again.

Alexander Anderson may have changed little whilst Mungo was away, but the same could not be said of his younger sister Allison. The girl Mungo had left behind in 1795 had become a young woman. During the summer of 1798 he fell in love, perhaps for the first time since his youthful romance with Nancy Henderson had ended seven years before.

In the autumn, Mungo returned to London to oversee the final stages of his book. *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* was published by George Nicol in April 1799. It proved an immediate success. The first edition sold out

within weeks, and further editions quickly followed. In *Travels*, Mungo found an expression for his narrative voice. His style is recognisably that of the young student who wrote letters to William Laidlaw, but in *Travels* he found an audience far greater than any he could previously have imagined.

By the beginning of May 1799, Mungo's work for the African Association was complete and his pay received. His business in London finished for the time being, he returned once more to Scotland to prepare for his marriage. The previous summer, Joseph Banks had attempted to engage him in a Government-backed expedition to New South Wales. Mungo had declined. He gave no explanation that Banks considered satisfactory, despite repeated attempts to discover his true reasons. Increasingly frustrated, Banks eventually wrote:

> You who are acquainted with the real Motives of your now declining an Engagement, which till your absence from London you always appear'd to me to sollicit with Eagerness are alone able to determine upon the propriety of your Conduct.[23]

Banks had his suspicions. James Dixon had informed him that Mungo was involved in a love affair in Scotland – on this occasion at least, Banks' informant had judged matters correctly.

Mungo Park and Allison Anderson were married in Selkirk on 2 August 1799. The kirk session record reflected Mungo's new status: 'Mr Mungo Park (The Affrican Traveler) in the Parish of Selkirk and Miss Allison Anderson gave in their names in the Church of Selkirk in order to marriage'.[24] Their marriage was witnessed by his elder brother Archibald and Thomas Anderson, Mungo's former master. In marrying Allison, Mungo consolidated his place within a family that had already played a central role in his life. Thomas Anderson, under whom he had first learned his profession, was now his father-in-law; Alexander Anderson, his close friend of many years, his brother-in-law.

The newly married couple took up residence at Foulshiels rather than establish a household of their own in Selkirk. Throughout his adult life, Mungo returned repeatedly to Foulshiels, and it seems to have remained the place he thought of as home.

Mungo's work for the African Association had concluded; *Travels* had brought both fame and substantial financial reward – a thousand guineas for the first edition alone. Between his earnings from *Travels* and the sums already received for his African journey, Mungo found himself in the unusual position of possessing both reputation and financial independence – for the moment at least, there was no pressing need to decide upon his next direction in life.

For the next two years, he lived at Foulshiels. Exactly what he did during this period has never been entirely clear. The image usually presented is of the African Traveller, newly returned from his adventures, living quietly on the proceeds of *Travels*. The reality appears rather different. Parish registers of the

time describe him as 'Dr Park' or 'Surgeon' on those occasions when he was present in the kirk to witness a baptism or marriage, which may suggest that he was practicing his profession. If so, he was probably assisting in Thomas Anderson's practice – having served his apprenticeship under Anderson, he would have been familiar with the work and many of his patients.

The arrangement would have made sense. Mungo had no immediate need of substantial employment. *Travels* had proved an extraordinary success, and the money was still coming in. In January 1800, he travelled to London to meet with his publisher, visiting Joseph Banks whilst there. Clearly, in spite of his settled life at Foulshiels, he still hoped that Banks might be able to offer an opportunity which would provide both employment and direction. Banks had little to offer beyond encouragement and advice, urging Mungo to consult any influential friends in London who might be disposed to assist him. Nicol, on the other hand, had better news. By this time three editions of *Travels* had been published and a fourth was pending. Happily for Mungo, Nicol informed him that the profits due from the first three editions would amount to £2,000. It was an enormous sum of money. Had money alone been the object, Mungo might have considered himself fortunate indeed.[25]

Money, however, was not the chief problem – it was what came next. Since leaving Edinburgh in 1792, Mungo had lived largely by opportunity rather than long-term design. The voyage to Sumatra aboard the *Worcester* and the expedition to Africa had both arisen unexpectedly, ultimately the work, as Mungo would have understood it, of Providence. Now, settled at home with a wife and growing family, he found himself uncertain of what course to pursue. Writing to Banks on 31 July 1800, he admitted that he had 'not as yet found any situation in which I could practice to advantage as a surgeon'.[26] He was already practising as a surgeon; what he lacked was an independent position and a clear direction. In Selkirk, there was little prospect of either. Thomas Anderson possessed an established practice and Alexander Anderson, as eldest son, was his natural successor. Mungo could assist, but he could not compete with the interests of the family, and so could never hope to build a future of his own there as a surgeon.

In the New Year of 1801, he made another attempt to solve the problem, travelling south to London and spending almost three months there soliciting the help of friends and patrons, as Banks had advised. Initially, he believed that a surgeon's position in New South Wales was virtually secured, writing to Allison about the society she might expect there. In his own mind, at least, the appointment appears to have been a real and imminent prospect. Before long, however, he discovered his mistake. There was no vacancy after all.

Mungo's disappointment is evident in the letters he sent home, as is his growing disillusionment with the 'friendship' upon which he had been encouraged to rely. He had been assured more than once that the position was his, yet nothing had come of it. By the end of March, he was ready to abandon

the effort. Allison was expecting their second child and he concluded that he would gain nothing by remaining in London. He wrote to his wife,

> I have done all that I possibly could have done and have received plenty of fair words and generale promises. […] everyone makes me sure of success and without doing anything on my behalf wonders why I did not succeed.[27]

The experience left him bitterly disappointed, but perhaps not entirely surprised. Mungo valued true friendship deeply. The patronage networks of London were not friendship as he understood it.

There were other possibilities. He briefly considered military service but quickly dismissed it. Whatever attractions such a career might hold, it would take him away from Allison and his young family too often. Mungo had crossed oceans before and would do so again. He was prepared to be absent for a time and for a purpose; what he did not want was a life spent perpetually away from home and those he loved.

Mungo had another idea, the beginnings of a plan. In January 1801, he had been assured during a social gathering in Edinburgh by a relative of Lord Home, the duke of Buccleugh's son-in-law, that a farm might be obtained for him under the duke if nothing more suitable presented itself. Farming held a strong appeal for Mungo. He had been raised on a farm, two of his brothers were farmers, and there is no reason to suppose that he lacked either the knowledge or inclination for the work. Accordingly, he pursued the matter on his return to Scotland, but ultimately without success. It seems unlikely that he struggled to raise the necessary capital given his proceeds from *Travels*. Nevertheless, he appears to have concluded that the costs of setting up a farm were too great. Later, in a letter to Banks, he wrote that the high price of cattle and the enormous rents expected by landowners had made farming 'rather a dangerous speculation'. The outcome was that this scheme, like the notion of a life in New South Wales, came to nothing. Once again, Mungo found himself, as he put it, 'compleatly at a stand'.[28]

The impasse was finally broken in September by the death of Robert Marshall, surgeon in Peebles. Marshall and his half-brother, Dr James Reid, had long dominated medical practice in the town. With his partner gone, Reid – who was also the provost of Peebles – quickly sought a replacement, the business being too extensive for one man alone. Accompanied by his father-in-law, Mungo travelled to Peebles to discuss the vacancy with Reid. Eager to admit him to his practice, Reid offered the same arrangement that had existed with Marshall: half of the riding and one third of the profits. Mungo refused to accept an unequal share, and negotiations quickly broke down.

Reid's proposal would have provided immediate security, had that been Mungo's sole concern. Instead, he chose a more uncertain course. Echoing

William Laidlaw's decision six years earlier, he resolved to establish himself in Peebles on his own account. What role William played in this decision, if any, is impossible to know. It is difficult to believe, however, that their friendship had not been renewed after Mungo's return from Africa. Reid was the Laidlaws' doctor and, as provost, a man whom William would inevitably have encountered in the course of his work. He was also the man to whom William had looked when seeking the position of town clerk in 1795. It may even have been William who first drew Mungo's attention to the opportunity created by Marshall's death. If so, Mungo's decision to move to Peebles may have been rather less circumstantial than has generally been supposed. The Parks and Laidlaws remained firm friends, and Peebles was by no means an unfamiliar place. Alexander Park, for example, had visited Hundleshope often whilst on business in the town, sometimes staying for several days with the family he had known since childhood. The ties of friendship between the families were enduring.

Mungo Park has frequently been described as disliking the life of a country surgeon. There is some truth in that assessment, particularly when it came to night calls: he would come to dread the knock at the door and the ride out in darkness and bad weather. Yet he was perfectly familiar with the profession and was prepared to make a career of it when circumstances required. The Parks moved to Peebles at the beginning of October, their second child, Elizabeth, just a month old. Mungo took a house in town; and set up his surgery and dispensary on the High Street.

Shortly after arriving, he wrote to Banks, emphasising his willingness to embrace another opportunity should one arise. At the same time, however, he had committed himself to building a life in Peebles. He was, by his own admission, tired of a life of idleness; perhaps necessity also played a part. Perhaps, too, he saw in Peebles what William Laidlaw had seen before him: a growing town in which an ambitious young professional might establish himself and prosper. A surgeonship in Peebles may not have been his first thought, but for the first time since returning from Africa, he had found a clear direction.

As Mungo sought to establish himself as an independent surgeon, the Laidlaws were themselves beginning a new chapter. At the start of 1801, William's father James and brother Walter relinquished their tenancy at Hundleshope and moved to Peebles. James, now in his seventies, intended to retire; Walter would shortly establish his own farming business. Their long association with the farm formally ended on 13 May, when all outstanding business was settled in the house of Miss Ritchie, vintner, on Northgate.[29] Thus, when Mungo arrived in Peebles, he found himself amongst familiar faces. The Laidlaws, like the Parks, were in the midst of a transition from one stage of life to another.

William had played an important role in his family's move. Acting in a professional capacity, he assisted his father and brother in managing the legal and financial arrangements surrounding their departure from Hundleshope.

During the last six years, he had continued to build his practice in Peebles. Alongside the ordinary business of an independent writer, he had secured a number of long-term commissions, acting as local agent for the Scots Militia Insurance Company and issuing annual certificates for the payment of Hair Powder Tax on behalf of the Stamp Office in Edinburgh. The latter was a respectable government appointment, generally entrusted to writers of standing and influence, such as Andrew Henderson the younger, who held the office in Selkirk. William may have obtained the commission through the assistance of his cousin James in Edinburgh, who had promised upon William's leaving his office to help him whenever he could. William was no longer the aspiring law clerk of earlier years, but an established professional man in his own right.

In some respects, Peebles was a reconnection with the past. After years spent pursuing separate paths, the Parks and Laidlaws were once again neighbours. The Laidlaws occupied a house at the foot of Northgate, which they rented from another branch of the family. Mungo took a house at the opposite end of the street, at the head of Northgate. The distance between them was but a few minutes' walk.

The circumstances of Mungo and William's lives, however, were no longer those of the young men who had once exchanged letters between Edinburgh and Selkirk, wondering what the future might hold. Both men had now achieved the ambitions they had discussed in youth. William was an independent writer with a successful practice and a measure of public standing. Mungo had indeed seen the world, as once he had imagined; returning from Africa with a reputation that extended far beyond the Borders. He was now establishing himself as an independent surgeon. The two men were no longer imagining their futures; they were living them.

Superficially, they had converged at the end point of their earlier ambitions. In other respects, however, the intervening years had taken them in different directions. Marriage occupied a central place in the lives of the Park brothers. Alexander's long attachment to Esther Turnbull had ended in a marriage which had occupied his thoughts for years beforehand. His second marriage, to a woman he had known for as long, emphasises the value that he placed on long-term attachments. Mungo had likewise married Allison Anderson, whom he had known since childhood; and was now raising a young family of his own. Home, wife and children increasingly formed the centre of his world.

William's course was different. Years earlier, as Alexander drew near to marriage, William had counselled caution – advice which Alexander ignored. William himself remained unmarried. In the spring of 1801, around the time that his family moved to Peebles, he fathered a son with Helen Lauder, the teenage daughter of a local tailor. In December, Helen appeared before the kirk session, naming William as the father. It was usual in such circumstances for both parents to appear before the kirk session, in the expectation that they

would confess their actions, repent, and submit to public rebuke. When summoned repeatedly before the kirk session, however, William simply declined to appear, refusing for several years to acknowledge publicly what was already common knowledge in the town. This type of behaviour was characteristic of William, who throughout his life displayed a marked reluctance to submit to authority when it conflicted with his own judgement. Be it family expectations, professional advice or kirk discipline, he preferred to proceed according to his own convictions.

Such conduct did not prevent professional success. There is no indication that William's standing as a writer suffered materially. His business prospered and would continue to do so during his lifetime. His personal reputation was another matter. His conduct regarding his son suggest a man willing to disregard convention when it obstructed his wishes. Concerns over William's drinking, which Alexander Park had voiced years earlier, were also apparent.

Such concerns are illustrated by an incident that arose in 1804, when William pursued his servant, Agnes Scott of Selkirk, through the Sheriff Court after she deserted his service. Scott alleged, amongst other complaints, that she had been sent out at all hours of the night and day to procure alcohol on her master's behalf and had not been adequately fed.[30] Considered in isolation, Agnes' allegations prove little: servants and masters frequently exchanged accusations in disputes of this sort. Set alongside Alexander Park's earlier remarks regarding William's drinking, however, they add to a broader impression of a man whose private conduct might attract criticism. In a small Borders town, such matters can scarcely have passed without comment. In this instance, Agnes Scott lost her case. The court, presided by Sheriff Walter Scott, ultimately found in William's favour and ordered her return to his service for the remainder of her contract.

William's irregular conduct, set against the moral compass which directed the Park brothers, does not imply, necessarily, that the friendship between Mungo and William cooled. The surviving evidence is silent on the subject. It is nonetheless difficult to avoid the impression that the men who found themselves together again in Peebles had been changed by life. Their shared upbringing remained, but their responses to adulthood increasingly diverged.

William is absent from Mungo's surviving correspondence from these years, their friendship in Peebles lost to time. During this period, Mungo formed a close friendship with Alexander Williamson (William's cousin and fellow writer), and he is mentioned frequently, and with evident warmth, in Mungo's letters to his wife. Like Mungo, he was a young professional, married with children, attempting to balance professional responsibilities with family life. Whether their friendship originated through William or developed independently cannot now be known. What is clear is that Williamson had become an important part of Mungo's circle in Peebles, a man, perhaps, who exhibited the same personal values as he himself held dear.

Mungo settled quickly into life as a country surgeon. Once his surgery and dispensary were established, he took his brother-in-law Thomas Anderson as an apprentice. Thomas had turned fifteen at the end of October 1801 and was now beginning the same professional journey that Mungo himself had undertaken under Thomas' father some fifteen years earlier. The arrangement benefited both families. Mungo gained an apprentice, whilst his father-in-law secured the next stage of his son's medical training. The Andersons compensated for the loss to their own practice by taking on a second apprentice that year.

Like any country surgeon, Mungo divided his time between patients in the town and journeys into the surrounding countryside, riding long distances in all weathers to visit the sick and injured. It was a life he later professed not to enjoy, particularly the long rides on dark winter nights, yet he had entered the profession with full knowledge of its demands. In return, it offered steady employment and the prospect of an independent future. Mungo is also said to have pursued his love of botany whilst resident in Peebles, in the hope of succeeding Dr Rutherford in the chair of botany at Edinburgh University.[31] Family life, too, appears to have prospered. In the spring of 1803, Allison gave birth to the couple's third child, Thomas, named after his grandfather, who witnessed his baptism in Peebles kirk.

In September, two years after the death of his half-brother Robert Marshall, Dr James Reid died. Reid's death removed Mungo's only established rival in the town and opened the possibility of acquiring the whole medical business in Peebles. He immediately set about making preparations for the future, including the purchase of a second horse, presumably with a view to extending his practice. For a brief moment, the future appeared certain and secure. Fate, however, intervened. Barely a fortnight after Reid's death, a letter arrived at the Park household from Joseph Banks requesting Mungo's attendance in Westminster. When he travelled south, he discovered the reason. During an interview with Lord Hobart, the Colonial Secretary, Mungo learned that the Government was considering an expedition into the interior of Africa. Writing afterwards to Banks on 20 October 1803, Mungo summarised the proposal plainly enough: 'When I waited on Lord Hobart, I found that his Lordship wished me to take another trip into the Centre of Africa, with a view to discover the termination of the Niger'.[32]

The proposal laid before him was not one he accepted immediately. By the autumn of 1803, life in Peebles had begun at last to assume a settled shape. He was no longer the obscure young surgeon who had sailed for Africa eight years earlier, but a husband, father and established country practitioner with very much more to lose. Reluctant to give a definite answer before he had consulted with his wife, Mungo returned to Peebles.

The weeks which followed were passed in discussion, not only within the Park household, but with the Andersons. From the beginning, Mungo appears to have conceived of the proposed expedition with Alexander beside him. The

reasons for this are not difficult to understand. No Briton living knew better than Mungo the realities of travel in the African interior. Whatever the fame and romance that had since attached itself to his first journey, his experience had been one characterised by frequent peril. He had suffered alone the trials of imprisonment, illness and robbery – experiences he did not recall lightly. It is understandable that he would envisage a return in the company of the brother-in-law whose judgement and companionship he trusted above all others.

Towards the end of 1803, Mungo and Alexander travelled to London. At first, they lodged with the Dixon family, as Mungo had done during every other visit to the capital. This arrangement did not last long, as in early December they took lodgings at 16 Bury Street. 'We are at very little expense in our lodging and we are much more comfortable being by ourselves,'[33] Mungo informed Allison. The Dixons had perhaps expressed their reservations about Mungo embarking on a second expedition, knowing how much he had endured in his first.

More than a decade had passed since his first uncertain arrival in London as a Scottish student in search of opportunity. The city no longer intimidated him: he was by now familiar with its 'hubbub and confusion'. For Alexander Anderson, however, who had travelled there for the first time, London must have seemed vast, and very different from the home he had left behind. It appears that he was not altogether impressed, as Mungo wrote to Allison, 'Sandy desires me to tell you that his brain will be turned before it is long with all the cheating, knavery etc. of London'.[34]

Hopeful of getting away before long, Mungo and Alexander began their preparations, which included having clothes made, and buying £20 worth of silver rings and other goods for barter. Time passed, however, and there was no news. Mungo had experienced delays on both occasions he had travelled abroad. This time it seemed that the expedition might be stalled altogether. At the beginning of February 1804, the expedition was postponed until the following dry season, which meant that it would not now commence until the autumn at the earliest. At the beginning of March, Mungo returned home to Peebles. He took with him a Moroccan interpreter, Sidi Omback Boubi, whom he had engaged at the beginning of the year to teach him Arabic. This might be seen as one of Mungo's first precautionary measures ahead of the proposed second expedition. During his first journey, some of his greatest difficulties had occurred amongst the Muslim 'Moors' of the western Sahel, whose suspicion of European travellers he never entirely forgot. Two months later, Mungo finally closed his surgery in Peebles and removed with his family and Omback Boubi to Foulshiels, there to await news from Westminster.

Alexander Anderson, meanwhile, had not travelled back to Scotland. Possibly through the intervention of his brother John, now a naval surgeon, he had secured an appointment at the Royal Hospital at Haslar, Gosport.



Figure 7. A view of the Royal Hospital, Haslar, Portsmouth, 1799.
(Courtesy of the Wellcome Trust)

Alexander wrote to his father on 3 April, after he had taken lodgings with a Mr Horn on South Street, the principal road leading down towards the harbour and docks. Amidst a lengthy discussion of local news back home in Selkirk he remarked:

> It gives me less and less concern what shall befall me, as I would wish to devote myself to him who hath purchased me (I hope) with his blood. My anxiety is that I perform the duties that are incumbent upon me in the situation Providence is pleased to place me in. […] I have only got 27 patients in hospital in my immediate care. Write soon. I am much obliged to you for the news contained in the letter.[35]

For almost ten years Alexander had experienced little of professional life beyond Selkirk and the routines of provincial practice. Haslar embodied medicine upon an altogether different scale. Beside Portsmouth Harbour, amidst the continual noise and movement of Britain's wartime naval world, the vast hospital resembled a town in itself. Sailors, officers, servants and artificers moved constantly between the harbour, the hospital and the town beyond the

bridge. Here the ongoing war with France was immediately visible; and the speed and volume at which patients passed through the wards was far removed from the familiar rhythms of Selkirk.

Local newspapers preserve something of the life surrounding the hospital during Alexander's residence there. Advertisements frequently appeared seeking contractors able to supply coal, vegetables, bedding, brushes and charcoal, amongst many other things, all required to sustain the enormous establishment, at the time the largest brick building in Europe. Regular auctions disposed of the clothes and effects of dead seamen whose families might never learn of their fate. The bridge connecting Gosport with Haslar became the subject of public dispute during Alexander's tenure, as it was deemed to be unsafe. Plans were afoot to remove it entirely and he may well have crossed the 'Hospital Lake' to travel over to Portsmouth using the old ferry service, which was reinstated due to the dangers of the treacherous bridge.

Alexander appears to have adapted quickly to his new, independent circumstances. During his residence at Gosport he formed a close attachment to Ann Shepherd of Portsea, the daughter of a Presbyterian family long established in the area. The surviving evidence is fragmentary, yet enough remains to suggest that Ann occupied an important place in Alexander's life during the year before his departure for Africa.[36] Alexander's life had begun to take on a distinct shape of its own.

When the autumn arrived, Mungo Park was once more summoned to London. He met with Lord Camden on 26 September, and afterwards wrote to Alexander at Gosport:

> I had a long conversation with his Lordship […] he said that if I would undertake to go on an Embassy or rather a Journey of discover to the Niger [...] a sufficient force would be allowed to me and if you went with me he said Government would have no difficulty in allowing you one thousand Pounds and four thousand to me to be settled on my wife and family in case of my Dicease.[37]

The scale of the proposal had altered considerably. The Government now intended that the expedition proceed with military support, formal appointments and substantial financial backing. Nothing suggests that Mungo approached the expedition in a spirit of unmitigated enthusiasm. The decision to proceed was, evidently, extremely difficult for him. Allison was pregnant once more with their fourth child – she and their three young children were the centre of his world. Whatever ambition or curiosity still drew him towards Africa, he understood perfectly well the risk that he might never return. 'The only uneasiness I feel is on account of my Dear Allie and when I think of her I feel that I am indeed a Coward, to part with her seems the very bitterness of Death,' he wrote to Alexander.[38]

Following his interview with Camden, Mungo remained in London whilst the terms of the expedition took on a more definite form. During the week following the meeting, he prepared a lengthy memorandum setting out the proposed objects of the enterprise and the means by which he proposed to accomplish them. The document showed how greatly his thinking had altered since 1795, when he took the opportunity offered by Banks without the benefit of experience. The second expedition would not be that of an isolated traveller moving through unfamiliar, often perilous country; but a Government-backed enterprise to secure geographical knowledge and commercial advantage alike. Mungo's memorandum proposed not only to determine the course of the Niger; but to examine the routes by which trade might effectively be carried into the African interior, the commodities available there, the profits likely to arise from commerce and the wider prospects for British influence.

This time, Mungo tried to mitigate the risk of the dangers he might encounter in Africa, leaving nothing to chance so far as it was in his power. His memorandum cited soldiers, carpenters, beasts of burden, firearms, medicines and instruments, as well as goods and materials sufficient both to pay homage to local rulers as he passed through their territory and to construct boats upon the Niger. His study of Arabic under Sidi Omback Boubi also formed part of the same effort towards preparation and control.

Ultimately, however, success depended upon reaching the interior before the rainy season began in mid-June. Every delay in London carried its own cost in time.

On 17 January 1805, Allison gave birth at Foulshiels to their fourth child, Archibald. Five days later, Mungo Park, Alexander Anderson and George Scott left London for Portsmouth. Scott, a native of Selkirkshire whose father tenanted the farm at Singlie near Yarrow, was a talented draughtsman several years younger than Mungo. He had resigned a position with the Ordnance in London in order to accompany the expedition. It is possible that Walter Scott, who had recommended him for the post at the Ordnance, also played a role in bringing him to Mungo's attention. Two weeks later, on the morning of 31 January 1805, the party sailed for the Gambia aboard the *Crescent*, along with an armed escort, the *Eugenie*.

The expedition's departure marked the beginning of a prolonged period of uncertainty for the families and friends left behind in Scotland. Letters were written home whenever an opportunity presented itself: at Port Praya Bay on the island of St Jago; at Kayee on the River Gambia; at Batou near Tambacounda. Travelling slowly between West Africa and Britain, these letters arrived months after they had been written, confirming only that their authors had still been alive and well when they put pen to paper.

The first letters to arrive from Africa brought a measure of reassurance, as intended. The travellers missed their families and home, but all were well and in good spirits. On 29 May Mungo wrote to Allison:

> I am happy to inform you that we are now half through our journey without the smallest accident or unpleasant circumstance. […] by the 27 of June we expect to have finished all our travels by land and when we have once got afloat on the River we shall conclude that we are embarking for England.[39]

This optimistic forecast of how the remainder of the journey would unfold was far from the reality of the situation – the rainy season was imminent and the Niger weeks away. The expedition had left Britain too late.

Park's fame meant that the expedition attracted considerable public attention in Britain, and reports concerning its progress quickly became a matter of national interest. The press exclaimed, weeks after the fact, that: the *Eugenie* and the *Crescent* had arrived at Goree, on the coast of Africa, on 28 March; on their passage, the expedition had visited the island of St Jago, where Mr Park purchased forty-four asses for his journey; and the *Crescent* was to sail on 6 April from Goree up the Gambia with that gentleman, and forty soldiers were to accompany him.[40] For family and friends at home, such notices represented more than mere news. They offered intelligence as to the fate of husbands, brothers, sons and friends, often long before letters from them arrived.

1805 passed by. At first there was little reason for alarm. The expedition had been expected to last as long as eighteen months, and communication with West Africa was notoriously irregular. On their route from the Gambia to the Niger, there would have been few opportunities to send letters and even if such an opportunity arose, it might be months before they found their way to the Borders. There was an extent to which silence was expected, even if family and friends wished otherwise. The Parks had been through the process of waiting with anxiety for news of Mungo's safety twice before – and both of those times, he had returned to them. As the spring of 1806 gave way to summer, and summer to autumn, however, the lack of any letters from Mungo or Alexander, or of any official reports, became difficult to ignore.

In the absence of reliable information, rumours began to circulate in the press. In May, the newspapers reported that Alexander Anderson had died on the banks of the Niger. Park himself remained alive and was proceeding down the river. John Anderson, who was in Londonn when he saw the letter reporting the death of his brother, wrote to his father: 'To attempt consolation on the loss of such a son and brother. […] That he has left no wife, no children to weep for him me comforts small compared to the purity and fullness of his soul'.[41] On further enquires to the Government, however, John learned that there was no official account to support the report of Alexander's death. On hearing that Banks himself considered the report to be false, it seemed that there may still have been reason for hope, after all.

More troubling reports followed during the summer. In July, a story reprinted from the *Charlestown Courier* claimed that Park and his companions had been executed in the interior by the king of Sego:

> The King of this place, after carrying him into every part of the city had cruelly and brutally murdered him, together with his attendants. This intelligence is received from traders in the interior country, on whom reliance might be placed.[42]

This story, widely reported in the British press, rested upon uncertain foundations. No witness to this purported event was identified and once again, no official confirmation followed. The story joined a growing body of contradictory intelligence from which readers –and loved ones – were expected to discern the truth. John Anderson, who was still working to establish the facts, wrote to his father on 18 July:

> I have this moment in Mr Dicksons […] seen a letter from Mr Alexander Park mentioning the distressing state you're all in in consequence of the reports in the News Papers respecting our dear friend – we have not been able to trace from whence the information came but no official account has been seen.[43]

The fear and uncertainty caused by the lurid newspaper stories, combined with the absence of any reliable intelligence from the interior, must have been almost unbearable for the Anderson and Park families.

Then, in September 1806, publication in the British press of extracts of a letter Mungo had written to Dr John Heddle, staff surgeon of the Royal African Corps, provided the Parks and Andersons with the first confirmed news of the expedition. It had taken it not one month but four to reach the Niger. By the time it finally arrived at Sansanding on 27 September 1805, most of the Europeans in the party were dead from fever or dysentery. Mungo Park and Alexander Anderson were among the survivors, but a month later Anderson too had succumbed to disease.[44]

Writing to her father from Myreton, the home of Mungo's sister Jean, Allison attempted to comfort her father in his grief. 'I am very unfit to write you upon this melancholy occasion,' she wrote, adding, 'The anxiety I have suffered upon my worthy Husband's account is beyond what I can express'.[45] Confirmation came towards the end of the year as the personal letters written at Sansanding by Mungo to his loved ones finally arrived. The first to receive the news from Mungo's own hand was probably his sister Peggy, to whom he wrote on 18 November 1805:

> I sit down in great haste to write a few lines to you to let you know that I am still alive and going forward in my journey. The Rainy Season came on us during the march from the Gambia to the Niger and the most part of the soldiers died of the fever. I am extremely sorry to say that my dear friend Mr Anderson and likewise Mr Scott are both dead.[46]

Enclosed was a letter for Sir Joseph Banks, which James Dixon duly delivered. Amongst the other letters which found their way home were those written to Allison and her father Thomas Anderson, Jean Park Thomson and George Scott's father William, tenant at Singlie, who had already lost two daughters in a drowning tragedy a few years earlier.

Whilst the Andersons and Parks grieved for Alexander, Mungo's fate remained unknown. Life, however, continued at home regardless. Mungo's wife and children had no financial independence without him and were reliant on family for support. In the spring of 1806 James Dixon, who Mungo had appointed joint attorney with his brother Alexander, petitioned Government for the first funds due to Allison – the sum of £1000 – according to the agreement made before Mungo's departure for Africa. The instalment had been due more than a year earlier. 'The delay that has taken place in the payment of this money has caused serious inconvenience to the wife and family of the said Mungo Park,' the memorandum stated, 'whose affairs were assessed for an annual expenditure of £150 a year from the time of his departure'.[47] The money was subsequently paid.

The years that followed brought little clarity. Newspapers repeatedly announced Park's death, only for other reports to suggest that he remained alive. He was said to have reached Timbuctoo. One report placed him in the West Indies. Another claimed that a European traveller with a 'light red beard' seen upon the frontiers of Abyssinia was none other than Park himself. Even reputable newspapers struggled to separate fact from conjecture. In Scotland, the Parks and Andersons moved on as best they could. They celebrated another union between their families in 1807, when on 22 October the youngest Park daughter Isabella married John Anderson. The wedding was witnessed by John's brother Thomas and Alexander Park, now a father of five children – of whom the youngest, a daughter baptised Esther, was just two months old.

The following year, the Government paid the remainder of the funds promised to Allison Anderson and her father in the event of Mungo and Alexander's deaths. The payments were published in the national press as part of the Civil List expenses on 2 April: 'To the wife of Mungo Park the African Traveller, pursuant to agreement with the War Secretary - £3236 10s 0 and to the father of ____ Anderson, who accompanied Mr Park, in prosecuting the discoveries in the Interior of Africa - £1085 5s 0'. The sums of money paid represented the agreement from 1804, subject to the standard flat rate of interest

at 4 per cent and excluding the £1000 that Allison had received earlier. The Committee of Supply, who issued the money with such accuracy, did not know Alexander's first name. In the public mind, he had already been consigned to the forgotten past, merely another casualty of an overseas commission – a dangerous exercise at the best of times.

There was still no sign or news of Mungo Park. As known facts receded, speculation flourished. Park's disappearance became a matter of public interest; the less that was known, the more elaborate the stories became. To newspaper editors he was an ongoing mystery. To the reading public he became a figure suspended somewhere beyond the limits of certain knowledge, neither conclusively dead nor demonstrably alive. While newspapers debated the fate of Scotland's most celebrated traveller, those closest to him were forced to continue their lives beneath a cloud of uncertainty that never entirely dispersed.

The financial settlement made by the Government in 1808 reflected the likelihood that Mungo Park was dead. Yet probability was not certainty. The Government was keen to discover the outcome of the expedition, in the hope, should Park prove to be dead, that his intelligence regarding the interior of Africa might have survived. In 1810, Charles Maxwell, the British Colonial Administrator and Governor of Senegal, received news of Park's former guide Isaaco and commissioned him to search for news of his fate. In October of that year, Isaaco found Mungo's guide and interpreter Amadi Fatouma at Madina, near Sansanding. In Isaaco's words, 'On seeing me, and hearing me mention Mr Park, he began to weep; and his first words were, 'They are all dead''.[48]

Isaaco brought the news back to Governor Maxwell, who relayed it to the British Government. For the Parks and the Andersons, the news was confirmation of their fears concerning Mungo's fate. The uncertainty which they had lived with since 1805 hardened into knowledge, as certain as it would ever be. In 1815, a new publication was presented to the public. This volume, which contained the first biography of Mungo Park, was compiled by John Whishaw, secretary of the African Association. It provided the reading public with a definitive account of the expedition and, for the first time, the story of Park's life. The Mungo Park remembered by his family as husband, brother, son and friend began to recede from view. In his place emerged the explorer presented by Whishaw: the version of Park that would be carried forward into nineteenth-century biography, popular memory and ultimately into history.

The Bank, the French and the American: 1810 and beyond

While Isaaco was making his long and uncertain journey across West Africa in search of news of Mungo Park, in Selkirk Alexander Park continued to prosper. Twenty years had passed since he had travelled to Edinburgh to study law in the autumn of 1790. Through his own diligence and ability he had established himself as a prominent professional man of the burgh.

His marriage to Alison Veitch appears to have been a happy one. Alexander was now a prosperous writer and Alison the daughter of a wealthy merchant. Her father John had retired from his business at the inn on the West Port in 1799, which passed, for a time, into the hands of business rival James Dun. John Veitch had been successful enough in his career that he was able to purchase a large plot of land within a few minutes' walk of the town of Selkirk, lying between the south bank of the water of Ettrick and the turnpike road leading from Selkirk to Melrose.[49] Here, he built Knowe Park, a large, detached house with extensive grounds; in every way the residence of a gentleman.

The Parks were financially comfortable, if not yet amongst the ranks of the local gentry. They appear to have lived well, and Alison's sense of style was the cause of some admiration, at least for Mungo Park's wife Allison, to whom he wrote in 1801: 'I could not find any gowns like Allie Veitches but I have bought one which I hope will please you it is the very tip top of the fashion newly arrived from London'.[50]

The following year, Alexander purchased a house in Market Place from John Riddell, a local schoolmaster. At the time, much of Alexander's daily business was conducted nearby in the tolbooth. This old building, which occupied much of Market Place, housed the council chamber, the sheriff court and the town prison. By the late eighteenth century, however, it had fallen into a dilapidated state. Following complaints from Walter Scott, who had held the office of sheriff-depute of Selkirk since the death of Andrew Plummer in 1799, the town council demolished it in 1803. The building they replaced it with in Market Place continued to house both the council chamber and the sheriff courtroom. A modern prison was built elsewhere in the town. Market Place, the civic centre of Selkirk, now had an open, spacious character.

Alexander's house occupied a central position in town. His neighbours were the respectable, middling people of Selkirk – next door, retired Baillie John Henderson, the elder brother of William Laidlaw's former master; across Market Place, the Laings and Dr Ebenezer Clarkson. Situated at the heart of Selkirk's civic and urban life, it was a suitable home for Alexander, Alison and their growing family.

Surviving court records suggest something of Alexander's working life during these years. As he had done since returning to Selkirk in 1793, he worked alongside Andrew Henderson the younger. Andrew's successful legal career had allowed him to acquire the farm of Midgehope in Ettrick, where he lived as a man of independent means. Alexander's other colleagues at court included Andrew's younger brother Robert, and writer George Rodger and his business partner John Paterson.

The everyday dealings of the sheriff court were rarely dramatic. Matters typically concerned the mundane affairs of life: property, debts, wages, leases, servants, boundaries, tolls, livestock – and the countless small disagreements that arose within a rural county. As a messenger-at-arms, notary public, and



Figure 8. An illustration of Alexander Park's house at the corner of Market Place and the Fleshmarket, Selkirk, by Sally Gerrard, based on historical descriptions. John Henderson's house is to its immediate right. The alley between it and the tall building (the location of the coffee house established by the French prisoners-of-war) led to stables and yards to the rear.

procurator, Alexander stood at the centre of this world, routinely preparing legal documents, advising clients and conducting their cases before the courts. It was the routine legal work of local government, largely forgotten today, but essential to the functioning of civic and commercial life.

Writing a century later, local lawyer John Chisholm described Alexander as 'the most forcible and the most daring' of the procurators who appeared before Walter Scott, a judgement which hints at the energy and confidence with which he conducted his practice.[51]

Since 1793, the war with France had been a constant presence in Selkirk life. Reports of the ongoing conflict frequently appeared in the Edinburgh newspapers, which were widely available in Selkirk. The burgh had a volunteer force, under the duke of Buccleugh, who had signed up to answer the call to arms, should it come. On the night of 2 February 1804 beacons were seen blazing over the hills, signalling that the French had invaded. At four in the morning, awakened by the blare of trumpets and the crash of drums sounding through the streets, the men of Selkirk made ready, quickly mustering at the market cross. It took them nine hours to march to Edinburgh – only to learn

that it had been a false alarm: the French remained on the Continent. Scotland – and Selkirk – were safe for the time being. In the aftermath of this brave, if ultimately unnecessary, expedition, the Reverend George Lawson advocated the importance of patriotism to his flock, preaching a sermon on the influence of religion on military courage, which was subsequently published, to popular acclaim, by Edinburgh printers Ogle & Aikman.

In the spring of 1811, the French finally came to Selkirk, although not quite as it had been imagined they would. From 1803 onwards, thousands of French prisoners of war were detained in Britain, many in terrible conditions, in prison hulks or overcrowded holding depots. The situation changed from 1810 – at least for some – when around six thousand officers were distributed to small towns in Britain to live amongst the local populations. Selkirk, like several other towns in the region, was selected to be one of these parole towns. This was the closest that most inhabitants of Selkirk ever came to the war.

On 29 March, the Edinburgh press reported the arrival of the prisoners at Leith. From there, 'They set off in the course of the day for Selkirk and its neighbourhood, where they are to be quartered on their parole'.[52] The officers' agent in Selkirk was Robert Henderson. He was to ensure that they adhered to the conditions of their parole, namely, to report to him on a regular basis, observe curfews, maintain standards of behaviour appropriate to their rank and status, and to remain within one mile of the town (markers were erected for this purpose). One of the officers, Adelbert Doisy, wrote many years later of arriving in Selkirk: 'Few of its houses were covered in slate; thatch being predominant. Pleasant hills encircled the town on all sides; a pretty large square and a fountain occupied its centre'.[53]

The arrival of approximately two hundred French officers represented a significant addition to the town's population and transformed the character of daily life. The economic impact on the local economy was significant, bringing new customers and business opportunities to the merchants and professionals of Selkirk. The officers were paid a weekly sum of half a guinea, regardless of rank, by Robert Henderson every Saturday morning; a sum which they deemed sufficient under the circumstances. Doisy recalled the difficulty Henderson had in finding lodgings for the officers – until it was discovered that they were 'cash customers'. After that, securing accommodation became a simple matter.

Many of the men paroled in Selkirk came from affluent backgrounds and also received money from their families at home. Doisy recounts one officer who was paid £1,000 a year – he himself received £200. Accordingly, the officers were able to live relatively well in Selkirk, spending on average £150 a week. As Doisy observed: '[…] in the course of two years and a half, we had expended no less a sum than over £4000, which was quite a consideration for a small town'.[54]

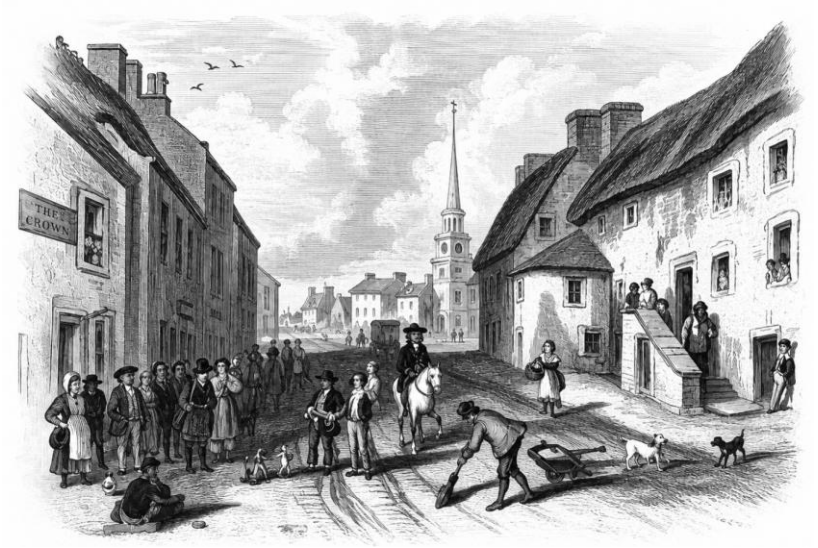


Figure 9. An engraving of Selkirk in the early nineteenth century, based on a drawing by D. O. Hill. The view looks towards Market Place from the West Port, with James Dun's establishment on the right. The new Town House with its spire can be seen in the middle distance. (From *The Poetical Works of the Ettrick Shepherd*, 1840)

The officers quickly established themselves as a community, acquiring premises in Market Place to serve as a coffee house. The new establishment, which was probably on the corner of the Kirk Wynd, two doors down from Alexander Park's house, became the centre of their social life. Furnished with a billiard table acquired from Edinburgh and supplied through funds remitted by relatives in France, it served as a place where the officers could assemble to drink and dine, read newspapers and books, play games, and generally maintain a semblance of the social life they had enjoyed before captivity.

The officers were generally educated men and many possessed talents extending beyond their military careers. Discovering among their number several capable musicians, they rented instruments, formed an orchestra and organised public concerts. These performances proved popular with local audiences and were reported in the Edinburgh press. Others turned their attention to amateur theatricals, borrowing plays from the Selkirk Subscription Library and staging productions for the entertainment of both prisoners and townspeople. During their time in Selkirk, around half of the officers on parole joined the library. Their presence had a marked effect on borrowing, which rose from 952 volumes in 1810 to 2,805 in 1813, almost a threefold increase.[55] The library registers reveal an appetite for novels, history, travel and classical literature – popular topics which the people of Selkirk also enjoyed. Several

officers borrowed copies of Mungo Park's *Travels*, a reminder of the extraordinary reach of a work written by a man who, only a few years earlier, had walked the same streets as themselves. One officer borrowed a manual on writing letters to young ladies, a small indication of the developing social relations between the prisoners and local women.

The presence of the prisoners also brought moments of tension. Doisy records celebrations held in the coffee shop for Napoleon's birthday, which provoked hostility amongst some townspeople. On another occasion, two French officers fought a somewhat performative duel over what one local historian later described as a 'daughter of Albion'.[56] Such incidents appear to have remained the exception rather than the rule. Relations between prisoners and inhabitants were generally cordial, aided by the efforts of Robert Henderson, whose tact and diplomacy earned the respect of both sides.

Whilst Selkirk was undergoing civic and social transformation, Alexander Park was embarking upon a new career in banking. Several banks had already been established by royal charter by the beginning of the nineteenth century: the Bank of Scotland in 1695, granted a monopoly for twenty-one years by act of parliament; the Royal Bank of Scotland in 1727; and the British Linen Company in 1746. The free banking system that subsequently developed in Scotland encouraged the growth of numerous smaller, unchartered banks, often local institutions established as private companies.

The East Lothian Banking Company (ELBC) commenced trading at Dunbar on 1 June 1810, announcements having appeared in the Edinburgh press the previous month. It was one of several banks founded in Scotland that year in response to public dissatisfaction with the chartered banks, which were perceived as serving the interests of a relatively small group of wealthy investors. There was a growing appetite for banking services amongst the wider population, underpinned by agricultural and commercial expansion and by a culture which increasingly valued thrift, prudence and self-reliance.

The founding of the pioneering Ruthwell Savings Bank in the same year, intended to encourage saving amongst the poorer members of society, reflects the widespread interest in more accessible banking services. It was soon followed by the Edinburgh Savings Bank, described as 'A Bank for receiving such small sums as may be saved from the earnings of tradesmen, mechanics, labourers, servants etc.'.[57] With a minimum deposit of only one shilling and a standard interest rate of four per cent, these institutions embodied a growing vision of banking for all.

The Commercial Bank of Scotland, also established in 1810, was significant in that it operated as a joint-stock company, supported not by a handful of wealthy men but by hundreds of investors, many of comparatively modest means. The large-shareholder base spread financial risk and provided security for depositors, although it exposed shareholders to potentially unlimited liability. This was the model adopted by the ELBC, which commenced

business with a capital of £80,000, divided into four hundred shares of £200 each. The majority of subscribers were tenant farmers and small landowners attracted by the prospect of financial gain. The bank was underwritten by Thomsons & Co., financial agents and insurance brokers whose offices were at 6 South Bridge Street, Edinburgh; whilst Messrs Balfour & Gibson, Writers to the Signet, acted as cautioners. Amongst the investors was Alexander Park.

The ELBC quickly proved successful and soon followed the Commercial Bank of Scotland in establishing provincial branches. One of these was opened at Selkirk, where Alexander was appointed local cashier, assisted by the teller John Aitken, who was sent from the central banking office in Dunbar. The branch was the first bank ever established in the town, marking an important stage in Selkirk's commercial development and bringing formal banking facilities to a community which had previously relied upon more informal networks of credit. Alexander's decision to enter into banking was a natural extension of the financial culture he had grown up in. He had been raised in a family where the careful advancement of credit formed part of everyday economic life. In many respects, the ELBC simply institutionalised practices that families such as the Parks had long employed on a smaller scale.

Alexander's new appointment represented a significant mark of confidence in his abilities. As an established member of the legal profession, he was exactly the type of successful, respectable man deemed suitable to undertake the role. There is every indication that Alexander discharged his duties conscientiously. He maintained meticulous accounts, which he submitted weekly to the bank's cashier, William Borthwick at Dunbar, together with the corresponding cash deposits under guard of mail. His surviving returns show average weekly remittances of more than £2,500, a substantial sum in contemporary terms and a reflection of the bank's success and the trust placed locally in its manager.

The business of the bank extended far beyond the receipt of deposits. Like other provincial banks of the period, the ELBC supplied the credit upon which much of the local economy came to depend. Farmers borrowed to improve their holdings and merchants sought loans to expand their businesses. Landowners needed money to finance purchases or bridge temporary shortages of cash. During the war years, rising agricultural prices and high land values encouraged borrowing, whilst expanding trade ensured that money continued to circulate freely. The system rested upon confidence that these favourable conditions would endure – and so long as they did, credit was both readily available and profitably employed.

Alexander required astute judgement and discretion as well as administrative competence to prosper as a local banker. His correspondence with the ELBC shows that he was regularly arranging loans and letters of credit, managing bonds and overseeing debts on the bank's behalf. The success of such transactions depended upon his ability to assess both the value of the securities offered and the reliability of the individuals involved.

Alexander's life was not without its burdens. In 1810 the fate of his brother Mungo was still unresolved. He, his family and all those who had loved Mungo had spent years in a state of uncertainty, hoping against hope for news from Africa. As the Reverend Lawson later recalled, 'many were their conjectures, for a time, of Mungo's safe return some day; and on each visit to Foulshiels the subject was again and again discussed, till the hearts of all became sick with deferred hope'.[58]

It was in these circumstances, amidst both prosperity and lingering uncertainty, that Alexander purchased the estate of Mainside in Roxburghshire.

In 1807, a young American doctor by the name of Gustavus Richard Alexander Brown became heir to the estate of Mainside when his grandfather died. Brown had, he considered, fought hard to establish himself in the world. His inheritance was to all appearances a stroke of excellent fortune. Mainside was one of the most extensive sheep farms in the south of Scotland, comprising more than 1,800 acres of upland pasture in the parish of Hownam. Attached to it were numerous houses, the barony of Hunthill, a mill, the right to hold a weekly market, and a freehold qualification, which carried the right to vote in county elections – a valuable marker of status and influence.

When Brown arrived in Scotland, however, he discovered that a rival claim to the estate had been made – one which he was obliged to contest. The legal battle was long and costly. It was not until 1810 that Brown's claim was upheld, and he was finally able to take possession of his inheritance. But Brown's life was in America, where he had left his wife, his home and his friends. What he wanted now was to sell Mainside, which had already cost him years of litigation and absence, so that he might return as soon as possible – and to this effect, he advertised the estate for sale.

Alexander Park saw an opportunity in Mainside. It seems likely that he knew of Brown's circumstances and recognised the potential for profit in a buoyant land market. Negotiations began during the summer of 1810; and by the autumn, the bargain was concluded. On 16 October, Alexander agreed to purchase the property for £16,688 10s., payable by instalments. Part of the purchase price, amounting to more than £5,000, was to remain in Alexander's hands under an obligation to provide Brown's wife with an annuity of 200 guineas. According to a survey recently undertaken at Brown's behest, the estate was worth £19,000, exclusive of the freehold qualification attached to it. Brown was evidently willing to sell Mainside at under the market value to suit his purposes. Alexander, for his part, had made the purchase on speculation, intending to bring the estate to public sale as soon as possible. He believed that he had made a good bargain, which could plausibly yield a substantial profit of almost £4,000. Land remained highly desirable, agricultural prices were strong and the prosperity generated by the long war with France had encouraged a general confidence in property. Alexander could reasonably expect a quick sale.

Naturally, he had spoken to his family and friends about Mainside – amongst them Thomas Kyle, Alexander's second cousin. The Kyles and Parks were on close terms, socialising together on a regular basis. Thomas, who was twenty-five years old in 1810, was the proprietor of an estate at Fens, adjacent to Dryburgh Abbey. He also held considerable landed property in Roxburghshire, which he rented for income, and ran a successful business as a wood merchant at Kiltonhill, St Boswells. He was, in other words, a man whose circumstances inspired confidence.

Almost before the ink was dry on Alexander's purchase agreement, Thomas Kyle offered to buy Mainside from him. Initially, he offered £19,000; but Alexander, who believed that the estate would fetch a higher price on the open market, declined. Thomas was not to be deterred, however, and asked Alexander if he could view the estate. On 1 November, the two men travelled together to Mainside and after due consideration, Thomas increased his offer to £20,000.

Alexander was obliged to go to Edinburgh the next day on business. Returning home to Selkirk the following Thursday, he found his cousin waiting for him at his house, accompanied by his solicitor. During an evening spent discussing Mainside, Alexander told Thomas that this would be the last opportunity to agree terms if he wanted to buy the estate, as it was due to be advertised in the next few days. They parted that evening in the full understanding that Thomas was to be the purchaser. Two days later, Alexander received an invitation from Thomas to dine at Fens. There, the details of the agreement were finalised. Alexander and Thomas both wrote and signed missives, a formal agreement that sealed the bargain. Thomas agreed to pay Alexander 20,000 guineas and to reserve the freehold qualification attached to the estate. The 'odd shillings' arising from the calculation were, Thomas wrote, to be 'referred to Mrs Park'.[59] In practice, they amounted to £1,000. This small remark speaks to the close and longstanding relationship between the Parks and the Kyles.

The arrangement appeared to be advantageous to both parties. Alexander had agreed to pay Gustavus Brown the purchase price for Mainside by instalments; and Thomas Kyle had agreed to pay Alexander on the same terms. As long as both of them kept their bargains, they would both profit. Thomas took possession of Mainside the following day, 11 November, Martinmas. Throughout the winter and into the following year, all was well. Thomas became, to all intents and purposes, the proprietor of Mainside, buying out the tenant and subsequently advertising the estate to let. By the spring, however, he found himself in a very different situation.

The contraction felt in the British economy in 1811 was underpinned by a commercial crisis ultimately caused by the effects of the ongoing war. It led to falling land prices and a lack of confidence in the economy – which in turn made credit hard to obtain. Thomas Kyle was evidently shocked and confused

by this sudden, dramatic and unexpected economic downturn. 'Land appears to be completely on the decline in this quarter,' he wrote to Alexander in March. 'If I get some money, I will put it into your account – but none almost is to be got. I don't know what's to be done'.[60]

The letter reveals a man struggling to grasp a rapidly deteriorating situation. Like many others, Thomas Kyle had relied on credit in managing his affairs. During the wartime boom, it had been easy to obtain. Now, however, it was not. To add to his troubles, the fall in the price of agricultural land meant that his tenants were struggling to pay their rents. Thomas owed money not only to Alexander for Mainside, but also to his brother Archibald, to the ELBC (to whom he was indebted in excess of £2,000), and to several other creditors.

By June, the extent of his difficulties had become apparent. Thomas' prosperity had been highly leveraged, dependent upon a continuous flow of rents and borrowed money, with little margin for error. The economic contraction of 1811 had upset both sides of that equation. In the space of a few short months, he found himself insolvent. At that point, he began to claim that his bargain with Alexander was at fault, having been made whilst under the influence of drink – an accusation that Alexander strenuously denied. Fens was advertised for a long-term lease, Thomas absconded and, as he had defaulted upon his contract, Alexander was left without the means to pay Gustavus Brown.

Alexander was astonished and clearly felt betrayed. In a petition presented to the court of session in July 1811, he argued his case – that Thomas Kyle had pursued the purchase enthusiastically, had entered possession, and had repeatedly acknowledged the validity of the agreement. Whatever difficulties now existed, they had arisen after the contract had been concluded. In the circumstances, the court agreed with him, granting his request for authority to sell Mainside.

Unfortunately, obtaining permission to sell proved easier than finding a purchaser. The market conditions which had persuaded Kyle to offer £20,000 in 1810 no longer existed. Alexander advertised the estate repeatedly but was unable to secure a buyer without sustaining a substantial loss. Rather than sacrifice the property in a depressed market, he continued to meet the instalments due under the purchase in the hope that conditions would improve. The tragedy was not that Mainside was worthless, nor that Alexander had recklessly acquired it. Rather, he found himself unexpectedly trapped with a large estate at precisely the moment that confidence in the economy was beginning to falter.

The dispute with Thomas Kyle was about more than the purchase of a farm. Alexander had trusted his cousin because there was every reason to do so. Thomas was a relation, a man of property and a long-standing associate whose circumstances appeared secure. Their bargain was not unusual. Much of the economic life of the Borders rested upon the assurance of personal acquaintance and reputation. Men borrowed and lent on that basis of trust. It was the world Alexander had known all his life.

There appeared little reason to doubt the security of the ELBC. It had proved successful since its foundation and its insurers, Thomsons & Co., were among the most substantial mercantile houses in Scotland. Established in 1753 by the wine merchant James Thomson, the business had expanded steadily over several decades. Based mainly at the Vaults, a large warehouse complex in Leith, the firm supplied wine and spirits throughout the Lowlands, including, at one time, to Veitch's Inn in Selkirk. By the 1780s, the company had diversified into managing the state lottery and acting as Edinburgh agents for the Sun Fire Office from their offices on South Bridge. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the company expanded further still, acting as insurance brokers and auctioneers of salvage and prize property. The opportunities created by wartime commerce transformed Thomsons & Co. from a successful wine merchant into a diversified commercial enterprise with interests extending across Scotland and beyond.

The salvage and prize goods arm of the business proved particularly lucrative. From the Vaults, Thomsons & Co. sold cargoes condemned in the Admiralty Courts and disposed of vessels captured from Britain's enemies. Contemporary advertisements show them auctioning Prussian ships, Dutch fishing smacks, doggers, brigs and schooners, together with their cargoes of coffee, cocoa, wine, brandy, timber, soap, barley, malt, hides, tallow and other imported goods. Vast quantities of goods regularly moved through the auction house into the hands of exporters and domestic merchants alike – in one year alone the auction house sold 1,265 French worsted dresses, 8,300 pairs of stockings, 60,000 quills and 800 deals of birch, amongst many other things. In 1806, John Thomson was acting as agent for the Commissioners for the Care and Disposal of Condemned Property, overseeing the sale of numerous captured vessels lying in Leith harbour. The firm's warehouses, granaries, counting houses and cellars made it ideally placed to profit from a commerce sustained by more than twenty years of war.

To contemporaries, Thomsons & Co. must have appeared financially unassailable. Yet on 22 May 1814, apparently without warning, the firm declared bankruptcy.

Thomsons' success had largely been built in a wartime economy characterised by expanding trade and abundant credit. As peace approached, those conditions began to change. Companies like Thomsons, which appeared immensely wealthy, discovered that their assets could not readily be converted into cash. Their bankruptcy proceedings reveal extensive holdings, including the Vaults, a fine house in Picardy Place, offices on South Bridge Street, rental property and substantial shareholdings in a variety of local enterprises. The problem was not a lack of wealth, but a lack of liquidity – much of Thomsons' capital was tied up in property, stock and investments, the value of which could not easily be realised in the current market. Even a wealthy concern could fail if called upon to meet liabilities faster than it could convert assets into money.

Thomsons' downfall suggests precisely such a crisis. Rich in assets but short of cash, a business that had appeared invincible only weeks earlier suddenly found itself unable to satisfy its creditors.

Thomsons' bankruptcy appears to have come as a profound surprise. As late as the day before the firm suspended payments, it was conducting business as usual. Amongst its routine correspondence was a remittance to the ELBC exceeding £12,000, part of the regular financial business conducted between them. Nothing in the transaction suggested that one of Scotland's most substantial mercantile houses stood on the verge of collapse.

The consequences for the ELBC were immediate and potentially catastrophic. The first problem was financial. When Thomsons & Co had underwritten the bank, they entered into a bond with a liability of £5,000, which at the time had appeared ample security. By 1814, however, the firm owed the bank in excess of £15,000, with no obligation to make good the difference. The second, and ultimately more serious, problem was one of confidence. Provincial banks depended upon public trust. If a company as prominent and prosperous as Thomsons could fail, depositors and shareholders might reasonably question the security of a bank which it insured. The collapse of the bank's insurers therefore threatened not only its balance sheet, but also its survival.

In response to the news of Thomson & Co.'s bankruptcy, Alexander Park wrote to William Borthwick on 25 May:

> I was Extremely sorry indeed to learn the unfortunate pause in Messrs. Thomsons & Co's affairs – I am happy to inform you, that though every person in the Market today have, somehow or other, got the news, yet I have not observed any thing approaching to want of confidence in the Bank in any of this day's transactions.[61]

This ostensibly positive reaction to the news was clearly intended to reassure – and to appear calm and dependable in the midst of uncertainty. However, the letter that Alexander sent the previous day to Christopher Middlemass, one of the ELBC's founders, tells a different story:

> I am this moment favoured with yours of yesterdays date Containing the Distressing account of the Stoppage of Messrs Thomsons & Company which must certainly be very unexpected as I never heard a Surmise of their Credit.[62]

Alexander was under no illusion what this might mean, adding:

> […] the failure must Create a very Considerable Sensation in the Publick mind both here and elsewhere. I shall limit my Discounts very much

> untill matters are better understood, indeed I would have Discontinued them altogether for a week or Ten days, were it not that my doing so might give a Sort of Sanction to the idea that the Bank was necessitated to Stand Still a little & might bring all our Promissory orders against us at once.[63]

The situation Alexander found himself in was uncertain and highly volatile. The ELBC's directors were working urgently to contain the consequences of Thomsons' collapse, but success was far from guaranteed. On Monday 30 May, Alexander forwarded his weekly remittances to Gibson & Oliphant in Edinburgh as usual, concluding with a light-hearted postscript: 'The water is getting into a fine turn for the Fishing Match – When shall I expect it to happen?'.[64]

Despite this display of normality, Alexander was under considerable pressure. As manager of the Selkirk branch, he bore personal responsibility for its losses. He had every reason to fear the consequences should public confidence in the bank falter. At the same time, Mainside continued to weigh heavily upon him. He had by now paid for the estate, but it remained unsold and burdened by the annuity due to Brown's wife. In common with Thomas Kyle and Thomsons & Co., much of Alexander's wealth existed on paper, tied up in land and property.

Two days later, on the fourth anniversary of the day the ELBC first opened its doors in Dunbar, Alexander Park died suddenly at his home in Selkirk. He was forty years old. Walter Scott, who had known him for fifteen years, later reflected:

> [He] speculated in land, and Lord knows what besides, yet as being a very clever fellow and a writer to the boot of a' that, might have come off handsomely had he lived to unwind his own ravelled hasps – But Writer and Banker though he was, he was compelled to depart in five minutes notice.[65]

Alexander's death, rather than resolving the difficulties surrounding him, transferred them to others. As branch manager and agent, he died owing the bank a substantial sum, leaving his affairs to be disentangled by those who survived him. Allison was left to protect the interests of her children and rebuild a life abruptly transformed by widowhood. Young Mungo Park, now nineteen, inherited his father's estate – but as a minor, not his liabilities. The task of realising its value nonetheless fell to him and his advisers, who included his stepmother Alison Veitch, John Veitch, Thomas Anderson, Alexander's brothers Archie and John, and James Turnbull, Mungo's grandfather.

Mainside was eventually sold in 1816 with an upset price of £13,500, substantially less than Thomas Kyle had once been willing to pay. Alexander's house on Market Place was also disposed of. These sales did not settle the wider question of Alexander's debts. The burden fell instead upon the cautioners who had supported him. Archibald Park suffered particularly severely through the obligations he had assumed on his brother's behalf, escaping financial ruin only through the intervention of Walter Scott. Others, including John Park and Thomas Anderson, were likewise affected.

Not all the consequences were bleak. Allison's fortunes remained closely entwined with those of her own family. Following Alexander's death she removed to Knowe Park with her children, inheriting the property upon her father's death in 1822. Later inheritances, including a large legacy from her uncle Robert Veitch, ensured her financial security. In this respect, the Veitches provide an instructive contrast to the Parks. Both families had prospered during the eighteenth century, and both had risen far beyond the circumstances from which they had begun, although they achieved that success by different means.

The Parks pursued advancement through the professions and through generations of enterprising financial management. Mungo and Alexander were both products of the Parks' accumulated wealth and ambition. Mungo risked his life in Africa in pursuit of discovery and distinction; Alexander invested in banking and land, convinced that the opportunities of his age outweighed the dangers. Neither man acted recklessly – the risks they undertook appeared manageable at the time and, had circumstances unfolded differently, both might have prospered further still.

The Veitches followed a steadier course. Their fortune rested upon trade, particularly the success of the inn at the West Port, which generated sufficient wealth to establish the family securely amongst the genteel ranks to which they had long aspired.

The contrast serves as a reminder of the uncertainty that accompanied advancement in this period. The same Scotland that created opportunities for families such as the Parks and Veitches also exposed them to very different forms of risk. Some prospered, some suffered reverses. Many would have attributed the distinction less to judgement than to Providence.

In another sense, Alexander's death marked the end of a story which had begun more than twenty years earlier. The circle of young men and women whose letters fill this volume had once exchanged news between Selkirk, Edinburgh and London, discussing friendships, courtships, careers and ambitions, rarely imagining where those ambitions would lead. By 1814 they had been much diminished. Mungo Park had disappeared on the Niger; Alexander Anderson had died at Sandsanding. Alexander Park was also dead. William Laidlaw, meanwhile, remained in Peebles, where his cousin Alexander Williamson succeeded Alexander Park as commissary clerk – an opportunity that might once have been William's had he chosen a different path.

It is impossible to know what those letters meant to William in later life. Perhaps there were simply old correspondence, lying forgotten in a box or drawer; perhaps, as the years passed, they became reminders of friends whose voices he would never hear again. Whatever the reason for their survival, it is through them that the story of this group of friends can still be told. Written without thought of publication, they preserve the words of young people standing at the beginning of lives whose outcomes they could not foresee. Time carried them in very different directions, but William kept their letters. More than two centuries later, their voices can still be heard.

Sally Gerrard
July 2026

NOTES

[1] The Star and Garter was later fictionalised by Walter Scott as 'Cleriheugh's' in his 1815 novel *Guy Mannering*.

[2] *i.e.* a room with a fireplace.

[3] The chapel was in Roxburgh Place, a street under development to the immediate south of the Royal Infirmary. It was of an unusual design in that it was incorporated into a residential tenement, occupying its two lower storeys.

[4] Francis Vogan was a Leith merchant of comfortable means who maintained both his city business and a fine house in Selkirk.

[5] In Scots, a traditional New Year's gift. Hansels were also given to mark other inaugural occasions, e.g. the birth of a child, moving into a new house, or marriage.

[6] Nenadic, S. *Lairds and Luxury: the Highland Gentry in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, Edinburgh, 2007, 195-96.

[7] For information regarding the Pantheon, see Fairley, J A. 'The Pantheon: an old Edinburgh debating society', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, 1 (1908), 47-75.

[8] *Macbeth* Act I Scene V.

[9] See Park, M. *The Journal of a Mission to the Interior of Africa, in the Year 1805, by Mungo Park, to which is prefixed an account of the life of Mr Park*, ed J Whishaw, London, 1815, 5.

[10] The sheriff depute from 1785 to 1799 was Andrew Plummer of Middlestead, whom the Parks already knew socially.

[11] *The Correspondence of William Laidlaw, Part I: Family, 1792-1795*, Sources in Local History 26, Edinburgh, 2023, Letter 2.

[12] *The Correspondence of William Laidlaw, Part I: Family, 1792-1795*, Sources in Local History 26, Edinburgh, 2023, Letter 9.

[13] For an early version of this story, see *The Works of Robert Burns*, 5 vols, eds J Hogg and W Motherwell, Glasgow, 1834-1836, I, 222-23.

[14] Hogg, J. *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 2 vols, Edinburgh, 1829, I, 262.

[15] National Library of Scotland [NLS], MS.10782, f. 180r, Letter from Mungo Park to his brother Alexander Park, 20 May 1794.

[16] NLS, MS.10782, f. 180r, Letter from Mungo Park to his brother Alexander Park, 20 May 1794.

[17] For the Laidlaws' Galloway and their family life in general, see *The Correspondence of William Laidlaw, Part I: Family, 1792-1795*, Sources in Local History 26, Edinburgh, 2023.

[18] Park, 1815, 13.

[19] Mungo had taken passage on an American slave ship with the intention of returning to Britain via Charlestown. The ship got into difficulties, however, and was forced to land at Antigua; and it was from there that he travelled to Falmouth on board the mail ship known as the *Chesterfield Packet*.

[20] Chambers, N, ed. *The African Correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks: volume 2, 1795-1803*, Abingdon, 2024, 157: Letter of Mungo Park to Sir Joseph Banks, 13 November 1797.

[21] Park, 1815, xxv.

[22] Macfarlane, J. *The Life and Times of George Lawson D.D. Selkirk*, Edinburgh, 1863, 67.

[23] Chambers, 2024, 190: Letter of Joseph Banks to Mungo Park, 21 September 1798.

[24] National Records of Scotland [NRS], OPR: Marriages, 778/Selkirk, p.284, Mungo Park and Allison Anderson, 20 July 1799.

[25] In terms of income, the £2,000 due to Mungo Park for the first three editions of *Travels* would be equivalent to £227,000 at the time of writing (2026).

[26] Park, 1815, 32.

[27] NLS, Acc.12055, f. iii, Letter from Mungo Park to Allison Park, 27 March 1801.

[28] Chambers, 2024, 324: Letter of Mungo Park to Sir Joseph Banks, 13 October 1801.

[29] The inn, known as the Cross Keys Inn since *c.*1840, was run at this time by Marion Ritchie, who had inherited it from her father, Walter, a town bailie and the provost of Peebles before Dr Reid. Marion Ritchie is thought to have been the inspiration for Walter Scott's character of Meg Dods in *St Ronan's Well*.

[30] The case involving William and his servant Agnes Scott appears in Chisholm, J. *Sir Walter Scott as Judge: his Decisions in the Sheriff Court of Selkirk*, Edinburgh, 1918, 22.

[31] Park, M. *The Life and Travels of Mungo Park*, Edinburgh, 1838, 77.

[32] Chambers, 2024, 384: Letter of Mungo Park to Sir Joseph Banks, 20 October 1803.

[33] NLS, Acc.12055, f. iv, Letter from Mungo Park to Allison Park, 5 December 1803.

[34] NLS, Acc.12055, f. v, Letter from Mungo Park to Allison Park, 7 December 1803.

[35] See Anderson, T C D'A. *Letters of the Andersons of Selkirk*, privately published, 2015, 33: Letter of Alexander Anderson to Thomas Anderson, 3 April 1803.

[36] Ann Shepherd is mentioned in a letter from Mungo Park to his wife dated 10 December 1804, in which he writes: 'Sandy's time of absence from Gosport being expired he returned to the Dear Miss Shepherd on Saturday, he will remain there until he hears that we are ready to sail' (NLS, Acc.12055, f. ix, Letter from Mungo Park to Allison Park, 10 December 1804). She later wrote to Thomas Anderson, shortly after the family first had intelligence of Alexander's death.

[37] NRS, RH1/2/743, Letter from Mungo Park to Alexander Anderson describing terms offered by Lord Camden for an Expedition to the Niger, September 1804.

[38] NRS, RH1/2/743, Letter from Mungo Park to Alexander Anderson describing terms offered by Lord Camden for an Expedition to the Niger, September 1804.

[39] NLS, Acc.12055, f. xvii, Letter from Mungo Park to Allison Park, 29 May 1805.

[40] The story was widely reported in the press, e.g. *Hull Advertiser*, 22 June 1805.

[41] Anderson, 2015, 49: Letter of John Anderson to Thomas Anderson, 10 May 1806.

[42] *The Charlestown Courier*, 1 July 1806.

[43] Anderson, 2015, 52: Letter from John Anderson to Thomas Anderson, 18 July 1806.

[44] Mungo had entrusted his journal and papers to his guide, Isaaco, before embarking on the Niger in November 1805.

[45] Anderson, 2015, 55: Letter of Allie Anderson Park to her father Thomas Anderson, 22 September 1806.

[46] Letter from Mungo Park to his sister, Peggy Dixon, 11 November 1805, printed in Hancock, E G and Wheeler, A. An addition to the archival record of Mungo Park (1771-1806), African explorer, *Archives of Natural History*, 15 (1988), 311-15.

[47] New South Wales State Library, 15/80/24, The Memorial of Mr James Dickson of Covent Garden Brother in Law & Lawfull attorney to Mr Mungo Park, 29 April 1806.

[48] Park, 1815, 284.

[49] *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 July 1799.

[50] NLS, Acc.12055, f. i, Letter from Mungo Park to Allison Park, January 1801.

[51] See Chisholm, 1918, for a number of cases managed by Alexander Park.

[52] *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 March 1811.

[53] Doisy, A J. *Reminiscences of Army Life under Napoleon*, Cincinnati, 1884, 75. Doisy was an eighteen-year-old *sous-lieutenant* when he arrived in Selkirk in 1811 as a prisoner on parole. He wrote his memoirs in old age.

[54] Doisy, 1884, 77.

[55] For the registers of the Selkirk Subscription Library, see the *Books and Borrowing: an Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1850* website.

[56] Craig-Brown, T. *The History of Selkirkshire; or, Chronicles of Ettrick Forest*, Edinburgh, 1886, 135.

[57] From the constitution of the Edinburgh Savings Bank, cited in Barber Beaumont, J T. *An Essay on Provident or Parish Banks*, London, 1816, 18.

[58] Macfarlane, 1863, 68.

[59] NRS, CS233/P/3/4, Court of Session Processes: Alexander Park vs. Kyle, Petition of Alexander Park, Writer in Selkirk, 2 July 1811.

[60] NRS, CS233/P/3/4, Court of Session Processes: Alexander Park vs Kyle, Petition of Alexander Park, Writer in Selkirk, 2 July 1811.

[61] NRS, GD304, Records of the East Lothian Banking Company, 1809-1829: Letter from Alexander Park to William Borthwick, 25 May 1814.

[62] Letter from Alexander Park to Christopher Middlemass, 25 May 1814 (courtesy of Ron and Eustace Shanahan).

[63] Letter from Alexander Park to Christopher Middlemass, 25 May 1814 (courtesy of Ron and Eustace Shanahan).

[64] NRS, GD304, Records of the East Lothian Banking Company, 1809-1829: Letter of Alexander Park to Messrs. Gibson & Oliphant, W.S., Edinburgh, 30 May 1814.

[65] Grierson, H J C ed. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott: volume 4, 1815-1817*, London, 1933, 330: Letter from Walter Scott to Miss Clephane, 26 December 1816.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF WILLIAM LAIDLAW, PART II: FRIENDS, 1790–1795

1. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 16th November 1790

Dear William

I am this moment from Mr Arch[i]bald's[1] returned and there I had the pleasure of seeing Mr Park from Foulsheils,[2] and as you may suppose the discours[e] was on the adventures we had in our journy to this D____d[3] Town which is called Edinburgh and also what was going on in the country with the particular consideration of _____ but I say nothing, but in this discource [*sic*] you will redily suppose that we had something to _____ for our tem[p]orary thirst and likewise the tostes [*i.e.* toasts] that was given by each respective person that was in the company (but the number and quality of each person and the names I do conceal for reasons that are too obvious to mention and in reality not necessary at this present time) but to return to the tostes. I must say little because you are I hope alredy acquainded [*sic*] with the persons names, but if you do not, I say that there was Miss etc. and Miss etc. and Miss etc. another one yet Miss _____ I dare not mention what I think att [*sic*] this time upon the last Miss _____ whom I gave for my tostes for further particulars enquire at Messrs Park and Mr Scott.[4] And after all I was half [*illegible – page torn*] half I was [*illegible – page torn*] had plentey. The only excuse that I make for not writing sooner is the following. Give my compliments to every body that makes mention of my name either Profainly or Sacridly but for to conclud[e] this letter I shall begin with *Vox Populus Vox Diaboli*[5] and then I shall conclude with saying –

I am Your etc. etc.
Alexander Anderson

Edinburgh November the 16 Day at 20 Minutes before 10 o'clock at the time when Messrs Park are writing to you – and Mr Scott is just counting over his money and saying O is the room rent to pay this night 1790.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, apprentice to Mr Hender[s]on, Selkirk

[1] Thomas Archibald was the husband of William Laidlaw's paternal aunt. He kept an inn and stables in Candlemaker Row, Edinburgh. It was here that the Selkirkshire carrier put up.

[2] *i.e.* Foulshiels, a farm on the banks of the River Yarrow, Selkirkshire. The tenancy was held by Mungo Park senior, the father of William Laidlaw's friends and correspondents Alexander (1773-1814) and Mungo (1771-1806). Laidlaw's father was the tenant of the neighbouring farm of Broadmeadows.

[3] Probably 'Damned'.

[4] The aforementioned brothers Mungo Park and Alexander Park, and Andrew Scott.

[5] 'Voice of the People, Voice of the Devil'.

2. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 16th November 1790

Dear William

The hubbub and confusion of last week prevented me from writing a letter to you and indeed it is only a few inaccurate lines that I can write to you even now!

It would be unecessary for me to give you any account of our journey to Edinburgh as I suppose you will have heard it from A.[1] Suffice it at present that we are here! with![2]

I promised to write to you concerning a certain circumstance viz. E. T.[3] which I shall fulfill as follows.

The occurances are twofold – 1st those which occured before the Ball concerning which I shall say – nothing – and 2dly (for I love to be methodical) those which occurred after the Ball – which I shall now describe.

Verse 1st In our journey the day after the Ball from Midlesteed[4] to Foulshiels it so happened that they were both upon the same horse and insteed [*i.e.* instead] of riding along with me (who was *solus*)[5] and Jeany[6] and John Fairburn, they rode about a gunshote behind, and upon being called to come up by J. F. she called out – ride on – and so they muttered away till they came to the Generals bridge[7] when we dismounted.

Verse 2d after our return home the effects of the ride were sufficently apparent in this: a seat being left empty betwixt your humble servant and the fire and another being left betwixt Alexander and the door, she refused the fire seat and took the seat at the door vacant in which situation she sat or rather they sat till after supper when a like offer was made by Mr A. A. from Selkirk[8] but with the same effect – I (not being very much disapointed) sat and craked[9] away with your brother W L,[10] but always in a sort of semi listen in which I heard "indeed Sandy I never could [*interlined*: never] have thought it of you" "Howt your surely Jocking"[11] as sure as [*illegible word*] its a fact "I'm sure I did all for the best[,"] etc. these with other like circumstancis [*sic*] made me think there was a cat in the poke[12] which was farther confirmed by what happened on the Sunday the better day the better deeds – which I shall enumerate in my next. In the mean time write me what the V..s[13] are saying

of my behaviour at the Ball, but in particular what N. H.[14] is thinking of it, I would not place any as a spy about any persons behaviour but I just want to hear whats their oppinion in general and thats all William that's all and so I am

Yours etc.
Mungo Park

PS write me if Somervile[15] gets any adv. or no – a long letter mind

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Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Selkirk

[1] Probably Mungo's aforementioned brother Alexander.

[2] A play on the word 'herewith'.

[3] Esther Turnbull (1774-1796) of Hassendean Bank, Minto, a distant cousin of the Parks who would become Alexander Park's first wife. See the Introduction.

[4] *i.e.* Middlestead, a farm about 2.5 miles (4 km) south west of Selkirk. See the Introduction.

[5] 'alone', probably in the sense that he was not sharing his horse with anyone.

[6] Jean Park (1769-1850), Mungo's sister.

[7] A bridge over the Yarrow Water that connected the Bowhill estate with the high road that ran through the Yarrow Valley. There would have been around 2 miles (3.2 km) still to travel to reach Foulshiels.

[8] Alexander Anderson (1773-1805), the eldest son of Dr Thomas Anderson (1751-1816).

[9] In Scots, to chat or to gossip.

[10] Walter Laidlaw (b.1768).

[11] In Scots, 'howt' can be an exclamation of disbelief, while 'jocking' is 'joking'.

[12] In Scots, a bag – so 'cat in a bag', *i.e.* a secret.

[13] Probably Annie (1772-1850) and Alison (1774-1842) Veitch, the daughters of Selkirk merchant and vintner John Veitch (1743-1822). See the Introduction.

[14] Nancy Henderson (1767-1839), the daughter of Selkirk writer Andrew Henderson the elder (1726-1810). Her father was William Laidlaw's master. See the Introduction.

[15] Alexander Somerville (b.1772), William Laidlaw's cousin in law, who was apprenticed to a writer in Selkirk.

3. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 24th November 1790

Dear Willeam [*sic*]

It is a common saying when one has got any thing "to say that I have received it" so I say that I have receaved [*sic*] your letter. But for to say as you have dune [*i.e.* done] that a good begining is commonly a good ending ~~but~~ I must acknowledge that I never heard of such a common saying neither did I ever observe it in Ramsays proverbs[1] but you or whoever is the author of it I say it is wrong neither does it agree with the common saying as "that a good begining is a bad ending" especialy conserning such things as you attribute to us, but of that I say nothing, but this I will say that cince [*i.e.* since] I wrote to you I have been two or three other Nights in the same employment of which I told you, we had in Mr Archibald's, but such another catting nights I ever saw, even such as would have made you provide yourself of another stomach to hold the _____ but the particulars of which I dares not write so that I will mark them in my memory to tell you when you come into Edinburgh.

The mellancholly accident that you relate is too frequent in this age and especialy in this nation so that we are the reproach of neibouring states[a][2] – Yea Women Dieth and where is she[b] and strange [*interlined*: to tell] the living lay it not to heart.[c] By the particular desire of the ingenious Mr Alexander Park who is just telling me to write the folowing stanza.

I add no more att present but leaves you to ly [*i.e.* lie] and you[r] own concience to peruse the undermentioned books which will tend greatly to edify the investigator for the meaning of the words.[d]

The above Phenomina you will excuse for I have rather got too much of the Inglish [*sic*] thing.[e] But in the mean time give my compliments to Miss [*illegible initial*].[f] But you must excuse me for not seeing your brother for the reason folowing that after I came from the class in the evening it was too late and in the morning I have to go out before 9 o'clock in the morning and not be in till the carrier.[g] Therefore it is required that an explanation should be given[h] but I do believe that it is contrary to law for to write in an unknown style.[i]

I am
Alexander Anderson

[a] See Blair on The Grave[3] which Mr Park praticularly [*sic*] <u>desires</u> that I should mention but for what reason I know not.

[b] See Bible Job 14 xi.

[c] see a poem intitled the grave.

[d] see Enticks [*illegible*] Dictionary.[4]

[e] for which see Mr Tait's Mugg.

[f] for which see Messrs Henderson and Veitch Low rams.

[g] for which see James Renock.

[h] see my next letter.

[h] for which see Erskine's Institutes major coppy Book 3 Title 2 Chapter 14.[6]

[i] see the Seession [*sic*] Book for the above.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] Allan Ramsay's *A Collection of Scots Proverbs*, first published in 1736.

[2] Alexander used a variety of footnote marks in this letter. Some of them are difficult to reproduce typographically and so have been replaced by lower-case letters. The various footnotes have also been grouped at the end of the transcript.

[3] 'The Grave' (1743), a poem by Robert Blair.

[4] *Entick's New Spelling Dictionary, teaching to write and pronounce the English tongue with ease and propriety*, first published in 1765.

[5] John Erskine's *An Institute of the Law of Scotland* (1773). The chapter referred to by Alexander is titled, 'All deeds may now be written book-wise'.

4. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 24th November 1790

Dear William

ha! ha! ha! I believe I shall burst with laughing; L..., L…,[1] what notions (<u>some</u>) women have of life ha ha; I say <u>some</u> for I am happy to hear they are not <u>all</u> so – But D__l[2] care [if] I care I'll go sell my books[3] – amen.

I shall now give you (according to your desire) some things that happened before the Ball. It so happened that Baldy and Sandy[4] and I went away to the fishing but before we had gone far Sandy slipt away like a notless threed[5] – Balldy [*sic*] and I fished till dinner time and on our return found that AP[6] had not come home and upon inquiry found ET absent likewise it was then my business to see where they were which was up the Hill among the fairns[7] [*interlined*: hoi hoi hoi] – they sat there from 10 till 2 – but I say nothing!

I am extremely happy to hear that Miss V's venom is spitting and I think I have paid her home in her own coin for the seat of pain on the satee [*i.e.* settee] that night – o rare! Mungo's Tail how it sownds![8] I have said this only to these Spleenidic [*i.e.* Splenetic]! Hypocritic! Self Conceited! Coqueting! Jealous! revangefull! B....s[9] – but – but – but – I say nothing of ___ of ___ of ___.

Next letter be sure you write me some more spleen and I will send you some cutting a[n]swers to them which you may give in in a kind of by-the-by way when you are in Mr V's[10] some night.

Your sincere friend
Mungo Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Sellkirk [*sic*]

[1] Probably 'Lord, Lord'.

[2] Probably 'Devil'.

[3] The phrase 'sell the book' means to have the final word.

[4] Mungo's brothers Archibald (1767-1820) and Alexander.

[5] *i.e.* a knotless thread.

[6] The aforementioned Alexander Park.

[7] In Scots, ferns.

[8] A double entendre.

[9] Perhaps 'Bitches'.

[10] John Veitch's inn, which stood at the bottom of the West Port, Selkirk. The inn was a popular hub for Selkirk society in the 1790s. See the Introduction and Figure 5.

5. From Alexander Anderson

Edinburgh 30th November 1790

Dear Willeam etc.

I am certain that I have nothing to say just now but till something come into my head (I am yours) but I will put it by till the person that interupts me be out of the way att the same time I am Your H:[1]

Alexander Anderson

Now I am come and as all incumbrances are fled as the owl from the beautyful beams of the sun before the [*i.e.* he] enters his meridian or as the Magnat[e] to the Friged [*i.e.* Frigid] Zone and all before me apears as Elysium ~~before~~ or as the beautiful scenes of Love (O thou Lovely! word Love) so I shall communicat[e] all that I have got to say at present. But in the first place I must read over your letter.

And as for your desire [*illegible – page torn*: of *or* in] knowing the meaning of that exclamation viz. you may Lament but yet Rejoice I must acknowledge that I said such a thing for which I am now sorry: I will not lie about the matter by puting different meanings on it. When I mentioned the above I had a particular meaning to these [*interlined*: words] that seem to contradict one another as directly as light and darkness do, but willie there are such thing[s] in the worald [*i.e.* world] that seem contradictory and yet perfectly argree [*i.e.* agree] or that a person may be affected with two different pations [*i.e.* passions] att one and the same time as with greaf [*sic*] and joy. Or to bring it nearer the point I suppose that you have lost your lover for which you lament and another one not inferior in every respect, you get the nixt [*sic*] opportunity for which circumstan[c]e you rejoice (now willie my man isen [*i.e.* ?isn't] that the thing) but what the meaning was (I say nothing) no mortal flesh living knowes [*i.e.* knows] nor shall any know till a time that I shall not mention and therefore I begg that you will enquire no more about it, only I say that it was [*illegible – mark left by seal*: ?concerning that] noble pasion – but if you hear her mention [*illegible – mark left by seal*: ?it] say that she need take no head [*i.e.* heed] to what I said that night because I had rather tuo [*i.e.* too] much of Mr Taits porter in my head. I am obliged to pospend [*i.e.* postpone] what I have to say on the rest of your letter till next week for it is past eliven [*sic*] o'clock,

I am your passionate freind
A A

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Selkirk

[1] Possibly an abbreviation for 'Your Humble Servant'.

6. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 30th November 1790

Dear William

I am just now returned from viewing the grand procession of Measons[1] but such another procession! As many torches as (if laid end to end) would reach to Philhophaugh;[2] at once in a blaze – as many Measons as could build a second Edinburgh or demolish the old one, all in a row – as many spectators as, as – L[ord] knows how many – as many broken heads as could make one claw – but I say nothing.

I am at a great loss for want of matter to fill up this letter – I'm just thinking what fine dancing you will have just now I wish you a very good dance and I expect to hear the whole account of it in your next, in the mean time I hope you will not spare the floor nor the shoes, and in particularly write a full account of the Ladies behaviour towards Miss ET, which I suppose was meant by the Certain Lady.

Mr Parish is this moment entered the room rubbing his lug and when you have heard the reason you'll think it no wonder. For he with some companions going to see the aforesaid grand procession as he was standing heedlessly viewing the show, a rough strong sailor having received a blow from some one in the mob and mistaking Parish for the offender came up to him and calling out god d..d the b…ar[3] withou[t] further ceremony gave him a whip on the side of the head with his tarry fist which was nigh kno[c]k him down but he sensibly fled without resenting it

I am yours
Mungo Park

PS.
I thought to have finished this letter without a post script but a circumstance has occurred just now which I must relate which is as follows – Andrew Scott hearing some nois[e] in the street went into the bedroom to hear what it was, when a squeeb[4] which happened to be flying past just as he was going to shut up the window and burst just before him with a considerable explosion – when Andrew heard it or rather felt it he [*illegible – page damaged*] open the dinning [*i.e.* dining] room door, and staggering half way through the floor exclamed with a voice of terror – O Desperate! The like of that! I am shot!!! This considerably alarmed us but he is more fleed than hurt.

M P

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] In Scots, masons. See the Introduction for more on this procession.

[2] Philiphaugh, a village near Selkirk.

[3] Probably 'damned the buggar'.

[4] In Scots, a firework, something similar to a banger.

7. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 7th December 1790[1]

Dear Sir

I now begin to write to you with a trembling hand for my head is affected with the [*interlined*: thing they call] grog, or what is called porter. I think if I remember right that I am much in the situation** as I was when that circumstance happened refering to the Lament and Rejoice) but I say nothing but this I will say that what I say~~e~~d [*i.e.* said] and you mentioned in your letter is True but as to the conclusion and your Guessing I think it imposible to any Mr F. but etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. and myself. I understand you well enough it is your sly way of finding out thing[s] that you want to know but I will say no more on that subject: William I tell you my mind freely, but more freely as to the following circumstance of your letter (but before I proceed Mr P. has given me an account of the dance and it is my thought that you would have a rare night of it for by the several circumstances that you was in during the continuance of the night the one of citting) I was near forgot at: therof in the the [*sic*] bed (I suppose that you would rarther [*sic*] have me to say on the bed but for my part I think that it* would be <u>both</u> on and <u>in</u>!!! as for example the laws of nature come in regularity or the cause must come before the effect and so the <u>concomitant</u> circumstances must preceed the consequence. The aplication of which I need not specifie at this present time (but to the point) "I wish you had been there for there was a You[ng] Lady there who lives hard by a marle moss:[2] Ha." I must acknowledge that I do not understand what you mean by making ~~her~~ <u>Her</u> as a particular one and to me too!!! is astonishing. I see not the least cause you could have for the suspition [*sic*] (turn over lad)[3] but I will be forced to say nothing!!! But (as I have said before) this I will say that if you had mentioned some ~~shortly~~ body (whom I shall name shortly) would have consernend [*sic*] me much more and I would have thought that

you who are accustomed to such things would have not missed the mark so far, but in the mean time I beg that you would hear me this once Sir, that

I am
your humble and obedient and loving
Alexander Anderson

* I call the thing it because I have no better name to call – as there probably was both male and female in the action so that masclune [*i.e.* masculine] and feminine form neuter especialy the meddium betwixt them!!! that is a non moveble!!!!!!!

** not to place but as to fealing that is I am not beside the Ladies but I find the porter making me stag[g]er.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] Alexander failed to date this and the following letter. It was William Laidlaw who dated both of them 7 December 1790.

[2] A marl moss was a bog from which marl was extracted. There were a number of such sites around Selkirk.

[3] The first page of the manuscript letter ends here.

8. From Alexander Anderson

Edinburgh 7th December 1790

Dear Willeam

I received yours dated December 6 A.D. 1790. And I now come in part to explain the rema[i]nder of your last letter but one and for the first of the questions. An account of the nights the particulars of which you dare not mention~~ed~~ but I say but nothing but as follows:

1th that these nights were in number two:
2d that these nights were solemnized by use [*i.e.* us] and other three of our acquaintances. And therefore
3d that the solemnization was complated [*i.e.* completed] in the space of five hours from 9 at night to 2 in the morning

4[d*] that these nights were solemnized by the destruction of a handsome supper ~~and~~ each night and rum punch [*interlined*: but] of the quantity I cannot specify

5 that the expence was not just directly 14sh 4d but as near hand it as – that every person was forced to look two ways at once but there is no compultion [*i.e.* compulsion] etc. etc.

6 that the night was suplied as to the conversation and tostes with the best of Troop's

7 that the night was ended with some excurtions that I have no business to mention particulars or even particu[l]ar persons all is nothing that I say

8 every one had a race home as hard as he could run for fear of being taken to the G__d h___e[1] etc.

– so they ended etc. –

[*] this is owing to an old maxim.

Since I wrote to you last week Freindship had invited us to ramble and drink several botles more it was much seemilar to the two former only there were three more in number and more mes dune [*i.e.* mess done] etc. etc. etc.

And I suppose that at the New Year there will be three nights more but I say say [*sic*] nothing etc.

I suppose that now you will know plentey about them but if not enquir att Alexander Anderson etc. but as for your other question I cannot tell you the reason that Master Park had in etc.

You will I hope excuse me for the [*illegible deleted word*] mistakes that I comit either in speling or composing and as trust that you are a freind I write the more freely to you?

I wish you would burn all my letters that I send.

I add no more at present but remain

your affectionate etc.
Alexander Anderson

Be so good as write me the particulars of the Ladies etc. which will very much oblidge [*sic*] your –

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] The guard house. It was the headquarters of the City Guard, one of whose duties was to arrest anyone found drunk in public after 8pm. It was located in the Tolbooth.

9. From Mungo Park

Edinburgh 7th December 1790

Dear William

I'm happy to hear that you have had such an axellent [*sic*] Ball and I hope that you would have several good jocks[1] some of which I expect to hear from you next week.

But as to what the amiable ___ said concerning the resurrection of Tibby Thomson[2] I think that 36 miles would rather be far to come for a living woman (she exepted) and you may guess if I would be such a fool as to come that length for a dead one, but 'if' I had been at Selkirk, 'if' I had – I-say-nothing – I hope she will freight you when you go up to Broadmeadows to get measure of your breaches by moonlight, so for the sake of the departed and that you may pass by her grave with a clear concience as having paid some tribute to her memory write the following upon a sheet of papper and plase it over her grave next time you go past it

- on one side –

Dear Stranger stop and cast a single look
on this neglected spot, wherein is laid
a Christian who in rage this world forsook
of Heaven as careless as of Hell affraid

Contra

Stranger be glad beneath this stone
lies one wha's tongue wad yeild to none
when she was weel, but now she's gone
and Lord be thankit
I'm sure the bairn will make no mone
whilk aft she's clankit

Her nimble hands fre yonder now
has often stowen a Heather cow
but round her neck she pat the tow
and gat a twang
that sent her to the mucle low
wi sic a bang .....

you will excuse the above as it [is] nearly extempore being wrote in a Tuesdays night hurry. I hope you will excus the shortness of this letter as I am in such a d[amne]d hast[e] and write me all the good jock

Your's etc.
Mungo Park

Hurra! Hurra!

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Selkirk

[1] In Scots, jokes.

[2] Isabel Thomson was a Selkirk woman who committed suicide in November 1790. Denied a burial in the kirkyard, she was accordingly interred at the juncture of three lairds' lands – no man's land – at the top of Foulshiels Hill. She became a popular figure in Scottish folklore during the nineteenth century. Her grave may still be seen today.

10. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 14th December 1790

Dear William

Letters are one of the many great blessings which are bestowed upon mankind for by means of these a person may sit at his ingle edge at Edinburgh and without any alteration converse with his freind at Selkirk as is weekly verified in the many letters which are sent to and from the above mentioned cities. I have frequently wondered that you should see every scrap that I have wrote and no doubt you will take notice of all the nonsense that is wrote in them and I have sometimes thought of writing a letter entirely nonsens and indeed this comes very nearly to that end this is what I call an extempore letter or in other word[s] a letter wrote without consideration for indeed the pen has never been lifted since it began it.

Next comes a few thoughts, and the 1st is where you will be just now, I believe you will be sitting at the old Bailies[1] lewgh[2] room fire side telling over the letters and occasionally taking a crack with Miss Wilhelmina[3] and that give occasion to another thought which is when is she coming to Edinburgh as Andrew Scott is terrified that he miss the sight of her but he is sorry that his compliments which ware [*i.e.* were] given all as a jock should be spred in the country therefore you may make an appology to Miss W. H.[4] upon his account and write me in the consequense next week – the next thought is what

you will think of this letter if you think anything of it your [*i.e.* you're] a guff[5] and if you think nothing your [*i.e.* you're] mad so you may think and say nothin that's all

owhou ist ner suppertime Anderson.[6]

Dear William

I received yours and am very anxious to hear some of the splienitic [*i.e.* splenetic] jock be sure you send some of them next week. I dont remember a single word of T. Thomson's Epitaph therefor I cannot mend it but I have sent you one of A McLerin's peices which I think is d[amne]d young[7] – youl [*i.e.* you'll] write your oppinion of it – but hark ye Willi I'll tell you of a scheme to see how the spleen is boiling, if you should pop into Mr Vieches you may say to the Ladies in a sort of by the by manner "Mr M. Park had his compliments to you [*interlined*: in my last letter] and bad me ask if [*illegible – page damaged*] if ever [*interlined*: you] have a game at my Lam o Gothio"[8] you may hint this (tempore conveniente)[9] and write me (verbatim) the answer.

Stormy weather – rough night.

Yours etc.
Mungo Park

Edinburgh, some day of the month, 179 [*sic*]

I think I have not mist [*i.e.* missed] you.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] The aforementioned Andrew Henderson the elder.

[2] In Scots, a room below street level, in this instance a living space.

[3] Wilhelmina Henderson (1774-1818), the daughter of Andrew Henderson the elder. William Laidlaw was living in the Henderson house on the High Street in Selkirk during this time.

[4] The aforementioned Wilhelmina Henderson.

[5] In Scots, a fool or a simpleton.

[6] Mungo appears to be quoting in the moment an interjection by Alexander Anderson telling him that it was now nearly time for supper.

[7] *i.e.* juvenile.

[8] The reference in obscure.

[9] At a convenient time.

11. From Alexander Anderson

Edinburgh 21st December 1790

Dear Willeam

I must soon draw this letter to a conclution for this night is far spent and I have not dune [*i.e.* done] with for after writing Mr Somerville's[1] letter I proceded to get my supper, but what has hap[p]ened since that time I am ashamed to mention, it was a very severe battle but of such a sort that I never was witness to the like of it, but lett it suffice that I came off with out the victory – but I say nothing, but proceed to the business in hand.

"Ask Mr Anderson if he ever intends to be sober again" Willi I am going to shave you, you vilan, lawbreaker but I say hold ma Lord have you forgot your ____ request. I sent you two letters the week before last, for which reason you gave me the flowing [*i.e.* ?following] – "I can easily perceive that you are very touched with the thing they call grog etc." And for not writing last week you sent in Mr Park the above _____ now Willi how does these? _____ agree but I say nothing. What in the wide worald has put that sober in your head.

But I can proceed no farther for I am so abused this night a[s] never a poor fellow was – first by Mungo (but you are to tell nobody) striking me with a great tigg rung[2] [*interlined*: and with a rope tied me down to the chare etc.] all the time that I am writing and then Andrew Scott spitting and pishing on me so that I am forced agains[t] my mind to end my letter. If I have dune with it I intend to give both Mungo and Andrew a sound drub[b]ing bout, which I suppose will end in blows but if I get them I will give them.

I am informed that Miss W. H. is soon coming into Edinburagh [*sic*] but I say nothing. I had some observations to make upon that subject but time will not permit.

Write me particular[l]y about the adventers [*i.e.* adventures] that you have and what the L:[3] are say and what is going on etc. etc. etc.

If required I will answer you conserning your knowledge of my affections but remember that at the same time I remain

your L: F:[4] and Companion
Alexander Anderson

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

1 The aforementioned Alexander Somerville.

2 In Scots, a 'rung' is a stout stick or cudgel. The meaning of 'tigg' in this context is unclear, although one of its meanings in Scots is to annoy or tease, particularly by tapping.

3 Probably 'Ladies'.

4 Perhaps 'Loving Friend'.

12. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 21st December 1790

Dear William

I wrote a letter to you last week which I suppose has not reached you for I was not a little surprised to find it the other day lying at the back of the drawers but I have sent marked 1st to distinguish~~ed~~ it from this.

I have no news to tell you – not a word – I am going to Mr Mundles tomorrow to see if he is going to make the Bees cast.[1] It is impossible for me to obtain a prospectus of Bells plays[2] as I called there today and was informed that they were all given away.

Hi Ho I dont know what to say, how are ye man? – no that will not do – Mr Laidlaw Sir I hope your very well! ha! how that sounds – and how is all the Ladies! ay theres the thing when was you at Mr Veitches now Lad and w[h]at is the Ladies saying ha? I was hearing yes I was hearing but I will not tell what I was hearing from the c[o]untry. Sad news indeed Willi - sad news inde[e]d I was hearing that .... ah .... and ah poor W… L…

Hang you write the news next week or else we will have to send blank letters for I have no news not a word.

There has [*sic*] a very strange Phenomenon appeared in our room just this moment – the room was suddenly darkened and in a very short space in the clap of a hand in a very surprising manner for the transition from light to darkness and from darkness to light was so quick as to be imperceptable but upon an examination of the phisical causes it appeared to be Mr Anderson snuffing the candles.

I add no more at present but I hate to leave any clean papper and so I have filled it up with nonsense.

– so good boy William good boy –

Yours etc.
Mungo Park

Edinburgh, same day, 1790

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] *The Bee, or Weekly Literary Intelligencer* was a periodical that contained a miscellany of essays and poetry. It was edited by Dr James Anderson and first published by Mundle & Son, Parliament Stairs, Edinburgh, in December 1790. See the Introduction.

[2] *Bell's British Theatre*, which was due to be published in 1791. See Letter 28, Note 1.

13. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 28th December 1790

Dear Willeam

The you thinking [*sic*] that I am often drunk, [*interlined*: but] I will confess all to you, the two first nights that I was drinking I was what they call tipsy but finding that it was hurtful to me, ~~therefore~~ I took your uncle's way that is drinking no more than 6 glasses of rum punch which resolve I have cupt [*i.e.* ?kept] the two last times which were since I wrote to you last, and on friday Mr Gray, Mr Blacklock, Mr Panis and Mr Scott magor[1] are to be at their supper and a glass or two of punch after supper etc.

Therefore I never had been drunk since I came to Edinburgh.

You will pardon the inclosed letter.

I never heard of the adition our family but I [*illegible word – page damaged*] thank you. Conserning my affections I say nothink [*sic*]. Writ me next week. Mr Park has told you the Leath jock [*i.e.* Leith joke] and and [*sic*] all the others newes.

I am
Alexander Anderson

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] Perhaps a mistake for the Latin *maior/major*, used in this instance to indicate 'the elder' Mr Scott.

14. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 28th December 1790

– Christmas News –

– Thursday night or Fraiday morning –

I am just now returned from Mr Parishes as fu[1] as the Atlantic we have been there since eight o clock and had for supper an exellent Yarrow salmon and after that a reaming bow[l] or two or.

Fraiday morning 10 o clock – my head eachs [*i.e.* aches] consumately – Scrub – I can scarcely go to class o whow! ow!

12" o horror! horror! horror! nor tongue nor eye can conceive nor name this, never were my eyes witness to such a spectacle of horror I can not express it in words but take the following as a faint specemen [*sic*] of the rest.

When I came out of Dr Blacks class[2] I heard a very loud noise like thunder but not knowing what it was was going straight home and as my nearest way was to go by a place where the measons were building an english chaple[3] I most commonly pass it, this chaple is 4 windows and a half high (the massons being still building at it) and is situate at the back of the Infirmary – before I approached it I saw about 20 people running towards it in great haste and a little after 3 chairs and some people came from the house and ran towards the Infirmary – I judged something had happened and therefore tooke leg for the same place – before I got to the surgeons ward I heard some very disagreable grones and upon pus[h]ing open the door was struck with a sight truely tragical – groans and crys on all sides – not less than six measons all mangled in the most fearfull manner – it would be unnecessary to relate all their cases I shall only mention one which was the first I approached, his face was truely shocking one of the large freestones having fallen upon it from a hight of about 50 feet, so dreadfully was it shattered that even his own wife (a young girle) tooke him for a stranger till perceiving his coat below the bed she she [*sic*] cryed out "he's mine! he's mine!" and then fainted.

No resemblance of a face could be seen – all was so champed that I stood by him expecting every moment would be his last and could not help reflecting on that part of Ossian "Why dost thou build thy hall? Son of the winged days!! Thous lookst from thy towers today soon shall the Blast of the desert come – it howls in thy empty court and whistles over thy halfworn shield".[4] He only survived 9 hours then died.

The cause of this melancholy affair was the weakness of the scaffold – being unable to support the great weight of stones which they had laid upon it – one man was killed on the spot and six hurt one of them is daed [*sic*] and some dying.

I deffere all the rest of the news till the next week.

Mungo Park

PS The Bee is to be published tomorrow afternoon I shall send it nex[t] week: I told him to send yours to my house and I would send it out. MP

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Selkirk

Note on cover sheet: if you Pleas[e] give Mr Moffats letter to the Post house

[1] In Scots, full – often used to mean full of liquor, *i.e.* intoxicated.

[2] Joseph Black (1728-1799) was a Scottish physicist and chemist. During Mungo's time at Edinburgh University, Black was Professor of Medicine and Chemistry.

[3] St Peter's Episcopal chapel, Roxburgh Place. It was under construction when the scaffold on its third storey gave way. See the Introduction.

[4] Approximately quoted, presumably from memory, from 'Carthon', in *The Poems of Ossian* by James Macpherson.

15. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 4th January 1791

Dear Willeam

I wish you a good New year may helth and happiness attend you all the days of your Life, may rishes [*i.e.* riches] be your servant, Tem[p]erance your standard and reason your master. Nevertheless I wish you success among the fair creatures, but there is one exception only viz if you be my rivel but here I must add nothing. I have many thing to write but I must confine myself to the subject of the Ladies etc.

Our meating [*i.e.* meeting] our walks our conversation was wonderfully strange but I will say nothing of that as I gave Mr Somerville the outlines of it and so you may enquire at him, for I am going to speek about things that are to come to pass at least wisht [*i.e.* wished] for, by etc. etc.

At our last ~~meating~~ interview with the Ladies we proposed coming [*interlined*: to] Leith on Wednesday to dinner (at which they still remain) and then to come up to Edinburgh in the afternoon, and at six o'clock go to the pit in the Circus,[1] but we among our selves have it in our head for to come up from Leith before tea time, but there is the question where are we and they to get ~~our~~ tea? our room if all suceed!!! as is wished, and there I say nothing ha ha ha ha 'ey that will be a rare jock [*i.e.* joke], and then to the Circus, but he he what after? Where do they go and what are we to do? is [*i.e.* ?of this] I say nothing, our adventure our success will be the subject of the next letter, till tomorrow at two o'clock I remain your humble and most obedient servant

Alexander Anderson

I say nothing of the compliments till I see them.

When Miss H was in our room the conversation ~~came~~ [*interlined*: turned] on you, and it was said ~~that~~ by the above miss "that upon no consideration you would let any of our letters be seen" that was what I thought and hops [*i.e.* hoped].

I am your
A. A.

I am in a hurry

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] Based in a dedicated building at the corner of Leith and Broughton Streets, the Edinburgh Equestrian Amphitheatre (also known as the 'Circus') was a popular entertainment venue in the 1790s. The main show began at 7 pm every evening and featured a variety of performers. For the week beginning 3 January 1791, they included a rope dancer, a 'ground and lofty' tumbler, clowns, horsemen, and comic singers and dancers. The evening concluded with a new pantomime called *Fairies Triumph, or Harlequin's Restoration*.

16. From Mungo Park

Edinburgh 4th January 1791

Dear William

I received your letter but not from the hand of her who would have added infinite value to these lines but although this was deneyed [*i.e.* denied] (by unavoidable circumstances) yet I hope to have the felicity pleasure and happiness of seeing her or in other word of dinning [*i.e.* dining] with her tomorrow where I have not the smallest doubt that a little spleen will occasionaly be on the carpet but I shall see to give them as cutting answers as I can, after dinner we intend to come up to Edinburgh and perhaps to the Circus[1] but all these are but occasional as anyhow we are goin'd to Lethe [*i.e.* going to Leith] to dine tomorrow.

The reason why I was not in the room was, I had just gone out to the Libberary when they came in and (as I stayed some time) before I returned they were gone so I have not yet seen them but I shall give you some distant hints about their reception. The 2 Alexanders[2] being on their journey to Leith [*sic*] on the walk they had the good fortune to meet with the Ladies and immediately taking about escorted them up to Edinburgh and the first place they landed was in our room where as soon as they were seated (but this is a secret) the 2

Alexanders immediately proceeded to give them their hansle[3] which was a bit chimpy[4] (ha delicious) a clap on the shoulder and a significant shake of the hand etc. etc. etc.

And now after giving you some general remarks on hansles I shall proceed to tell you what I have the expectation of receiving by way of hansle and which to me appears of a very sereous [*sic*] and parabolic nature I have not yet seen it nor do I care how long but it is an effegie of a Bubly Jock[5] and a Parrot very ominous birds indeed! and I have been informed that the Parrot was sent by Miss N H but I am not certain but what conclusions to draw from these two birds is what perplexes me and how to give them a cutting answre setts my brain on fire or in other words makes me laugh half an hour every night.

As to the affair of the beads I can give them an answre not less galling than that haughty expression no indeed I wont which they shall be sure to get the first time it comes upon the carpet but what that answre is must depend upon the question but it shall be such an answre and such an answre as will yes indeed I will but – but to return to the last night of the year 90 we had as a body may say a nipriken[6] and got ourselves all pretty canty[7] and it was 3 o clock before we bedded, at the said drinking bout a gentleman sung a song of his own composition addapted for the very purpose but this letter will not admitt of it nor do I remember any of it at present.

You will receive in your trunk the first Bee of the hive[8] but according to your desire they shall be sent for the future by the post – your brother Robert[9] was here just now and as he came down the street he saw a large quantity of [bloo]d upon the pavement which was the melancholy remains of a slatter[10] who had just fallen from the house and was killed on the spot, upon Robert relating the story to us round the board[11] Mr Lang[12] being in his lugs[13] took a singing, his face turned pale, he shut his eyes he he.

I am yours etc.
Mungo Park
1791[14]

PS There's a letter for ye

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

Note on cover sheet: side script if any letter should come from Mr Moffat be sure to put it in the Trunk or if the Book/Item – MP

[1] The star attraction at the Circus that week were the 'European Albinos'. See the *Caledonian Mercury*, 6 January 1791.

[2] The aforementioned Alexander Anderson and Alexander Park, with whom Mungo lodged in Edinburgh.

[3] In Scots, a gift given for a specific occasion, in this case for the New Year.

[4] In Scots, a small piece of food.

[5] In Scots, a turkey cock.

[6] In Scots, a small measure of alcohol.

[7] In Scots, merry.

[8] *i.e.* the first edition of *The Bee*. See Letter 12, Note 1.

[9] Robert Laidlaw (*c.*1773-1797), an apprentice ironmonger living in Edinburgh.

[10] *i.e.* slater (roofer).

[11] *i.e.* a table, specifically for the purpose of eating or drinking.

[12] George Lang (b.1771), a childhood friend from Selkirk.

[13] In Scots, cups – *i.e.* Lang was drunk.

[14] Mungo drew the number 1 of the new year as an illuminated number surrounded by ivy and a laurel wreath, which he appears to have copied from the front-page title of the *Caledonian Mercury*.

17. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 11th January 1791

Dear William

I received your hasty letter or in other word your letter wrote in a haste, I am happy to hear that the first Bee[1] has arrived but this cold weather I think has prevented any more of them from taking flight as I have not received any more of them since.

I was down at Leith on Seturday [*sic*] where I had the felicity-pleasure-happiness and whatnot of seeing the Selkirk Ladies W H and A V[2] and likewise of escorting W H up to the Circus and back again with many other circumstances which I suppose you will hear from some of my companions – yesternight Mr and Mrs Vogan,[3] W H and A V drank tea and supt in our room and afterwards went down in the 9 o'clock coach. Mr Vogan was very merry and so was all the ladies all cracking over the jocks about Selkirk etc.

I shall now answre your letter more particularly concerning a cutting answre to Miss N H this I have thought fit to do in her own strain of similitudes and therefore have sent her a book which I think will give her such another cutting answre as will make her provide herself of another name, I have directed

it to you but you must take off that cover and you will perceive another below directed to Miss N H and with this cover on it you must deliver it to her own hand you need say nothing as it will speak for its self but this you may say "that you W L got this from M P to give you [*interlined*: N H] as your new years Gift" thats all.

When the Ladies were up they handid [*i.e.* handed] about the beads and I gave them such another cutting etc. as made them look etc.

We are all very hearty but you are so lazy – write to Andrew Scott etc. next week etc. and I

I am yours etc.
Mungo Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

Note on cover sheet: with a Book

[1] The journal of that name. See Letter 12, Note 1.

[2] The aforementioned Wilhelmina Henderson and either Alison or Annie Veitch.

[3] Francis and Jean Vogan, who were chaperoning the two young women during their visit to Edinburgh. See the Introduction.

18. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 25th January 1791

My Dear Willeam

The above was wrote about two or three weeks ago before the carrier came, but after he came I perceived there was no Letters to me I proceeded no farther expecting to receive one next week which I impatiently [*interlined*: wated] to receive but behold there was no thing to Anderson but please your worship I received the last letter which I have just now before me. In your letter the muse has been glinting and long may she shin[e].

I have almost no matter to write to you, but the Ladies are now at there [*i.e.* their] respective abod[e]s and no access is granted to any of the male kind, so that we are obliged to say nothing.

Sir I received the fiddle which I no sooner received than at once with a ho[a]rse and tremendous murmer I played the first and last time upon it, and as for the bubly jock I never received it, but could not understand what was the

meaning of it neither would they tell [*interlined*: what] was ~~was~~ the intention of sending it, but I say nothing. I have no more to write at present but remain your

Humble Servint
Alexander Anderson

I am not well this night but not with Love which I suppose you are sometimes trubled with.

I wish you a good new Friday.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

19. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 25th January 1791

Dear William

You will receive in the trunk the 3d no. of the Bee which I got sent to me but I have since seen the Editor and they are for the future to be sent by the post – in your last letter you thought I could not send N H a cutting answre without the book but to show you the od[d]s of it you will find in letter 2d an inclosed one to her which I think will half and more bully her out of her Christian name but as a letter to her if seen might raise a tatle you may for her sake keep it cosh[1] (write what fun you hear) give her it with these words "there's a cutting answre for your bubbly Jock", it is 4 o'clock in the morning by Jupiter – good night Dear William

Yours etc.
Mungo Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] In Scots, quiet – *i.e.* Mungo was asking William Laidlaw for discretion in this matter.

20. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 1st February 1791

~~my~~ Dear Sir

and Dear Sir what shall I say, for to asist me in any thing either in the Disquisitions of Love etc. I cannot bo[a]st of a Muse to carry my Ieas [*i.e.* ?Ideas] to the foot of Parnas[s]us but it has been too often confirmed that there is nothing there but baran [*i.e.* barren] rocks and poverty upon the tope [*i.e.* top], you[r] Muse has taken a sudden turn indeed to be either stopt in her carreer or ~~turn~~ to des[c]end from the fanning plea[s]ures to near the solemn mantion [*i.e.* mansion] of the tomb, but I am sorry to hear of the sudden indisposition of the old B...y[1] which if any thing happen him there will be not only a general lamentation as he was so useful in society but how will ever etc. etc. bear such a thing as what was indeed great but little in compairison [*sic*] to this. I have not seen Miss H. these three weeks but on sabath [*sic*] night last I [*illegible word – page damaged*] down at Leith and drank tea with Mrs Vogan[2] who was then not well with a pain in her head (but she then knew nothing of what has happened) she said that she had not seen her sister for a fourtneight [*i.e.* fortnight] but as I was coming home I went in to see Agnes Romanis who was lat[e]ly delivered of a daughter, there was Miss Law and Miss Peggy Law (which in the mean time was a good jock [*i.e.* joke] but I say nothing) and as I enquired for Miss H she viz Miss Law said that she seed [*i.e.* saw] her in Mr Hall's meating [*i.e.* meeting] house[3] and she further proceeded and said that Miss H. was at a practising on Saturday so that she did not go down to Leith etc. but as for Miss Veitch I do not know where she is staying.

As for my health it is but sie and so as it was, I hope you will be quite better before this come to you.

That unfortunate man is to be exeicuted [*sic*] tomorow and before this comes to you he probably will be in his everlasting abode of that afterwards.[4]

Alexander Anderson

Ecxcuse [*sic*] I am that throng that I cannot get time to red over what I have[5]

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

1 Probably 'Bailly' or similar, in reference to Andrew Henderson the elder. See Letter 21.

2 The aforementioned Jean Vogan. She and her husband lived in Rotten Row, Leith.

[3] The Associate Synod meeting-house in Rose Street, Edinburgh. Its minister, the Reverend James Hall (1755-1826), attracted large crowds due to his skill as a preacher.

[4] William Gadesby, a convicted thief, was due to be hanged on 2 February. Between his sentencing and this date, he penned an autobiography in which he claimed to have committed various other crimes. His execution was postponed so that these further crimes could be investigated. He was eventually hanged on 23 February. His autobiography, which according to its publisher was 'a narrative of the most extraordinary and unexampled depravity of conduct perhaps ever exhibited to the world', was published the day after.

[5] There was no room on the page for Anderson to finish this postscript. If there had been, he would probably have written 'wrote'.

21. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 1st February 1791

Dear William

I received the two Poems which certainly have great merit but I suppose they have been extracted from the Kelso pappers.

I was informed by Robert Fletcher of the Baillies[1] illness which gives me great uneasiness and as he <u>was</u> a man of truely generous and liberal sentiments I have no doubt but all Selkirk will lament his fall – Long may he stand – and (addopting the words of Ossian) "if he <u>does</u> fall as one day the warior <u>must</u> fall the generous shall weep at his grave and the sons of the strangers mourn". I have not seen Miss W. H for 3 weeks past but if I should you may be sure I would not inform her of it – if you have not delivered the letter you may deffer [*i.e.* defer] all jocks at such a time as they would certainly be very disagreable – so if you have not delivered it you may return it <u>unopened</u> under cover to me next week.

An accquaintance of mine has promised to show me three verses of his own composition which will contain at once the beauties of the <u>sublime</u> <u>original</u> and <u>musical</u> and may either read <u>Prose</u> <u>Verse</u> or <u>Blank Verse</u> without altering a single word. It will certainly be the most compleat peace [*i.e.* piece] of English Poetry that ever was wrote!! When I can obtain it you shall see it.

I saw your brother Robert on Sunday and he was very mad at you for not writing him – excuse haste – and

I am Dear William
Yours etc.
Mungo Park

N B dont forget to return N H's letter if it is not delivered.
Burn this

MP

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] The aforementioned Andrew Henderson the elder. A baillie was a local magistrate.

22. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 8th February 1791

Dear William

I am sorry that the letter should have been broken up but I by no means blame you for it for it was but naturale to think that (when there was no restraint) you would be curious to see its contents and as I gave you no information concerning it but rather otherwise (as you would see in the letter) I freely forgive you – but since it is discovered it would be imprudent in me to tell you how to behave you certainly must know how much the happiness of her (whose tender feelings would take even the most distant hint as a discovery) depends upon secrecy and also how such a sensibility would relish the public tattles. I shall say no more at present, perhaps it may serve for a 2 o'clock job some night when you and I shall keep together next and it will certainly be a more aggrable [*i.e.* agreeable] theme the [*i.e.* than] our disquisitions on Miss A. V.[1] which has so often served us whole nights.

I had a thought of sending a few verses to the Bee but he is so d[amne]d saucy that I believe I had better say nothing.

I have not seen W H this month but from all that I can learn she has gote rather a too favourable account of her father's distress as Mr Lang informed me that her on Sunday and she was very merry and told him that her father was able to ride out in a chaise and to sit at the fire side and was near as well as ever – but I fear – write particularly about him.

I am sincerely yours
Mungo Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] Almost certainly Annie Veitch, the elder of the Veitch sisters, with whom Mungo had a rather adversarial relationship. See the Introduction.

23. From Alexander Anderson

Edinburgh 22nd February 1791

Dear William

I received yours and again this week, I received yours, but for want of time I was sor[r]y that I did not write to you again these theree [*i.e.* three] weeks, but I hope you will excuse me after considering the various circumstances that I must unavoidably be taken up with, but it is almost imposible that you in the country can know what we are taken up about, at different times. It is often our wish and even saying that if William Laidlaw was amongst us, we often wonder what William Laidlaw will be about, we often imagin[e] that you will be I need not say where.

You will winder [*i.e.* wonder] what comes off [*i.e.* of] the Ladies but for my part, after they went home to their respective places, I did not see them for a month, but intending to see at least some of them, I went several times past their windows, but not succeeding, I had recource [*sic*] to Mr Hall's meating [*i.e.* meeting] house or sabath was eight-days [*sic*] and there I had the felicity, pleasure and happiness of seeing them both in the house, and after we came out, and after all that for a particular reason they intended to come to our room on the Monday following which accordingly took place, they not only came but brought Miss Dickson, I can add no more.

You gave my compliments [*interlined*: to __] but but [*sic*] asking your pardon there was no offence but I need not at present say who I meant, that will be known soon enough, but if you had given them to ____ I would have but ___.

I hardly understand what you mean by the first part of your letter, viz some bodies [*i.e.* somebody's] answer, see Mr Sommervills letter.

Busimification will require more time and paper than I have at present etc.

Alexander Anderson

I suppose that Mr P. P. and S.[1] will acquaint you with AV's[2] circumstances see Mr Som[merville].

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Selkirk

1 Probably the aforementioned Alexander Park, Mungo Park and Andrew Scott.

2 Probably Alison Veitch, who was in Edinburgh at this time.

24. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 22nd February 1791

Dear William

If you recolect before we left Selkirk I half and more promised to speake in the Pantheon but as I had a great many things on hand I never could get as much time till last week when the following was debated "whither is the Theatre or Circus most worthy of public notice" and as I intended to go at any rate I thought I might make a bit and so away I went with a speach of Broad Scotts and after hearing a great many learned speaches rose and spoke with universal applause so much so indeed that I had to stop a considerable time after each verse in consequence of the ruff[1] but perhaps I have said too much in my own applause but if I had said nothing you might have thou[gh]t I was hissed. As to the Bee afair – I have sent him one peice some time ago but which did not receive a place – though he himself confessed it a performance of infinite merite, it was the following –

The Stormy Night

I

The storm begins to lower – the Ball of day
sinks in the darkened wave – the troubled sky
rolls big with tempest and no friendly ray
shines on the path – the teases and thistles fly

II

Loud roars the mountain stream – the adged oak
groans to the Blast – the Hunter on the hill
reels with Benighted steps – the hollow rock
sound from afar – Black runs the mossy rill

III

The trembling sailor hears – the ocean roars
around the rocking Bark – the ratling wind
Howls in the riggin and the brocken oars
float on the surge – confusion fills his mind

Banks of Yarrow 1791 M.P.

N B You will perhaps see no beauty in it the first reading but if you stop at the pauses and read it like prose I think it is as well worth a place as the childish addresses to the Bee. Write me your opinion of it.[2]

I am surprised to find no mention of Dr Cramonts death[3] as we heard it affirmed for a fac[t] hear [*i.e.* here] a week ago and it is likewise going very currant [*i.e.* current] (I have h[e]ard it 10 time) that Miss A.V. is cried[4] on Mr Mac and that the wedding was to be in a few days – Alteration!!! We likewise heard that Mr John Dunlope was in Se[l]kirk prison for … moderation!!!

I am
Dear William
Your sincere friend
Mungo Park

P.S. Mr Anderson has told me of Dr Cramonts death but none of the other.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] In Scots, 'to ruff' is to applaud by stamping or drumming the feet.

[2] This note was written along the edge of the poem.

[3] Reverend Dr Cramond's death, aged only fifty years, was a great shock to the people of Selkirk, and his funeral was a crowded affair. An account of it can be found in Russell, J. *Reminiscences of Yarrow*, Edinburgh, 1886, 24.

[4] In Scots, to have the banns for marriage read in the kirk.

25. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 1st March 1791

Dear William

Nothing strange has happened this week ergo I can write nothing strange to you – I cannot send you a copy of my speach this week as I allways burn these litle productions of the muse but perhaps I may be able to send it at some future period – I have not seen W.H. this long time unless[1] the tother day as I was going to the Infirmary I was lu[c]ky enough to meet her on the street but unless then I have not seen her this month and more – on Wednesday last I was at the Theatere [*sic*] where after the comedy of The Suspicious Husband[2] was presented the new serious pantomime "The fall of Captain James Cook" and

received with unbounded applause the scenes and dresses etc. were very elegant and the part of Captain Cook grandly done.[3]

We are hearing that weddings are going on very well about the country though Miss V be all a sniff and even in Edinburgh here they are not standing still Mr Tait has got his long reported wife Miss Law at last I have heard frequently affirmed.

No correspondance (by letters) says the Illustrious [?Battie] can be kept up without either news or questions and as you have got no news I shall give you a few questions.

Is Tibby dunlope staying at whitemorehall just now? has your great black dog rover casten his hair? or is he clipped? or is he alive? or dead? is the young belies[4] parlour lok brass or iron? how many bars are there in his Carron grate?[5] what o'clock ist? whats the colour of the Emporess of rusia's hair? is the crows begung to big yet?[6] does the young belie take his breakfast yount the get?[7] whats the price of the meal? do you ever go to Mr Veitches?[8]

I am
Dear William
Yours etc.
Mungo Park

its all a whim.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] In Scots, except.

[2] *The Suspicious Husband* is a comedy play by Benjamin Hoadly, written in 1747. The fact that performances were still being given in fashionable venues such as the Theatre Royal in 1791 demonstrates its popular success.

[3] Mungo was referring to *The Death of Captain Cook*, a hugely popular 'serious pantomime'. It was on stage at both the Theatre Royal and the Circus in Edinburgh during this time.

[4] *i.e.* baillie, in this instance Andrew Henderson the younger. William Laidlaw was living with the Hendersons and might understandably write about them in letters to his friends.

[5] The Carron Foundry, near Falkirk, manufactured high-quality, decorative cast-iron fire grates, among other things.

[6] In Scots, 'has the crow begun to build [its nest] yet?'.

[7] In Scots, 'beyond the road' or 'further up the road', which can have the meaning of 'out of the way' but might imply here 'at someone else's house'.

[8] The aforementioned John Veitch.

26. FROM ALEXANDER ANDERSON

Edinburgh 8th March 1791

Dear Willeam

In my last letter I said that I would mention that I would in this say something on the word Busimification![1] by no means all, but before that I must inform you with a particular circumstance that has lately hapened in this city, it will apear something strang[e] to you, but not to surprise you in a future period I shall, begg your indulgence to mention it. In the year one thousand seven hundred and ~~Eighty~~ ninety one February twenty eight, and [*illegible – ink blot*] R: of G: III K of G:B:[2] this is it [*illegible word*] I by Mushi[3] got my H:T: and in the same year Andrew Scott got his H:T: but William I say nothing, but among the Ladies I am quite the dandie.

And again sir this morning one Mr Scott an accquaintence [*sic*] off [*i.e.* of] mine went off in the Mail Coach for Liverpool and there he intends to go on bo[a]rd the Nancy, bound for the Cost of Genua[4] (or how do you spell it) and from thence to Jama[i]ca for rum and shugar which you know are the constituent parts of a Businification [*sic*].

As the old saying is this letter comes to inform you that, I am in better health, than since I came into Edinburgh, and I hope that this will find you in the same.

Last sabbath I went myself to leath [*i.e.* Leith] but no!

And furthermore every night (during I suppose my say [*i.e.* ?stay] in Edinburgh) I will have to go to a class in the New Town opposite where Miss Willeam [*i.e.* Wilhelmina] Henderson stays nearly forgenst [*i.e.* foregainst] the very house, at least I have to go by her door at four o'clock in the afternoon, but in this case as in a former I am forced to say nothing.

But as to the Busimification I must deffer it till another oportunity as I have no time to enlarge as before I began to [write] this letter the punch glasses were just removed I was going to subscribe for the U. Travler[5] but I am afraid that my father will not let me.

I am your
Alexander Anderson

I say nothing about the Pantheon as etc ____ and I asure you that I never spock [*i.e.* ?spoke] in it none some thinks never will, they have all dune [*i.e.* done] it but me.
A.

Give my compliments to Mr Somerville and tell him that I do not know whether he is Dead or Living, but in confirmation of the letters, I got a little hint that he was lately jumping in a barn yeard [*i.e.* yard].

I am yours etc.
A A

I am not in all probability coming home to Selkirk when the classes gives over as I have got an uppiting[6] – but I say as you say nothing.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] The reference is obscure.

[2] *i.e.* in the reign of George III King of Great Britain (1760-1820).

[3] In the Old Testament, Mushi was the son of Merari (Leviticus 3:20). Why Alexander used his name in this way is unknown.

[4] *i.e.* the coast of Guinea. The *Nancy* was a slave-ship that worked the triangular trade between Liverpool, Africa and the Caribbean.

[5] *The New Universal Traveller; or, a collection of late voyages through Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and the South Sea Islands*. Compiled and translated by Robert Heron, the 900-page collection was published in two volumes in 1791 by G. Mudie of Edinburgh. Alexander's comments, and those of Mungo Park in Letter 27, indicate that it was also possible to buy the voyages individually by subscription.

[6] In Scots, a lodging.

27. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 9th March 1791

Dear William

Last Thursday I made my second appearance at the Pantheon upon the question "Is poverty, profligacy or deformity the greater Bar to mairage [*i.e.* marriage]" and with the same success as formerly you may guess of that by the president giving me a ticket more than the rest and told me that if ever I could find it convenient he would take it exeeding kind if I should favour the society with some more such productions and that he never heard any speak scotts verse so well since he was president which is above 15 years – I am my own Trumpeter!!!

As to the Bee affair I realy cant tell whether they are my verses or not for it is more than six weeks since I sent him any thing, I called upon him today and paid him for the 1st volume he seems to be a very clever fellow for he and I cracked away for half an hour upon different subjects but I allways took care to keep M.P. out of the question – I have subscribed for another Volumne [*sic*] – I am not a subscriber for the universal Traveler but reads every number as soon as published.

As to the hinted story I can say nothing about it as I am intirely ignorant of it but shall answre all pro et con (as the saying is) in as far as I'm concerned but as I have not the least hint whatt these hints are I wish when you hint these hints that you would likewise hint who the hinter of these hints is and then without hinting I shall say

I am yours etc.
Mungo Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

28. From Mungo Park

Edinburgh 15th March 1791

Dear William

Your hints were indeed very surprising to me and I wonder how you could harbour such an opinion after knowing that I was some other where but as she may have received letters and as I may be judged for the writer of them I can assure you that I never wrote one line to her in my life though Miss A.V. (which I suppose to be the author) may have suspected it.

I am not a subscriber for the universal traveler as a work of so long a continuance would not aggre [*i.e.* agree] with my fluctuating situation but I read every no. as soon as published and am just now done with the third in my opinion the work is very good.

As to The British Theatre[1] it is the expences alone which hinders me for it is certainly the best thing of thi[s] kind ever printed. I have seen the first number, the plates are extreemly beautifull and the print and papper superb. No. 1st is Comus[2] with 2 be[a]utifull figures.

I wonder that you did not mention when the old Balie gote better (for I was hearing that) but doubt it will not be so sudden, be sure to write next week

how he is coming on in his recovery – I dont remember any thing more at present so good boy William and

I am yours etc.
Mungo Park

PS Since I have told you all pro and con conserning the hinted story I wish in your next you could give me some hints about the author
M P

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] *Bell's British Theatre*, which was published in Edinburgh by G. Mudie in 1791. It was a multi-volume work, each volume consisting of a single play. In spite of Mungo's reservations regarding the cost, different print versions were available from Mudie, including a cheap version on 'coarse' paper costing 6 pence per play. Mungo was apparently thinking of the 'Splendid' version, 'for Amateurs [lovers] of Fine Printing and Beautiful Embellishments' (*Caledonian Mercury*, 1 January 1791), which at 5 shillings per volume was beyond his budget.

[2] A masque written by John Milton and first performed in 1634.

29. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 31st May 1791

Dear William

I am very far from harbouring the least suspicion that you have acted any way out of jot or that even _____ has been guilty of what I so little suspected, I was only giving my opinion upon thing[s] in general and if I were to condescend upon particulars I would be apt to sing "o gin I ware fairly shot o her"[1] but till once matters come to an explanation or in other words a conversation I shall say nothing!

I have been hearing Dr Scotts fate withe [*sic*] the Ladies in differant letters please write how he bears his afflictions.

Miss W. H. will be arrived I suppose before this time cram[me]d full of Edinburgh news. L[ord] send that M P be none of the budget. Heavens defend me from a womans tongue and mairage and all the other ills of life are blessings!!

I suppose you will be drinking his Majistys health at the Cross on Saturday and I expect the particulars of it next week, and as night has turned the beam and weighed up morning I would beg you would excuse great haste

yours sincerely
Mungo Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] The first line of the contemporary Scottish song 'Fairly Shot o Her' by John Anderson, the theme of which is essentially that of the proverb 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure'.

30. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 8th June 1791

Dear William

My time will not permit me to go into long disquisitions upon _____ so let her story sing oblivion for I cant remember it without pain to think how many "look like the inocent flower but are the serpent under it"[1] fallacia sumpta Vestis desiperat omnes in quibus.[2]

I heard a particular account of the Seria from AA and cannot help thinking how blue she would look, I would have given all the hair of my beard to have been there at the time.[3]

O Man! what Charming Days are here just now the streets are all crouded with Ladies but (with regard to me) "they pass as the Dream of the Hunter on the Hills of Heath"[4] for I have in a manner forgot the sex and are happy in their absence, blessed oblivion!!

The Kings Birthday was celebrated not with d[r]unkeness and feighting[5] but with the loyal notes of Great George is king (cannon etc.) and loud thunder.

My opinion of the Bee is that it is a great deal better than ever and I entend[6] to write a peice some of those days when I have time why dont you do so too!

I'll sign my sel[f] Q&R[7] so notice

excuse a 7 letter haste

Yours
Mungo Park

PS What ails Somervile[8]

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

[1] *Macbeth* Act 1, scene 4, lines spoken by Lady Macbeth as she reveals her true nature as an evil woman, intent on persuading her husband to regicide.

[2] Paraphrasing a line from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book XIII. Mungo adapted the quotation by adding '*vultus disipit*' above '*vestis desiperat*'. See the Introduction for the meaning and context.

[3] This paragraph appears to refer to the death of a young woman.

[4] A loose quotation from the aforementioned *The Poems of Ossian*.

[5] In Scots, fighting.

[6] In Scots, intend.

[7] The meaning of these initials is unclear.

[8] The aforementioned Alexander Somerville.

31. FROM MUNGO PARK

Edinburgh 14th June 1791

Gulielmus

Latina, linguarum omnium pulchrima, non solum in Libris, sed etiam in Litteris, scribi potest ratio ea, nunc te demisi haec ruda indejestaqu moles; in quo se bona non videntur, tantum opinio, sua melancholia magnis rizibus Dispelere adjuvabit gratiae amabili sexus nimpe mihi alienae sunt sed spleniae semper mihi spuntur quo casu statuor neque tempus consumere nec studium negligere omnibus gratiis dare posunt sed amico Libroque vitam transabo et ventos dare (sine suspira) omnes Juventes amores statui – quia?

Aire Incognite

Amor, tumultum
in animo, surrexit
aperte vel ocultum,
tum vehimens perrexit.
Suspiris frequentibus

Doloris cruentibus
aducit flentibus
Voluntate suo
omnibus virginibus
sic gratia ejus fluo[1]

I suppose by this time you will be wishing for a word of English and to tell you the truth the Latin never comes weel by hand with me unless when I get a little of the creature[2] which I have got the night, you may hear by my speaking and more especialy by my writing for all this is the productions of the bowl with uncle Gyon[3] and quite extempour for I made the verses in the time that Alexander[4] was laying the cloaks into the trunk – a reverie!

Theres not one new thing in all the corners of my brain, to give you, ergo if I write any thing I shall merely repeat what you may have heard – but one thing there's a fleet coming to Leith road soon – news when it comes – L___ Bless Mr Burke and C__se the french revolution.[5]

Yours sincerely
Mungo Park
Edinburgh

Excuse me to A Somervile

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk

1 See the Introduction for a translation and comment.

2 In Scots, a euphemism for whisky.

3 The reference is obscure.

4 Mungo's aforementioned brother.

5 Probably 'Lord Bless Mr Burke and Curse the french revolution'. Edmund Burke MP was a member of the Whig Party and, among other things, a prominent opponent of the French Revolution. Mungo had perhaps read Burke's pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in November the previous year.

32. From Mungo Park

London 31st October 1792

I believe I shall not be able to send you [a] yard worth of information for though I am in London which is the world in minature I see nothing very extraordinary but bustle and confusion, a thing I never was fond of, so you need expect nothing new.

Our voyage was very pleasant and only of 4 days duration, in every place I find myself at home, on the sea I was happy and on the land am the same Gaudeamus.[1] I have seen some of the Literati and am bussy [*sic*] in reading new books, running thro the hospitals and seeing collections.

I shall give you a fuller account of London in some future letter when I have seen more of it and had more liasure [*i.e.* leisure] to examine the faces of its inhabitantes.

In your next be sure to let me know how Somervile is, I hope he is getting better, I would have wrote him just now but as his letter would have been nearly the same as this I thought I would defer till I had seen something more.

My compliments to all that sat round the board at James Duns yon night and though I despair at having such another till I shall cast my eyes on the Caledonian hills yet I look forward to the bustle of life with indifferance sensible that all things are guided by a superior hand and though absent from freinds; by his blessing we can converse and by his gracious presence be happy though all the powers of the world should combine against us.

I cannot tell in what link of the grand chain of this world providence has placed me but wherever it is I hope I shall say thy will be done.

Though I don't much regard the opinion of man kind or the strife of litle tongues yet it is a satisfaction to know it, and as I suspect the V.s will open a budget[2] I should like to hear some of its contents.

I found in my pocket yesternight a piece of the bake[3] which I got at the memorable place beyond the Lindeen church yard,[4] rememberance painted the scene and humanity could not forbear at it though we then parted you have now met again

your sincere Freind
Mungo Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Selkirk[5]

Note on cover sheet: N.B. via Carlisle

1 Latin for 'let us rejoice'.

[2] Mungo referred to a 'budget' to allude to gossip or reputational damage more than once in his letters to William Laidlaw.

[3] In Scots, a biscuit.

[4] Lindean Old Kirk, a medieval building approximately 1.5 miles (2.4 km) north of Selkirk. It was abandoned in 1586. In 1792, as today, the kirk and graveyard were in a ruinous state. Given that the village of Lindean had no less than fifteen drinking establishments, despite its modest size, it is reasonable to suppose that Mungo, William Laidlaw and their friends had been out drinking. The large number of inns in the village were chiefly sustained by custom from the textile mill at Lindean.

[5] William Laidlaw was still living in Selkirk, either with the Hendersons or at Broadmeadows. By January 1793, he had relocated to Edinburgh.

33. FROM AGNES HENDERSON

Selkirk 26th November 1792

Dear Willie

I was favoured with your lecture on Sunday morning and takes the pen to write you this.

My restless companion thumps me for every word I write she's making such a terrible biz I dont know what I am doing. I should thank you for your kind enquiry after my poor ears they are now quite well. ~~I should~~ I would certainly have accepted of your kind present had I not been provided I have got a pair from my father.

I intended to have wrote you a long letter but I am very busy working a ball vest[1] for Andrew so has little spare time as the great occasion is near an approach. With expects a letter soon

I am Dear Willie
Yours etc.
Agnes Henderson

PS You may either send your letters by post or carrier which ever is most convenient.

The cover sheet does not survive.

[1] *i.e.* a waistcoat.

34. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

London 19th January 1793

Dear William

I have been to blame in delaying so long to answer your letter, nor do I plead the want of time as an excuse for although I have been as throng as I possibly could be yet a strong inclination can almost make time at least never wants it, and I doubt not but before you get to the end of this letter you will find I have had too good cause to occupy my attention.

After coming to London in order to study the English Laws and engaging so far in the pursuit that I found it not unconquerable I have now found out that unless I had served an apprenticeship of five years I am eternally debarred from practising as an English attorney, by this you will easily see the last fatal blow given to my hopes of succeeding in Berwick. It is impossible for me to discribe nor would I wish you to feell any thing like the sensations in my mind at the time when I learned this piece of dismal news; Although I have cause to lament the loss of B[erwick] for many considerations yet there is none makes so deep an impression on my mind as the bar that it has thrown betwixt me and my charmer[1] – at a time when I had given scope to the most enthusiastick ideas of felicity in her company, the cup of promised bliss in one sad hour is soured with dissapointment and despair. But thy will be done O God! thy will be done! And man should not repine, and who would repine when he is conscious that the part he is to act on the Scale of Existence[2] is marked out by prescience and in that course the hand of unerring wisdom will be his guide; he whose protection is extended to the meanest of his works (if any are more so than other) will give to every man his portion of happiness in this life and has promised the afflicted a happy termination of their days. In this hope I am enabled to thank the Great Dispenser of events for all his dispensations and trust that the time is fast approaching when I shall see myself in a situation able to fulfill all my engagements to that amiable Lady.

I have been offered settlements in London not at all dispicable but as I know my Lucr[3] would rather wish to be in Scotland and that I joined with my love for my country has brought me to the resolution of spending the summer session in Edinburgh if no uncommon place throws up for me here before the end of Aprile.

After passing for a notary at Edinburgh I intend this harvest to push my fortune upon my own footing and as I have some guess of a place I hope to be in possession of my Lucretia before the end of the present year; a delay which to you may seem short but one in my situation is an age to look forward to.

You may let Anderson[4] know what has happened concerning the B[erwick] affair but caution him not to hint anything of it [to] Lucretia for I

would by no means let her know anything of it till I have found out a proper remedy for the misfortune. I beg you would write as soon as this comes to hand and be sure not to be so tedious in writing as me for I hope you have not so good reason for your delay as I have – and tell Anderson I wish to hear from him immediately and I am,

Dear William,
Your most obedient friend,
Alexander Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mrs Scotts, foot of Gilmores Close, Grass Market, Edinburgh, North Britain

[1] *i.e.* enchantress.

[2] Alexander's metaphor refers to a Christian concept of a predetermined course through life towards an afterlife in heaven, marked out by God.

[3] The aforementioned Esther Turnbull. Alexander referred to his future wife as 'Lucretia' in all of his surviving letters to William Laidlaw, often in the shorted form 'Luc:'. His intention was no doubt to liken her to the Roman noblewoman Lucretia, who was portrayed in some classical works as the model of female virtue. From here on in the transcript, the abbreviated form of her pet name has been silently expanded.

[4] The aforementioned Alexander Anderson.

35. From Wilhelmina Henderson

Selkirk 27th January 1793

Dear Willie

I received yours on Thursday inclosed in the Mirror[1] for which I return you money bra[2] thanks – you may be sure the Lady in the Habit was just the thing I looked for and after viewing her from top to toe as the saying is I could not help thinking you flattered me a good deal in saying I resembled her a little however as I know you are sometimes rather plenty of your plaister,[3] I concluded you had rather been burdened with it at the time you wrote me.

News news terrible heaps of news nothing but marraiges [*sic*] going on nothing less than five couples was to be proclaimed[4] yesterday however as there was no truth in the report I shall only mention one of the couples which was no other than your sister and Bailey you know what.

I must conclude as the carrier is just going of[f]. In hopes of hearing from you soon

I am Sir
your most Humble Rumble Come Tumble Servant
W.H.

Burn the paper after perusal.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mrs Scotts, Gillmoors [*sic*] Close, Edinburgh

[1] Probably the literary journal of that name. Originally published in Edinburgh in 1779 and 1780, it had recently been made available in multi-volume bound editions.

[2] In Scots, many good.

[3] In this context, to plaister means to flatter or to offer soothing words.

[4] It was the custom for public notice to be given in church of an intended marriage, so that any person who knew of any impediment thereto would have the opportunity of lodging an objection.

36. FROM MUNGO PARK

London 2nd February 1793

Dear William,

You know I was allways lazy and that a very little hurry disconcerts me, these will in some measure excuse my negligence, in being so long in answering your last letter, I have now got every thing ready and will be on board in less than a fortnight, and if the Frenchmen do not lay hold on us I expect to be in the Downs from India in 13 or 14 months hence.

I was sorry to hear that your complaints had recurred[1] but as Anderson made no mention of you in his letter I expect you will have got better and I hope you will one day shake hands saying "Bless me Mungo I'm glad to see you" – it is no doubt looking [*page damaged* - ?too] far; and considering the uncertainty of humane [*i.e.* human] life it looks like building airy castles but perhaps they may be realized and if not "our days are in his hands".[2]

You may tell Anderson he need not be affraind [*i.e.* afraid] of Surgeons Hall and if he had been here last week I could have assured him of an Indeaman,[3] for there is now a scarcity of mates.[4]

I expect you will have a letter lying at Mr Dickson's for me on my return.

Adieu
Your sincere friend
Mungo Park

P.S. give my compliments to your brothers, and try if you can give them sideways to ... you know who – and to all our acquaintances, Rodger and Lang[5] in particular. Your MP.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mrs Scotts, foot of Guilmores Coss,[6] Grass market, Edinburgh

1 William Laidlaw's leg troubled him from time to time, as contemporary letters from his family attest.

2 Mungo was perhaps paraphrasing from Psalm 31:15: 'My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me'.

3 *i.e.* Mungo would have secured Alexander Anderson a job as an assistant surgeon on board an East Indiaman, one of the merchant ships operated by the East India Company.

4 The demand for ship's surgeons and their assistants (known as surgeon's mates) had greatly increased with the threat of war with France.

5 James Rodger and George Lang, common friends. For Rodger, see Letter 43, Note 5.

6 *i.e.* Gilmore's Close.

37. FROM ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE

Selkirk 11th February 1793

Dear Willy

I believe this is the first scrape I ever wrote you in my life and after all I've nothing to say (write, you mean (you'll be saying) for when I was with you you had always too much to say). I had a letter from our old friend Mr Mungo Park a few days ago, he is very well and is to sail for India on the 18th Instant, I suppose you hear from him sometimes?

Will you be so good as procure me a copy of the Farce called The Poor Soldier[1] and send it out and the price shall be remitted per first opportunity, are there no new tunes in vogue just now?

Pray what's my good friend S.A. about? You are a pack of the laziest D[evi]ls I ever knew in my life, you never think fit to write me a single line, so for that reason I'll write no more at present but subscribe myself with compliments to your brother SA. JR. and GL.[2]

Your very humble Servant
Alexander Somerville

NB. Do you ever see Miss A. Veitch?

The cover sheet does not survive.

[1] *The Poor Soldier* (1783) is a comedic opera by William Shield and John O'Keefe concerning Irish soldiers returning home following the American War of Independence.

[2] The aforementioned Alexander (Sandy) Anderson, James Rodger and George Lang.

38. From Agnes Henderson

Selkirk 4th March 1793

Dear Willie

I am quite ashamed of my negligence in not acknowledging a receipt of my little Handsome Prince sooner, for which accept of a thousand thanks.

The country can afford no amusement to an Edinburgh Beau – how does your pulse beat just now, is it quite perpendicular, no throbing nor palpitations, that's a good joke.

I spent a whole week at Broadmeadows lately. Your sister was here part of last week – a certain Gentleman paid her all due attention he could not leave the house night nor day during her stay – I dare say the poor fellow wants the power of utterance concerning a certain subject. We teazed [*i.e.* teased] your sister so much she says it will be a while before she comes ~~back~~ here again.

Brussels Gazette[1]

Miss____ is arrived from ____ quite the sort after having killed many and mortally wounded thousands – there is just now a bride upon a visit to her bridegroom – a mystery – there is at present in agitation a matter of great importance to both beaus and belles another mistery. Would you chuse a third, if its much the same to you Miss I'd rather be excused – O yes Sir it's quite the same – I think I hear you saying Oh what a passion I am in – never reveal the

above secrets if ever you do you forfeit my confidence forever. You shall have more mysterious intelligence next letter – in the mean time I am

Dear Willie
Your sincere friend
Agnes Henderson

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mrs Scotts, foot of Gilmores Close, Grass Market, Edinburgh

[1] This begins a new page in the manuscript.

39. FROM ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE

Selkirk 11th March 1793

My Dear Sir,

I received the Poor Soldier safe and I return you thanks for your trouble. I would have sent the price this week but you did not write what it was. I ask your pardon for being so negligent in writing you but believe me it [*interlined*: is] often want of time and matter not inclination that hinders me. I hear you've got into Mr Laidlaw's office now. Write me how you like it! I've got no news to write but that Jenny leavers has left her service with child to – You!!! I hope you take care of the poor Innocent when it comes into the wicked world and be on your guard for the future against such temptations.[1]

I remain
Dear Sir
Your servant always
Alexander Somerville

Excuse the haste A.S.

The cover sheet does not survive.

[1] Andrew Henderson the younger claimed paternity of Jennet 'Jenny' Leaver's child, Jessy, two weeks before his marriage to Helen Turnbull on 26 December 1794. See the Introduction.

40. FROM ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE

Selkirk 25th March 1793

Dear Willy,

I return you many thanks for your last letter and could wish for one of the same kind every week but am sorry that Tait gives you so little time. It was surely a very affecting sight to see so many poor Devils torn from their country, their friends, their wives and families perhaps never to see them more! I am happy to hear you are free of a certain scrape which I wrote you of.[1] I can assure you "I'm Off Demme".[2]

I've no news to write you (as usual) but that we have a new apprentice to come home next month from Midlem[3] a very good place for a saint but whether for a scribe or not I cant say. I never see any of the Ladies now, except at a distance. Pray did a certain person Gallant Miss A. Veitch[4] when she was in Edinburgh?! I presume you are busy in that way in Edinburgh and improving your time because the days are evil.

I am happy to hear you like your place so well: a certain person's tongue must be born with. As I am become very serious now and quite another person than I was I must beg you'll forbear all oaths in your letters for the good of your immortall soul. Swear not at all etc. That is to say not at all persons but at some particular ones and let me be none of these. How like you the explanation? Pray whether is it the fashion in Edinburgh for the men to ride above the women or the women above the men for fashions are continually changing. The March fair is on Friday eight days,[5] come out to it for Heaven's sake, for the Lasses's [*sic*] sake I mean for some will be ill off without you.

Dont give my compliments to Anderson[6] Damned Lazy D[evi]l for he never so much as writes me a line. But I never was more pleased with you in all my life for writting [*sic*] last week.

I shall settle with you for the Poor Soldier when we meett [*sic*] till then be assured I remain with the greatest regard

Ever yours
Alexander Somerville

I wish you may can read the above.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Edinburgh

[1] See Somerville's previous letter concerning Jennet Leavers.

[2] 'I'm off women', with 'demme' being a variant of the Scots 'deme' (dame).

[3] A village approximately 3 miles (4.8 km) east of Selkirk.

[4] The aforementioned Alison Veitch, who in 1798 became Alexander Park's second wife.

[5] The Selkirk March Fair was traditionally held on 25 March. The name was retained after the formal adoption of the Gregorian calendar in Scotland in 1752, even though the fair now fell in the first week of April.

[6] The aforementioned Alexander Anderson.

41. FROM WILHELMINA HENDERSON

Selkirk 1st April 1793

Dear Willie

After a long silence I at last take up the pen to write you without offering any other appology than want of subject which I am still at a lose [*i.e.* loss] for. There is nothing going on here worth mentioning. The merriges [*i.e.* marriages] I mentioned in my last is all turned out to nothing but a few good jokes and indeed I am sadly affraid we shall all be oblidged to lead tpes[1] for life as our beaus looks as if they intended to live and die unmarried. Heigh Ho.

I suppose you would be in a terrible passion at the mysterious epistle you had from Nancy but you did not need to mind it had you known it was only a few blown up stories to put you in a punchion.[2] I have time for no more the carrier is going.

Adieu
W. H.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mrs Scotts, foot of Gilmour Close, Edinburgh

[1] The intended meaning is unclear.

[2] More usually 'puncheon', this word has a number of meanings but perhaps 'barrel' is the one intended here.

42. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

London 2nd April 1793

Dear William

When I consider the high hopes and expectations with which I was fraught when I came first to this city, and the mighty alteration which a few months has made upon my mind, and long projected schemes of happy life; I cannot help wondering at the presumption of us sons of ffrailty [*sic*], who as if we could regulate the events of futurity to our own caprice look forward to distant time and promise ourselves the revolution of many happy years, when, if we could but attend properly to the operations of nature, and our own mind we would find from the most minute circumstances sufficient indications of a change; the year and the hour that hurries away the agreeable day might sufficiently convince us that we are not here to expect things of a permanent nature; and [*interlined*: that] this our present existence is but the infant state of our being, to be compleated in a manner of which we can have no idea, and [*interlined*: in] a country that far exceeds our most sublime conceptions.

This you may perhaps think too serious for epistolary correspondence, but it is a theme we cannot have too frequently in our "minds eye"; and one which I now so effectually believe in all its prin[cip]les that I attribute every event that befalls me as happening for the best; and in that view I only feel for what has happened at Berwick as it concerns the dear partner of my soul; and as it must affect her with some degree of distress, I too must feell a pang of sorrow for her disappointment.

I intend leaving London in about a forthnight, if any ships sail to Berwick at that time but as none leaves the river[1] without a convoy and it is not being appointed yet I cannot be certain however I expect to be in Edinburgh the beginning of May.

I have had several letters from Lucretia since I wrote you last all in the very stile I could wish them.

I had a letter from my brother yesterday[2] informing me they were to sail that morning from Portsmouth for St Helena[3] under convoy of two 74s, they expect to fall in with the french [*sic*] fleet[4] – tell Anderson I expect to hear from him next week when I shall be able to write him more particularly about my coming down.

Since the frustration of my B[erwick] scheme I have learned the court hands practiced here, studied my own business more assiduously than ever, recovered my Latin; am mending my round hand and just at the close of a course of mathamaticks, by which you will see I have not been idle, and what

is still more I have seen quam parva sapientia regitur mundus[5] – and least I should not hear from you again I must wish you farewell till meeting and I am,

Dear William,
your true ffreind [*sic*]
Alexander Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at ~~Mrs Scotts, foot of Gilmours Close, Grass Market, Edinburgh NB~~ Broadmeadows

[1] *i.e.* the River Thames.

[2] After leaving university in Edinburgh, Mungo Park had obtained a post as assistant surgeon on the East India Company ship *Worcester*. See the Introduction.

[3] In the event, the *Worcester* did not depart Portsmouth until 5 April 1793.

[4] France had declared war on Britain on 1 February 1793. The convoys mentioned here were armed vessels escorting merchant ships. A '74' was a two-decked gunship that typically carried seventy-four guns – hence its name. Two 74s would have amounted to a heavily armed escort for the *Worcester*.

[5] 'How little wisdom governs the world'.

43. FROM EBENEZER CLARKSON

Selkirk 20th July 1793

Dear Will,

I received yours 1st and 2nd – and thank your attention. I wish you to send me out the seal when done before engraving to compare it with the one I have before I determine which to pay the 12/6 for.

Hang your Masser's Magazine – I'm no Masser you know – but I beg you to send me [*interlined*: as a specimen] the first number of Cooke's edition of Humes History[1] – from C. Elliot Esq. Bookseller Parliament Square.[2] And also the whole of the pamphlets that are published concerning the dispute betwixt Drs Gregory and Hamilton[3] they will be got in the above shop.

Tis more than bedtime so must be done. I'll really expect the above per carrier.

Yours Sincerely,
E Clarkson[4]

[*The following was written (in an untidy hand, parts of which are obscured by ink blots) on the cover sheet of this letter:*]

Edinburgh 2[?] May 1794

Mr Laidlaw trys 3 Guineas he can not have connection with [*illegible*] of them Mr Lang stands in trys [*illegible*] of them and if he cannot accomplish [*illegible*] of them Mr Rodger takes one Guinea that neither of the two Gentlemen shall have connection with [?Rixson] girls and that Messrs Laidlaw and Lang takes off that they shall accomplish said Jobb.

James Rodger[5]
George Lang
William Laidlaw

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

[1] *Cooke's Pocket Edition of Hume's History of England* was published in nineteen volumes between 1793 and 1795.

[2] Cornelius Elliott's bookshop was at 31 Parliament Square, Edinburgh.

[3] James Gregory (1753-1821), Professor of the Practice of Physic at the University of Edinburgh, had written a pamphlet in which he accused his colleague James Hamilton, Professor of Midwifery, of being the author of a 'Guide for Gentlemen Studying Medicine at the University of Edinburgh'. The guide had been strongly critical of the professors of medicine at Edinburgh with the notable exception of the midwifery staff, who were praised. Hamilton responded with his own pamphlet, which was scathing in its criticism of Gregory. The feud escalated into violence with Gregory attacking Hamilton with his cane. After being fined £100 for the assault, Gregory offered to pay double for another opportunity to beat his rival.

[4] Ebenezer Clarkson (1759-1844) was a surgeon from Selkirk, who in 1810 married the aforementioned Agnes Henderson.

[5] James Rodger was a childhood friend from Selkirk and William Laidlaw's room-mate at John Williamson's. A gardener, he stayed on Richmond Street after Laidlaw had moved on, buying property there and becoming a landlord himself in a few short years. It appears from references in the letters from the Parks that Rodger and Laidlaw got on famously. That being the case, perhaps the same was true of George Lang. The marginalia, apparently a wager of a somewhat nefarious character, was probably written in Laidlaw's room in Richmond Street.

44. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 22nd July 1793

Dear William

I take this opportunity of begging pardon for the breach of repeated promises. Last Monday happened to be a fair day here and (not from the multitude of business) as I had a number of ffriends calling upon me and paying the usual compliments upon events of this nature (I mean drinking a tumbler and wishing success in business). I was unfortunately prevented from paying my respects to a ffriend at a distance and letting him know how matters were going forward. On Wednesday seenight[1] I presented my petition to the Sherriff and Commissary; the Sherriff remitted me to my friend [*sic*] Mr Ingles in Hawick and George Rodger, and the Commissary to Mr Henderson Junior[2] and George Rodger. We dined in the Old Baillies[3] and after dinner the examination took place and the report found me "qualified" – the friday following at Mr Hendersons request and on his recommendation I rode to Peebles and procured a commission appointing me to the office of Commissary Clerk and last Wednesday was swore into office. I have two or three processes before the Sherriff and before the Court sits down again I expect to have as many before the Commissary; I have also the hope of one or two corn roups.[4]

This is the track of my carreer since I came to the country, and such my little business and my prospect of accession; though the whole is but small yet "the little that the Just man hath is blest".[5]

The Sherriff substitute and me differed in private tother[6] day about a point of law in the management of a process given to me by him, he coloured a little at my presumption, but while I have the text of law in my favour I am resolved to assert my independency.

Give my compliments to Rodger, your brother[7] and all friends, legal or consanguineary and in hopes of hearing from you and seeing you in a short time in my litle tenement I remain

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Alex Park

Addressed to: [*cover sheet damaged*] Williamsons, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

1 In Scots, seven nights, *i.e.* a week.

2 The aforementioned Andrew Henderson the younger. He is referred to later in this letter as the 'Sheriff substitute'.

[3] The aforementioned Andrew Henderson the elder.

[4] A public auction of a poinded corn crop to pay a debt. A commissary clerk was responsible for executing the legal documents that authorised court officers to seize and sell the goods of a debtor.

[5] Paraphrasing Psalm 37:16.

[6] A contraction of 'the other'.

[7] The aforementioned Robert Laidlaw.

45. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 29th July 1793

Dear William

From my three footed stool where I sit issuing precepts to convocate the leiges and teach them unanimity and peace I send you this greeting.

Mr Henderson and me are far from being at enmity we are upon the same footing as ever and since I differed in opinion with him I have received the foundation of two processes from him one of which (being a priviledged one) I began this morning and had the assurance to lay an arrest in his own hands, and him, his father with all the procurators before have resolved among themselves (without my consent) to dine with me the first day the court sits down where I shall be happy to see you and we shall peirce the barrell.

Since I came here I have spent one night with the charming Lucretia her consistency can scarcely be called a virtue for it is the very characteristick of all her actions and a principle of her nature, she was scarcely well pleased at my coming to Selkirk but circumstanced as I was it required little ~~Rethorick~~ rhetoric to make her yeild to my opinion, I intend visiting her again on thursday first.

I expect to hear from you this week and very likely I may visit you next week personally as I intend admitting messenger before the fair.[1]

Old Tait is in his last stage of life and very near his exit[2] and as I will have none but Will Dunlop to cope with I expect to engross the greatest share of the business and I am with compliments to your brother

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Alex Park

P.S. I only hold the deputation which Old Baillie Henderson held A.P.

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

[1] Alexander expected to become a messenger-at-arms. See the Introduction.

[2] John Tait, writer in Selkirk, was buried on 6 March 1794 – so, he was not so soon dead as Alexander expected.

46. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 26th August 1793

Dear William

I would have wrote you last week but I had to do business at Melrose in the morning and before I got home the carriers were gone in purpose to get home on Wednesday to the fair – I refer you to Mr George Lang for the fair news and only observe that I had [a] good number of visitors of both sexes and after I had finished the days employment got myself "well enough dysee[1] and then went to bed.

Mr Henderson[2] at the dance struck down the candlesticks and extinguished the lights – and you may figure what followed – there is nothing remarkable but what your brother[3] will have told you.

I expect to see Lucretia next week. Miss J. Burnet came to the window this moment with "the little Hills uncovered"[4] and I am

Dear William
yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] Probably 'dizzy' – *i.e.* drunk. The closing inverted comma is missing.

[2] The aforementioned Andrew Henderson the younger.

[3] Probably the aforementioned Walter Laidlaw.

[4] *i.e.* she was not wearing a neckerchief and so her bosom was on view.

47. FROM ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE

Selkirk 2nd September 1793

My Dear Sir

I received your kind letter last week and upon showing it to my other creditors they unanimously agreed to put off for some time for which reason I hereby promise you shall be paid among the first and for[e]most, but [*interlined*: as] all communications on that subject are to be addressed to Mr A Park Writer in Selkirk you may write him.

Well what the Devil have I got to say now I have no news but that it was reported that Miss W.H.[1] was just about to be married on Mr Morrison (ah, Poor W. Laidlaw) but as the D[evi]l would have it he has gone the L[or]d knows where and lost himself – the story is thus. He left his own congregation about 3 or 4 weeks ago and before leaving them he gave out his Sacrament. He came to Selkirk a forthnight [*i.e.* fortnight] ago and slept in young Bailley Hendersons, from here he went to Moffat etc. and I cant tell you where but certain it is that the day fixed for his Sacrament arrieved [*sic*], Ministers all mett to assist him and every body there but Morrison – Upon this they dispatched two of his elders to seek him and who after searching everywhere for him arrieved here the other day and have got no word of him. Nobody knows what is come of the poor D[evi]l. I am affraid he [is] lost in some water or other and indeed this seems to be the common conjecture.[2]

Tell Lang I would have wrote him and [*i.e.* ?but] had nothing worthy the communication. I am just the Old Man. As [*interlined*: this to be filled up] by Mr W. Laidlaw as ever but be assured[3]

I am ever, My Dear Sir,
Yours etc.
Alexander Somerville

The cover sheet does not survive.

1 William Laidlaw's romantic interest in Wilhelmina Henderson was an open secret among his circle of friends.

2 Alexander Morrison had not met with an accident. After deserting his charge as the Associate Synod minister in Kennoway (Fife), he travelled first to his native Moffat and then on to England, finally settling in Salisbury.

3 The following was written in the margins of this letter in a different hand:

> advent of Building
> 29th Ja. 1779 Cruicks 9 Taws [*illegible – ink blot*]
> Mcaul Die. p375 & Kilkerran 517

48. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 9th September 1793

Dear William

Being out of the town last Monday and not returning till past carrier time I was prevented from writing, However I had good hopes I should not have occasion to write again till I had the pleasure of shaking you by the hand and saying herestic[1] in my own appartment. However you have thought fitt to remain where you are.

I have no hesitation in calling Rodger and you both infidels for if you believed the scriptures you would keep your promises which you must be conscious you have failled in.

The Ladies are all well and I suppose you will have heard of Mr Morrisons fate[2] at least what is feared to be his fate I mean derangement of mind and the cause is strongly suspected to be dissappointment in one of his amours – if you have not heard I shall mention particulars next week.

I expect to be in Edinburgh in the course of a fforthnight – I expect to see Lucretia this Wednesday – so much for <u>expectations</u> and now I remain

Dear William
yours sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] The meaning of this word is unclear. It is possibly a misspelling of 'Heretic', a suggestion strengthened by the fact that Alexander went on to call William Laidlaw an 'Infidel'.

[2] See Letter 47, Note 2.

49. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 17th November 1793

Dear William

If I thought an apology would please you I would begin with it and by that means keep you in good humour till you got to "Yours etc" but I very much doubt it will not do – will it? no; - its in vain for me to thro' [*i.e.* throw] the

blame upon Broadmeadows Chirstie then! – as to say I was at Hawick Fair[1] – but since I have got there it would be barbarous not to tell you the news.

There was nothing particular, my business would not give me time to act the gallant – my rival Crosby[2] was there, he had not seen me for three years. He was thunderstruck or rather he looked as if his "Auld Friends Ghost had started up before him" when I asked Lucretia with so much familiarity if she was not going to ride and when she answered she had just been seeking me – but the soul of the scene was we actually did ride to H B[3] by ourselves solus cum sola[4] (unless you include the horses and spoil my Latin) whilst poor Crosby, bursting with indignation drowned his cares in a large punch bowll [*sic*] at the Tower.[5]

I need not tell you that my passion increases with every interview – when will the day dawn that makes her mine is my constant wish.

I spent a happy night and next day rode to Jedburgh came back to my dinner spent an hour [with] my charmer and came home in the evening – but stop – a thought has struck my mind this very moment I must insert it – it is the idea of Mrs Graham – spare your pity for she's beyond its reach and I hope needs it not from man – the best apology is a long letter concluding with I am

Dear William
Ever yours
Alexander Park

Compliments to all acquaintances – Jeans a bride[6]
AP

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williamsons, Dobies Land, Rishmond [*sic*] Street, Edinburgh

1 A hiring fair was held in Hawick each year on 8 November (or on the following Tuesday, if the day fell on a Saturday, Sunday or Monday).

2 John Crosby, Alexander's childhood friend, who lived in Hawick. See the Introduction.

3 Hassendean Bank, Minto, the residence of the Turnbull family.

4 A reference to the Latin aphorism *Solus cum sola non dicunt Ave Maria* ('A man and a woman alone are not saying prayers').

5 The Tower Inn, situated on the High Street, Hawick. Originally a tower-house of the seventeenth century, the Tower was a coaching inn from 1769 and subsequently a hotel until closure in 1982.

6 Alexander's elder sister Jean, who married Andrew Thomson, tenant at Burnfoot, on 29 November 1793.

50. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 25th November 1793

Dear William

Our courts sat down on Wednesday last when Mr John Oliver[1] was admitted Procurator.

I am happy to inform you that my business increases much beyond my expectation. On Wednesday I had the good fortune to call ten new causes in court, seven before the sherriff and three before the commissary and in the course of this and next week I expect to be able to call [an]other five.

Old Baillie Henderson[2] says such a number of libells has not been in Selkirk in one day (excepting removings[3]) these twenty years.

I have not had an opportunity of seeing Lucretia since her sisters death but I intend seeing her soon and nothing shall be wanting on my part to reconcile her mind to the Dispensations of Providence.

My sisters wedding is to take place on Friday first, the bridegroom is the person you suspected – we shall have a merry bout – but Lucretia will not be there; poor Lucretia how can I be merry and her mourning.

The Farmers Dance is to be on Tuesday, I dont know yet whether I am going – however I shall send you the news ~~next week~~ the week after and I am

Dear Sir
Yours sincerely
Alexander Park

tell Rodger[4] to send his direction and I'll write him – Compliments to Bob.[5]

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

[1] John Oliver, later of Pine Bank, Selkirk. William Laidlaw's sister Mary was a close friend of Margaret Oliver, John's sister.

[2] The aforementioned Andrew Henderson the elder.

[3] In Scots Law, a removing (eviction) was a process used to recover heritable property.

[4] The aforementioned James Rodger, William Laidlaw's room-mate.

[5] Robert Laidlaw, William's brother.

51. From Alexander Park

Selkirk 9th December 1793

Dear William

He must either be dead or in the red sea; and pray which of the two would you choice [*i.e.* choose]? If the one's worse the other is at least ill[1] – but to say no more of that pray what has become of you these two weeks. I have heard no more of you than you had been in the Land of Egept [*i.e.* Egypt] although there is only 36 miles betwixt us – strange to tell and I wrote the last letter too.

I'll not complain of Decayed Friendship for I know there must be a cause for your silence yet if you had one syene[2] or two it would have been sufficient to have continued our friendship at present I am

Dear Sir
In Great Great Haste Dear William
Yours, etc.
Alexander Park

P.S. I have hade [*sic*] a fight with my brother Crosby and have beat him.
AP

The cover sheet does not survive

1 Alexander is referring to his brother Mungo Park, from whom he had not heard since the latter's departure on the *Worcester*.

2 Intended as 'sign', possibly.

52. From Alexander Park

Selkirk 16th December 1793

Dear William

I am sorry my friend to relate to you an affair which I am no less ashamed to have been concerned in than to think upon – I mean my difference with Crosby.

He dined with me on this day seenight and spent the afternoon with much pleasure and festivity till the conversation turning upon matrimony he sprung from his seat and at the same time from his reason and attempted to strike me

sitting in my chair. However he calmed again but it was only to break out with greater fury for when I was assisting him with his great coat he actually struck me – my passion rose I returned the blow and had the misfortune to knock him down and cut him severly upon the head.

He went from this to Burnfoot, my sister's habitation and the then residence of a much dearer connection (Lucretia) where after shewing his face he alarmed them to such a degree that the one thought she had lost a brother and the other a _____.[1] Alexander Thomson's brother was instantly dispatched to Selkirk and went back with the news of my safety.

Lucretia scarcely ever closed her eyes till the Friday morning when I surprised (rejoiced her I should say) in bed by day light – you may imagine the meeting – it was the sun beaming through a shower – it was the most the most extravagant joy displayed in the midst of greif.

But let me leave this scene and think no more on what was not in my power to remedy.

Lucretia says with regard to what you hinted at in your letter "that you are always affraid of the day you never saw" she had me write you this and by way of jest added that one could not do a good turn too soon. However the people are deceived that event will not take place till martinmas and I am

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] 'Lover' is probably to be inferred here.

53. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 23rd December 1793

Dear William

Since my last I have had another opportunity of seeing Lucretia I rode with her from Burnfoot to Hassendeanbank but the news of the Dust[1] had been before us; However I had the satisfaction to find my freind Mr Turnbull had taken in hand to make up the difference. I never have been at Hawick since but am told that Crosby "ever and anon vows revenge".

This difference has been fewel [*i.e.* fuel] to the ancient grudge bore here to Lucretia – and for my part I am made the very butt of the Ladies's ridicule and spleen – they talk of the Gallant "such a one" who fought for his mistresses reputation and with what a superior grace the man who did so, might lay claim to her affections; nay they ever wondered how she could deny him and for their part they would rejoice in such a lover – with these and such as these am I duned[2] continually. However

> let the stricken Deer go weep
> the Heart ungalled play
> for some must watch while some do sleep
> so runs the worled away[3]

and I am
Dear William
Yours etc.
Alexander Park

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

[1] An uproar or a disturbance. See Letter 52 and the Introduction.

[2] In Scots, brought down, humiliated.

[3] *Hamlet* Act 3, scene 2.

54. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 6th January 1794

Dear William

I stand upon [*interlined*: no] ceremony for to speak the truth ceremony will not stand betwixt two so long and so intimatly conected as we are and although you are now four letters in my debt, yet like a very Jew naturally prone to usury I sit down again with a laughing face to add another to the score.

Last letter I wrote contained the difference betwixt Crosby and me this is of a more peacefull nature for it contains the news of our agreement – we met at Hassendean Bank and after some altercation and the interposition of my

Bonus Pater[1] we are at last prevailed upon to shake hands to the great joy of Lucretia, who expressed her satisfaction in the most expressive manner.

Be so good as to write next week if you dont I am determined to add still another to the number and I am wishing you many a happy year

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Alexander Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mr Williams [*sic*], Richmond Street, Edinburgh

1 'Good Father'.

55. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 20th January 1794

Dear William

I have now received my own with usury as the saying goes and your letter has made full amends for your long silence.

As you talk of holiday engagement I cannot help relatin[g] a part of a dream which I had on new years morning concerning you – I thought in my fancy I saw you and some of your companions warm from the mug patroling the streets of the capital and strange to tell kissing every one you met, not even excepting that part of the Creation destined for every man's use and pleasure – I could not believe it for I thought humanity would not suffer you to sport with missery – I shut my eyes and the picture again occurred and I saw you kiss a Lady whom I thought I knew by the name of Miss Dickson.

Holiday employments of various kinds! O Willie! Willie!

It is impossible to inform you particularly of the conduct of the Ladies [*interlined*: here], it is sufficient to say that every word spits fire and every action indicates inveterate hatred against Lucretia but this gives me no uneasyness while I have this comfortable reflection that the object I admire is highly worthy my esteem and that the flame burns on each side with equal enthusiasm.

Thus far had I gone last Monday when I had to go to the country to put a man into corporal possession upon an Assignation Cont[ainin]g Precep[t]s[1] to that effect drawn by me.

Letter 2[d]

Dear William

Last Friday night an incurable breach took place twixt the Miss Vs and me – I had been in company and had taken a glass or two and passing there [*i.e.* their] house rather late I spied a light and in I popt – I was gently reprimanded for my freedom and desired to sit down which I did.

The talk turned upon Lucretia and I was told by Annie that although Lucretia thought much of me I was not from thence to inferr that any of the Ladys of Selkirk liked me.

– "I never made any such inference Anny nor would I wish it to be the case"

– How came you then Mr Park (heating) to say in a publick company that if houses were as easily got as wives you could get ten in the town of Selkirk

– If I ever said such a thing (which I dont remember) I meant it as a joke

– I like no such jokes

Here she took the whole say[2] and from one subject raging like a fury she flew to another till at last I lost patience and withdrew in such a manner as might shew them I did not mean to return in a hurry – when I meet them I shall lift my hat and pass by.

I shall see Lucretia on friday I expect when I shall show her your card and am in haste

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Alexander Park

N.B. Last time I saw Lucretia she desired me to compliment you in her name and inform you "that what she desired me to write you was merely a joke; That she is sufficiently convinced of your affection for the Parties Concerned; and that whenever that event takes place no person shall be a more welcome visitor than W.L.

No address on cover sheet

[1] In Scots Law, a legal deed used to transfer the unexecuted administrative instructions (precepts) from an old land conveyance to a new property deed.

[2] In Scots, conversation, discussion.

56. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 10th February 1794

Dear William

I am conscious you kissed Miss Dickson on New Years morning

> "so let the stricken deer go weep
> The Hart ungalled play
> for some must watch while some must sleep
> so runs this world away"

On the friday preceding the storm I went to see Lucretia and was storm stayed till the Sunday; when I very rashly ventured out and had near paid dear for my timerity [*i.e.* temerity] – Betwixt H.B. and here which does not much exceed 8 miles I (with my horse) wandered from 11 o'clock forenoon till six at night, when at the expence of two frosted toes and a skinless face I at last got home, thankfull it was not worse. But what a fool was I to come away, when I was [in] such happy quarters? and when such eloquence pled it was a wonder unacountable I did not relent; for Lucretia alternately entreated threatened wept and held and yet after all I came away – dont mistake me it was not from want of sensibility or affection for I have store of both to her; but because none of my friends knew where I was, I was affraid they might think me lost.

The storm in this part of the country has committed great devastation both amongst sheep and herds in Etterick and Yarrow,[1] 2 herds have lost their lives and scarce a farmer but has lost a score or two of sheep – in Lammarmuire[2] it is said 20 herds have perished.

The difference betwixt me and the Miss Vs is partly settled and I am on as good terms there again as I would ever wish to be – a false report spread lately that Lucretia was cryed upon a Gentleman[3] in Jedburgh has much helped to establish me and I can even visit with freedom and I am

Dear William
Your Sincere Friend
Alexander Park

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

1 Ettrick and Yarrow, two upland parishes in Selkirkshire.

2 The Lammermuir Hills, a range of hills in southern Scotland.

3 In Scots, had the banns read in the kirk. They were, in other words, engaged to be married. Spurious rumours concerning engagements appear to have been commonplace in Selkirk.

57. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 10th March 1794

Dear William

How it comes to pass, for it certainly has happened that our correspondence for this sometime past has been upon the decline and for these last three weeks suffered a total stagnation. Can the war the universal cause (said to be) of our national misfortunes stoop so very low as to affect our little concerns – it cannot be.

The defect must lie in one or the other of the springs that has for years kept for years this wheel in motion – it must either be friendship decayed, or enmity inbred. The last it cannot be, as it could not have a cause; the first it may be for that I am sorry to say may commence without a cause.

I should be sorry, my dear friend if our correspondence should be suffered to go into dissuse and be forgotten without our being able to assign a reason for it, it would be a terrible falling off, of that affection which every year added strength to, and which absence could not erase. But I hope better things and in this hope proceed as usual.

I am sorry to inform you of Old Father Taits death.[1] He died here on thursday morning. He made few struggles; life left him almost without him knowing it was gone – many times have we been merry in his company when the whisky punch and the Lee Riggs[2] and the full logie[3] made every heart expand with joy. But noisy mirth and routs even though dressed like ours in the Garb of Innocence never faills to leave a deep impression on the soul at the departure of one of our companions.

I have seen Lucretia twice since I wrote you, poor Nellys hastening to her journeys end.[4]

Mr and Mrs Turnbull of H.B. were here and dined with me at our tryst; about seven o'clock I went with her alongst Anderson to the Miss V's shope[5] and introduced her to them as my aunt, and then taking them a litle aside says I this is my good mother of H.B. They changed colour, seemed much embarrassed and wee [*i.e.* we] bought some stone ware and came off – it was a good jock – I am

Dear William
Ever Yours
Alexander Park

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

[1] The aforementioned John Tait.

[2] The 'Lea-rig', a traditional Scottish song that had recently been popularised by Robert Burns.

[3] In Scots, a good fire.

[4] Esther Turnbull's sister, who was terminally ill. She died at Prestonpans in July 1794.

[5] Sisters Annie and Alison Veitch ran a crockery shop at the foot of the Kirk Wynd in Selkirk.

58. From Alexander Park

Selkirk 15th March 1794

Dear William

I have just before me Letters in Supplement for extending the Sherriff of Selkirkshires jurisdiction to Daick[1] or to bring the tenant at Daick under his authority; I see the Letters are of your raising and I am very glad to inform you that I am employed to put them in execution.

Pride may say that it is a low profession but I find my account in it and I am determined to push it as far as possible, and I would advise you if you intend setting up in the country to admitt Messenger when you admitt N.P.[2] – from my turn of business in that way I think I will clear £25 per annum.

I was at HB last night and met my brother Archibald there – was it not a singular circumstance that two brothers should meet in such a situation? We both felt a litle awkward; However I had a few hours pleasent conversation with the dear enchantress a sufficient reward for every hardship – everything runs still in the same channel of prosperity.

I had a poinding[3] sometime ago which made some noise in the country – I poinded a mans goods etc. at Newstead agreeably to the order prescribed in the late Bankrupt Act. The debtor called a meeting of his creditors immediately and Mr Mercer in Melrose was appointed trustee; upon reveiwing [*sic*] my procedure he dictatorially pronounced it illegal and assured the creditors that what I had done could not affect the subjects – In the meantime I procured warrant to roup[4] and advertised the sale to be on thursday last and Mr Mercer advertised the same goods to be rouped on this day (Saturday). In order to procure which he presented a petition at Jedburgh craving my sale to be stopt and reserving action of spuilzie[5] againt me. The attention of all parties was turned upon the event and it was generally believed I was outwitted when the Sherriff to my Great Joy would not suffer the petition to be read and I went on with the sale without molestation and am

Dear William, Ever Yours Etc.
Alexander Park

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

[1] This was an alternative spelling of Dawyck, Peeblesshire, but whether or not that is the place mentioned here is uncertain.

[2] Perhaps 'Notary Public'.

[3] In Scots law, a process used to seize and sell a debtor's movable property to pay off a debt.

[4] In Scots, to sell by public auction.

[5] In Scots law, an action for the restitution of goods seized or meddled with without the owner's consent.

59. From Alexander Park

Selkirk 24th March 1794

Dear William

I expected to have heard from you last week but not a word came and I inferred from this that I would have the pleasure of a personal interview in a few days – Dissappointed – However I have taken the pen again determined to make you speak this week.

Did I ever inform you that I had gott an apprentice; I got him sometime in the month of november and he can now draw a lybell upon an open accompt without any assistance. His name is Robert Eliott a cousine of my own dont you think him coming well on. Inclosed you have this nights bill of the amusements in the Selkirk Theatre[1] – did you ever build any Airy Castles.

I am going to HB on thursday, I begin already to anticipate my happynes[s] – Can there any thing be imagined in this world capable of affording greater felicity than when the Torch of Love kindled on both sides burns with equal lustre it is said to be the nearest approach of mortal man to the happyness above

Adieu, Dear William, Ever yours
Alexander Park

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

[1] The 'Selkirk Theatre' was located in the West Port. Here, customers could dine, drink and enjoy an evening of entertainment. Its proprietor was the former baker James Dun.

60. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 14th April 1794

Dear William

I own myself to blame in not writing you before this, but I have been dayly in hopes of seeing you at Selkirk.

We had a very throng[1] March Fair with a great number of pretty ladies from the Highlands of Ettrick and Yarrow if you had been here I have no doubt but you would have called them all good troops.

On Saturday last (just as I came home from the Banquet of Love) the Post brought me a letter – would you wish to know who it is from – it is signed Mungo Park and dated from St Helena on his way to England. He has never had a days illness since he left Scotland, likes his situation well and we expect to hear from him in England in the course of a month. I was so happy to hear of his welfare that after assembling my acquaintances we adjourned to Veitches and got drunk on the occasion.

If you have any intention of beginning business in the country this Summer you certainly should come out in the vacation and [take] a ride to where you think there is the most probability of success.

Mr Usher has given up being Sheriff Substitute at Jedburgh and is succeeded by Mr Shortreed a Procurator before that Court which must put a stop to his business in his former capacity; now if you could make it convenient to come out soon I would take a ride with you to Jedburgh and (as I am intimate with Shortreed as a Brother Scribe) endeavour to procure you his good will to his business, which if we can get your bread is backen[2] as Shortreed had a great run

And I am
Dear William
Ever Yours
Alexander Park

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

1 In Scots, busy.

2 'Your bread is baked', or in other words, 'the job is done'.

61. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 23rd June 1794

Dear William

I beg ten hundred pardons for not acknowledging your favour long er[e] this and am sorry I can only now say that I am in existence and must then shut the letter.

My brother Mungo has been here and is gone, I shall write a letter of length and particulars next week meantime accept of this as an appology and I am

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Alexander Park

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

62. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 30th June 1794

Dear William

Yours came duely to hand; Mr John Anderson has been with me since and informs of some fine riggs[1] he had with you in Edinburgh; two nights never in bed; two nights never fresh![2] Two nights in the town!! The world is actually reformed.

Our Common riding took place on friday when we had a capital race for a saddle. The horses belonged to Mr Scott 'Wool', Mr Thorburn 'Thames', Mr Mill and one I dont know. The match was keenly contested with Thorburn and Mill and gained by the latter with not much advantage – of the Common riding I can say little more, the remainder you know is always a scene of dissipation.[3]

My brother leaves London in August with an intention to make discoveries in the interior of Affrica. He is commissioned by the Affrican Association under the sanction of Government and has injunctions on his return to publish his travels. It is a dangerous undertaking; but we shall talk of it at meeting.

On Wednesday first we are to have a dance in Veitches, of which I have good reason to believe I shall be manager. There are a number of good troops in the country at present and they are all expected to join the cavalcade on

Wednesday. Could you but fall upon a plan to become visible that night in Selkirk I have no doubt but that you would see a good show of nice Ladies and enjoy a very jovial night.

On Thursday I take a ride to the south; I have not been there this forthnight and long very much for the wished for day; by this you will easily see my ideas with respect to Lucretia are Semper Eadem.[4] She knows you went home that night (though not from me) and forgives you with her usual goodness – you may write a card to her if you like at the end of my letter and

I am, Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] In Scots, wild, riotous behaviour, indulgent fun.

[2] In Scots, sober.

[3] Alexander had attended the Selkirk Common Riding, a traditional event held in June each year to commemorate the Battle of Flodden in 1513, from which a single survivor returned to Selkirk carrying a captured English flag. The Riding was followed by a celebration in Market Place in Alexander's time, as it is today.

[4] 'Always the same'.

63. FROM MUNGO PARK

London 26th July 1794

My Dear Friend,[1]

In our journey through this world, the company and conversation of a real freind (though one of the greatest blessing[s] in life) is what we very seldome meet with; for we no sooner quit the amusements of youth, and the places of education, where a similarity of pursuits, and the open frankness of youth unite us in the truest friendship; but we find ourselves after repeated trials, oblidged to keep our distance from all the world: the general friendship of the world, try it when you will, being nothing more than polite conversation, which can be shaken of[f] at pleasure, when your spoke in fortune's wheel dips towards the mud. how differand [*sic*] – sadly differant! is the only friendship I can now enjoy, from that which blissed our meetings and walks about Selkirk, and crown[e]d the night at Broadmeadows or Foulshiels, or a moonlight parting at

the Quarryhole[2] – of joys departed perhaps[3] never to return how painfull the rememberance.

I can just say I have been in Scotland, for my stay there was so short that it appears like a dream allready! I had only time to see some of my nearest relations, and staid for the most part at foulshiels. The hopes of meeting my freinds and companions, made me look without fear on the highest waves, and had cheared the gloom of many a sleepless night; but we may learn from what happened, the uncertainty of humane [*i.e.* human] prospects.

Amongst other blanks,[4] I cast a melancholy eye to Broadmeadows, where, in the midst of freindship and mirth, I had often heard with regret the c[l]ock strike one: but like every thing else it had suffered a change; and sorrow appeared to have settled on my native streams[5] – you may rest assured that if I could have staid [*i.e.* stayed] Hundleshope should not have been my last visit for few people are higher in my esteem than your father, I wish you would remember me to him in your next letter, and give my compliments to your mother and sister and Walter and to Robert, who perhaps now sits on the other side of the fire.

I shall sail for Africa sometime in September or October, I suppose Alexander[6] has informed you of the particulars, but I expect you will ply the quill and exchange a good many letters before I set off. You had put the seal over your direction[7] but you may send it again in your next.

I am your sincere Freind,
Mungo Park

Direct – as before to the seed shop, Covent Garden.

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw

1 This was originally written 'Freind' but was corrected either by Mungo or a reader. Elsewhere in this letter, 'freind' goes uncorrected.

2 A long-abandoned quarry near Broadmeadows, Selkirkshire.

3 Mungo drew a circle around the word 'perhaps' for particular emphasis.

4 A brief glance, or a moment of comfort. Mungo's use of the word here conveys the bittersweetness of his visit home – something akin to nostalgia. Following the departure of the Laidlaws, Broadmeadows stood empty, adding to his sense of melancholy.

5 *i.e.* innate tendencies.

6 The aforementioned Alexander Park.

7 *i.e.* address. Laidlaw was living on Richmond Street, Edinburgh, during this time, something which Mungo would have known. It is possible, therefore, that Laidlaw was at Ravenshaugh, near Prestonpans, for the summer, where he and his siblings holidayed every year with a large number of friends.

64. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 11th August 1794

Dear William

The payment of your literary debt came duely to hand, and on ballancing scores I now find myself two weeks behind; which was occasioned merely by my being out of town on the mondays of both these weeks, I shall now therefore endeavour to make total restitution.

On thursday last I went to Peebles (which unluckily was their fast day) and from thence to Hundleshope where I lodged all night, and on fridays morning went into Peebles again alongst with your brother Bob. Being the forenoon we meant to drink spareingly but in the end it turned out very fully, for when we returned to Hundleshope we had rode so fast that your Father said he would not have wondered if his mare had called out to Bob "Why dost thou use me so".

All this night I stayed at Hundleshope, much regretting yours and your brother's absence, when in the midst of supper in pop[p]ed Walter, fresh from Edinburgh and Prestonpans[1] – it must have been a great haste that made a certain Gentleman run without his shoe.

Your brother brought intelligence from Preston[pans] – and its residenters, and that instant I fell upon the following plan of hearing from my Love – you will deliver the inclosed and Lucretia will give you an answer which be so good as to inclose in your letter to me. Have you seen her since she arrived – I trust you are at Preston[pans] – you will pay attention to her not only on her account but also for the sake of friendship.

I have just got a horning[2] by a man in this town to instantly execute so must plead haste and subscribe myself

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] During July and August each year, many of the 'middling' young men and women of Selkirk resided at Prestonpans, enjoying a long summer holiday.

[2] In Scots Law, a legal document demanding payment of a debt on pain of being outlawed.

65. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 18th August 1794

Dear William

It is with pleasure I sit down to answer yours of the 14th current.[1] I had occasion since the departure of my Lucretia to be all night at Hassendean – but what a night did I spend – every thing around was changed; and those very objects which before I viewed with pleasure and delight excited only that sensation which Ossian[2] has termed the Joy of Grief.

It appears to me to be a law of our nature that we contemplate with a kind of solemn joy those scenes which were wont to strike our senses when in presence of the darling object of our Soul, and when that object is removed at a distance.

It is from this principle that the spot where our youth was fostered is always dear to our wishes; and that even in manhood we can form no idea of terrestrial felicity without annexing the local situation of our youthfull sports.

By this time I expect you will have seen Lucretia and delivered my remembrances – I have no doubt but it would be a welcome gift – I expect an answer by the carrier of one sort or another, and sadly dissappointed will I be if it do[e]s not come.

I am in great hopes of seeing you here on Thursday and you must make it a point to stay with me that night that we may have an opportunity of cracking over the occurrences that are now past. If you can't come let me know how long you stay at Hundleshope and I shall endeavour (as I have now got a horse of my own[3]) to see you and I am

Dear William
Yours most sincerely
Alexander Park

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

1 Letters have here been exchanged quite quickly: Alexander Park on the 11 August, William Laidlaw on 14 August, and Park replying on 18 August. Laidlaw was presumably at Prestonpans but departing imminently, if he was potentially in Selkirk in three days. Presumably, Alexander expected him to stop via Richmond Street to pick up his post.

2 See Letter 14, Note 4.

3 A horse was a valuable asset, and owning one at the age of twenty-one years is an indication of how well Alexander was getting on in the world.

66. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 1st September 1794

Dear William

Excuse me for not writing last week and thanking you for the care you took of my Lucretia. The reason was shortly this as I had no opportunity of a private interview at Selkirk and longed sadly to bring it about I set off early on monday morning for HB and by that means was prevented from writing to you.

She speaks in raptures of your kindness and attention, says she will never can make any return till she have the pleasure of thanking you in her own house at Selkirk – may it soon be is my hearty Amen!

Mr Lang carried her the length of Bankhouse[1] and when there Miss H came up in a chaise, made room for her and brought her to Selkirk. It was on a wednesday, Mr Mack and I had just finished our dinner and were taking a single glass, when full in our view up drove the chaise which contained Lucretia. Conceive my situation for my pen will not attempt to describe it.

Next morning I called upon her in Mr Hendersons and here I certainly cut a most awkward figure – I attempted to be polite and chearfull but it was forced and whenever I addressed myself to Lucretia she blushed. I was confused, and the whole wheels of the conversation made a solemn pause till relieved by the usual peal of laughter from the Master of the House. In this situation I continued for a complete half hour and then came away blessing my stars that the first meeting was over and that I was again at liberty.

Mrs Thomson brought her over on the Fair night, I had a good mind to have kissed her and told her that here she was mistress, but my courage failed and I could not for my life approach her – she stayed with me about an hour, gave me your letter to my fairing[2] and then went away with Jean.

She stayed at Selkirk till after dinner on Friday, then walked out to Whitmuir[3] and from thence home on the Sunday – I have a number of good jocks about this excursion which I shall relate at meeting.

Have you any idea when you will be in the country and which road you mean to take. If you could be pointed to a day, I have a good mare, and a strong inclination to come in on her if you will but promise to return to Selkirk with me and stay a week.

Will you be so good as purchase one of the fashionable Ladies hat belts and send it by the carrier and I shall settle with you at meeting – I have promised one to Lucretia and mean to give her it on Friday and I am,

Dear William
Yours sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] A coaching inn in the parish of Stow, Midlothian.

[2] The word 'fairing' has a number of meanings. Of those in English, two would be applicable in this context: (1) a souvenir brought back from a fair; (2) a present or gift, especially one given by a lover. In Scots, it can mean 'a due reward or recompense', which would also fit here.

[3] A small estate approximately 4 miles (6.4 km) east of Selkirk.

67. FROM JOHN ANDERSON

Selkirk 8th September 1794
Monday evening half past 8 o'clock

Dear Willi

After parting with you in Edinburgh I arrived here safe about ~~6~~ ½ past six o clock P.M. Had not gone far upon my journey untill I came up to an Anti Burger parson,[1] who proved to be an agreeable companion all the way.

Delivered your packett that evening to Mr A. Park, sup't [*i.e.* supped] with him and we had a little chat upon Edinburgh matters likewise.

Nothing new in this place has transpired since that saw you, except the death of poor Miss Nelly Turnbull at Preston Pans, the particulars [*interlined*: of] which, you likely have heard by this time.

I am just now going to sup in the house of a most amiable young Lady. It is the greatest, eastmost, house, of our town, on account of which you will excuse my being concise and if what [I] have wrote appear incoherent let the above circumstance be an apology.

I ever remain, Dear Willi
Your Sincere Friend
John Anderson

P.S. Hopes you have got better news of your brother Robert – expects to here [*i.e.* hear] from you next week and when you intend being in the country, J.A.

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

[1] Anti-burghers were former members of the Associate Presbytery (a secession from the Church of Scotland) who had split from their fellow seceders in 1747 over the issue of the Burgher Oath. Their opposition to the oath gave them their popular name.

68. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 2nd January 1795

Dear William

I confess myself much to blame for not answering your favour long ago – I shall make my apologie[s] next week by carrier as the post is just going off.

I did not receive your New Years gift till within an hour of post time – James Renwick[1] did not come home till this morning and I was out of town before the letters were delivered which is the cause of my hurrie. Inclosed you have summons Mitchell Vs Paterson dues 2/6. I shall write particularly next week meantime believe me to be with best wishes for many returns of the season

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw at Mrs Wilsons,[2] Dobies Land, Richmond Street, Edinburgh

1 James Renwick was the carrier between Edinburgh and Selkirk.

2 An error for 'Mrs Williamson'.

69. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 5th January 1795[1]

Dear William

I hope you received your summons in due time.

Every thing here carries the look of happyness, nothing but feasting, marrying, and proposing to marry goes down – never was anything in Selkirk seen like Mr Hendersons wedding, it was sumptuous in the Highest Degree.

I am just going to see Lucretia and as the days are short have scarcely time to get there before dark and can only inform you that I have taken a whole house – entry at Whitsun and then – I am

Dear William with Compliments of the Season,
Yours sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] The original letter is misdated 1794.

70. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 12th January 1795

Dear William

I wrote you alongst with the summons and by the carrier without any answer but as this is a daft time of year[1] I suppose you will be feasting. Have mercy on the poor Geese! But to the point.

I have taken the house Miss Cunningham removed from – my entry is at whitsunday; though the house is rather small I must just content myself untill I can better afford to keep a larger one; in the meantime I am doing all I can prepare it for the reception of my Lucretia.

I hear you saying its too soon, wait another year? Put [*i.e.* ?But] place yourself in my situation and ask your own heart when love and opportunity invites if you would not accept – I am sure you would and so will I. Besides Pr[o]vidence says its requisite, a young man may fall (nay will) into many errers [*i.e.* errors] that the advice and assistance of an amiable will prevent – from these considerations I am determined to marry and ~~look~~ looking forward to the month of June with Pleasure and Anxiety, in hopes that that month will crown an affection which lasted for near five years with the object beloved.

Mr Henderson seems very happy in his choise [*sic*], she appears very frank and likes her situation vastly. Write next week

And I am, Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] The period of festivity at Christmas and the New Year was traditionally known in Scotland as the 'daft days'.

71. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 13th April 1795

Dear William

I shall not begin by asking pardon for past delays, but shall candidly confess I am to blame. Having thus cleared the cost by a fair confession I shall begin to open the budget.

I am just this moment arrived from a very pleasant jaunt; I left Selkirk on Saturday P:M and arrived at Hassendean Bank towards dark where I found my intended Bride and Miss Nelly Scott Letham her intended Best Maiden both anxious to see me. Its in vain to describe the satisfaction I felt to see the joy that lightened up both their faces at my approach and the visible cordiality that appeared in all concerned at our mutual felicity. It appeared to me like enchantment and even now I believe the charm has not left me – "women have such Charms such Magick in their looks, They turn and wind us as they please Adzooks".[1]

But you think all this enthusiasm

You will have heard by this time of the ravages committed by the storm; it was really tremendous, however the gradual thaw has prevented much of the loss amongst the cattle that would eventually have followed one [so] sudden and precipitate, and in fact if it is not the money consumed on hay the farmers in this place have not much to lament.

If all goes well I shall be a married man in the month of June; To my house Lucretia and myself say that no man shall be more welcome than my Friend to whom I write and we both hope he'll accept the invitation and make it [h]is home at all times when in this part of the country – write by course and I am

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] A quotation from *Once a Lover, Always a Lover* (1752), a popular play by George Granville.

72. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 25th May 1795

Dear William

I am to be in Edinburgh[1] on Thursday first (of which let my acquaintances know) till which time give me leave to subscribe myself,

Dear William
Yours truly
Alex Park

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

[1] Alexander was travelling to Edinburgh to meet with old friends for a night out before his impending marriage – the contemporary equivalent of a stag night. His note suggests that William Laidlaw had been tasked with organising the event.

73. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 1st June 1795

Dear William

I got home pretty much fatigued about seven o'clock. James Renwick [*interlined*: will give you] a spare box in which is the ring I mentioned to you – you must let the one you purchase be something easier and if you can get it with this provision that as it is to go to the country if it does not answer it may be returned and another taken it will suit very well.

How are you standing after our debaucheries. I feel myself perfectly recovered. Give my compliments to Messrs Lang, Rodger and Scott[1] and tell them I got well home and am as ready for another campaign as possible and I am

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

I can send no money this week; Shotefish[2] yet!!

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

Note on cover sheet: with a Parcell, A.P.

[1] The aforementioned George Lang, James Rodger and Andrew Scott.

[2] A name given to freshwater fish that resembled trout, in particular grayling. William Laidlaw had been entrusted by Alexander to procure a wedding ring and a selection of fish for the wedding dinner.

74. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 16th June 1795

Dear William

I received every thing safe and am much to blame for not answering yours – But the thought of the happy day ingrosses all my attention – Will that excuse? I'm sure it will – Friday eight days I am to be … the Husband of Lucretia – may God himself Bless the union.

In addition to the scate if you would make your Landlady purchase (and place it to my account) a code [*i.e.* cod] fish and six good haddocks and send out by next week's carrier to make part of the Wedding Dinner – Lucretia is very fond of fish and I promised [*interlined*: her] both these kinds on that day.

I will send you a decreet next week for horning. I was from home last night is the reason I write by post.

You may tell Lang, Rodger etc. and Scott of Friday eight days should they enquire and I am

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

75. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 19th June 1795

Dear William

I have this moment received yours.

I wrote you by tuesdays Post which by this time I expect you have got; in which I mentioned the safe receipt of everything sent.

I have applied to Mr Pringle M.P. for the county here to procure me the Commissary Clerkship of Peebles. He has wrote to the Duke of Portland, Duke of Queensberry and Duke of Buccleugh in my favour and assures me that if the office is not previously disposed of I am certain of it.

If you think your interest at Court better I would by no means wish to stop you; for however well I may have paid for the office yet I would rather see it in your hands than anothers.

If I procure the office you are certainly the Gentleman I wish for my depute and shall have it [at] all events.

The happy day is Friday next – next carrier is the conveyance for the scate and other fish mentioned in my letter of Tuesday and I am

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

76. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 22nd June 1795

Dear William

I wrote you last week per Post which I hope alongst with my other letter you received.

I mentioned in one of my former letters to you to send a code fish and half a dozen haddocks by this weeks carrier for Fridays dinner, I hope they will come and charge them to my account.

The decreet is not extracted it will come next week.

I hope my friend will rejoice with me in the completion of my Long Expected Wishes on Friday and I am

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

77. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 29th June 1795

Dear William

Yours with the fish came safe on Thursday night and on Friday composed a great rairity at the wedding dinner; I need not add that I drank with great pleasure the donor. I am now actually matramonised. On Friday the ceremony was performed at Huntlaw[1] by the reverend Dr Burns and at half past three o'clock (the time of the races at the Galaridge) we got to Selkirk.

The night was spent in a very agreeable and happy manner to all parties – after tea we danced till supper and from that we pushed the glass untill half past twelve; after this I can say no more – I was absent. Tis impossible I can pursue the happy idea after this period any longer "for of the Genial Bed with most mysterious reverence I deem".[2]

This day our company have all left us except Miss Scott Leitham,[3] as pleasand a Lady as I ever talked with and withall an intimate acquaintance and friend of my – wifes – we are now reduced to a family capacity and in that little circle I expect to reap more rational enjoyment and substantial happyness than from all the mirth and roit [*i.e.* riot] of dissipation and debauch.

Please raise horning on the inclosed and return as soon as possible and I am

Dear William
Yours
Alexander Park

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

[1] Huntlaw, a farm in the parish of Hassendean, was then the home of Esther's father James Turnbull. The marriage ceremony was performed by a Burgher minister before Alexander and Esther travelled to Selkirk for a second ceremony in the kirk.

[2] A loose quotation from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book 8, when Adam is speaking about Eve. Alexander was referencing his joy at being newly wed and his love for his bride.

[3] Sixteen-year-old Nelly Scott of Leitham, Roxburghshire.

78. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 6th July 1795

Dear William

It is with great pleasure I inform you that my Interest has at last prevailed and my commission by this time is ready for taking out.

By a letter from the Duke of Portland to Mr Pringle received on Saturday he say[s] he is happy it is in his power to appoint me and has given the necessary directions for making out ~~his~~ my commission. I have wrote to Mr Dickson to take it out and pay the fees; and in the course of fourteen days at farthest Mr Pringle says I may be certain of having it in Selkirk.

If you have any expectation of practicing in Peebles it is now in my power to grant you a deputation – you need not be affraid of the Commissarys refusal; his son is going to the army and of course can be no barr and indeed the Commissary is so very good that [he] has allowed and still will allow me the sole power of naming deputes both for him and me – I would advise you from the bottom of my soul to embrace the present opportunity at Peebles and the sooner the better, as it will not be long vacant.

There is now not a provider of credit in the town, and if you can steer clear of the rock upon which they all founder (inebriety) I shall say without any pretence to prophecy that you will do well. I have always advised you for what I thought the best; and I would fain hope this will be adopted. I sent you a decreet last week for a horning which I expect this week with a note of dues.

My wife begs leave to present her best compliments to her friend and thanks him for the present she received at her marriage – she expects to see him soon and I am

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

79. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 13th July 1795

Dear William

Your two favours with the horning I received in due time.

I assure [you] I do not like the contents of the one that objects against coming to Peebles – I am really of opinion that you sit in your own light[1] if you do not go; it is an opportunity the like of which may perhaps never occur to you – your friends in that place and the patronage you have every reason to expect from Gentlemen in the neighbourhood is sufficient to introduce you into business and to carry you on in a manner that will make you live in a comfortable way, your own master. The place I am certainly informed will be occupied in the course of a forthnight or three weeks, if not filled before that time, so that you must be speedy in your conclusions, or else it is lost, perhaps for ever. Don't be timerous, there is enough of business and you have every prospect of having the best share.[2]

I shall ~~dont~~ [*interlined*: not] dispose of the deputation untill I hear from you which I expect to be soon; You did not write by carrier as you promised; Be sure to write this week and before I bid you good night allow me again to say go to Peebles and I am

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

[1] A saying used to describe someone who fails to recognise or promote his own abilities, either through self-doubt or fear, and so risks not fulfilling his full potential.

[2] Alexander's reference to William Laidlaw's 'friends' in Peebles would have included his family, who were living nearby at Hundleshope. See the Introduction to the present volume, and the one in *The Correspondence of William Laidlaw, Part I: Family, 1792-1795*, Sources in Local History 26, Edinburgh, 2023.

80. FROM ALEXANDER PARK

Selkirk 20th July 1795

Dear William

Inclosed you have a twenty shilling note with my wifes compliments who begs that you (with the assistance of Miss Henderson or Miss Cramond)[1] would purchase her a black beaver hat therewith; and if any of the two Ladies will cause some trimming be put upon it according to the times and take the trouble of sending it by James Renwick she says by thir presents that she will be much under their obligation. She wishes it this week if it can be got as we proceed upon our southern visits the beginning of next.

Youll [*i.e.* you'll] mind that independent of this you are two letters in arrear – I expect a particular answer about Peebles and in hopes that you have come to the resolution of fixing your standard there. I remain

Dear William
Yours Sincerely
Alexander Park

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

Note on cover sheet: with £1 Sterling

[1] William Laidlaw was on friendly terms with the Henderson and Cramond sisters. The young women mentioned here were probably Nancy Henderson and Bell Cramond, who were both living in Edinburgh at the time.

81. FROM WILLIAM DEAS

Edinburgh 24th September 1795

Dear Willie

I have just time to tell you, that owing to the hurry we have been in since Mr Ls arrival which happened on Monday afternoon I have not had time to arrange matters so as to be able to send your books this week but you may depend [*interlined*: them] per next weeks carrier. I have heard nothing as yet of our Saturday nights indiscretion, so that I am hopefull that affair will blow over. I

have not time to say more, but must conclude by wishing you all manner of happiness, and success in your new way of life and am

Dear Sir
Yours very sincerely
William Deas[1]

Addressed to: Mr William Laidlaw, Writer, Peebles

Note on cover sheet: Edinburgh 24th September 1795. William Deas. Answered viva voce.

[1] William Deas was resident at the house of James Laidlaw, Writer to the Signet, who was William Laidlaw's cousin. The letter suggests that he may have been a clerk, like William; and reflects Laidlaw's imminent move to Peebles.

FURTHER READING

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

Further biographical information about William Laidlaw can be found in Sally Gerrard's introduction to *The Correspondence of William Laidlaw, Part I: Family, 1792-1795*, Sources in Local History 26, Edinburgh, 2023.

For the life of Mungo Park, see Duffill, M. *Mungo Park: Surgeon and West African Explorer*, Edinburgh, 1999; and Withers, C W J. *Mungo Park and the Exploration of the Niger*, Edinburgh, 2022. For the Andersons of Selkirk, see Anderson, T C D'A. *Letters of the Andersons of Selkirk (with reference to Mungo Park's final trip to Africa)*, privately published, 2012.

For a contemporary description of the parish of Selkirk see *First (Old) Statistical Account of Scotland*, 21 vols, Edinburgh, 1791-99, II, 434-448. For a history of Selkirk and its county, see Craig-Brown, T. *The History of Selkirkshire; or, Chronicles of Ettrick Forest*, Edinburgh, 1886. For the development of Selkirk in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Harris, B and McKean, C. *The Scottish Town in the Age of the Enlightenment, 1740-1820*, Edinburgh, 2014, 215-219.

John Stark's *Picture of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1806, offers a detailed depiction of the city around the time of Mungo Park and company's stay. The entry for Edinburgh, and its appendix, in the *Old Statistical Account* provide further contemporary details, as does *The Traveller's Companion through the City of Edinburgh and Suburbs*, Edinburgh, 1794. Anecdotes about the places, manners and characters of late eighteenth-century Edinburgh can be found in Robert Chambers' *Traditions of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1824-25.

See the notes to the Introduction for other relevant works.

SOURCES IN LOCAL HISTORY

GENERAL EDITOR: KENNETH VEITCH

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