

Alexander Penny and "Reminiscences" - a book many times revisited

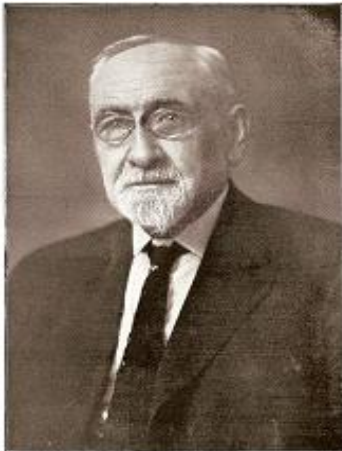
Alexander Penny (1845 -192x)
My great grand-uncle

Late
1860s



ALEXANDER PENNY IN LONDON

Early
1920s



Alexander Penny

Alexander's book "Reminiscences of 75 Years of My Life" was published in St Louis in 1923. A copy was given to each of Alexander's relatives and the one I have belonged to my great grandfather, James. This book was in my parents' house all through my childhood - and never opened by me. Before that I guess it was in my grandmother's possession in Aberdeen after George (my grandfather) died in 1926. If only I had listened to my father and read the book when encouraged to do so years ago!

My great grandfather, born in 1839, was Alexander's elder brother by 6 years. In recalling his earlier years he often refers to his brother "Billie" (William), who was just under 2 years his junior, but not to his elder brother.

Born at the "farm of Hallmoss on the Inverallochy estate", Alexander was my great grand-uncle. The estate at that time belonged to Colonel Fraser of Castle Fraser, near Aberdeen. The family moved to Nether Kinmundy when Alexander was pre-school age (maybe aged 3 in 1848). He mentions a chimney pot being put on the house - I wonder if that was when the house was built?

In 1857 his grandmother died, when he was about 11, and he was sent to Hallmoss to stay with his grandfather (James 1781 - 1858). Having been at Longside School he then went to school at Inverallochy and returned to Nether Kinmundy a few months after his grandfather died - and back to Longside school. He comments that at the Kinmundy school, out of between 50 and 60, there were 26 Pennys at one time.

The farm at Hallmoss must have been run by Alexander's uncle (James 1816 - 1909) whose gravestone is in St Combs cemetery and referred to in my section "The first 6 generations".

In his book there are descriptions of "Kinmundy in my day" which refer to his childhood, say, between 1850 and 1859 when he went to become an apprentice in the drapery trade in Peterhead at 7 pounds in his first year. He comments on what he saw in 1920 and relates that back to his boyhood - 60 years before. All of this is very relevant to me as Alexander's recollections from his early years are contemporaneous with my great grandfather and Alexander's holiday back home is around the time my father could have been holidaying at Nether Kinmundy. When my grandfather lived at or near Nether Kinmundy, Alexander, his uncle, for most of the time would have been in the States.

In these *extracts* (*in italics*) when Alexander is talking past tense that means, roughly, between 1850 and 1860, and when he is talking present tense that is in the time of his visits in 1910 and 1920.

There was at one time a woollen mill, which stood back of our cart shed. It is now called the Calf Park - I just remember the ruins being taken away, but a row of houses which were built for the workers is still standing. It is called "Creeshy Raw". The carts that were, and still are, used are very heavy, with two wheels and a box. The horses are very large, as they need to be to haul those heavy carts with a load.

Our crops on the farm that were grown in my time, and are still grown today, are oats, turnips, hay, grass and potatoes. Turnips were very prolific and great fields were sown with them. 30 or 40 acres feed quite a number of cattle all the winter and spring.

In our garden, the apple trees were trained up against the walls round the garden. Gooseberries, both red and green, were the best berries, although currants and strawberries were grown.



Towards the south of Kinmundy is a hill, where you can see the valley for 10 or 12 miles. At that distance was the Hill of Mormond, quite a mound rising abruptly out of the ground, reminding me of the great mound of the Field of Waterloo. The owner of this hill, or mound, had placed stones on the face of it that, at a distance, were in the form of a perfect horse. You could imagine it was alive. It is called the White Horse of Mormond.

Kinmundy is 2 ½ miles from Longside. It is also the name of the Estate. It has been offered (in 1921) for 36,000 pounds. The income is 1700 pounds, with taxes and charge amounting to 500 pounds or odd. Besides the land, there is a fine home, barns, stables, threshing mills, all built of stone and roofed with slate.

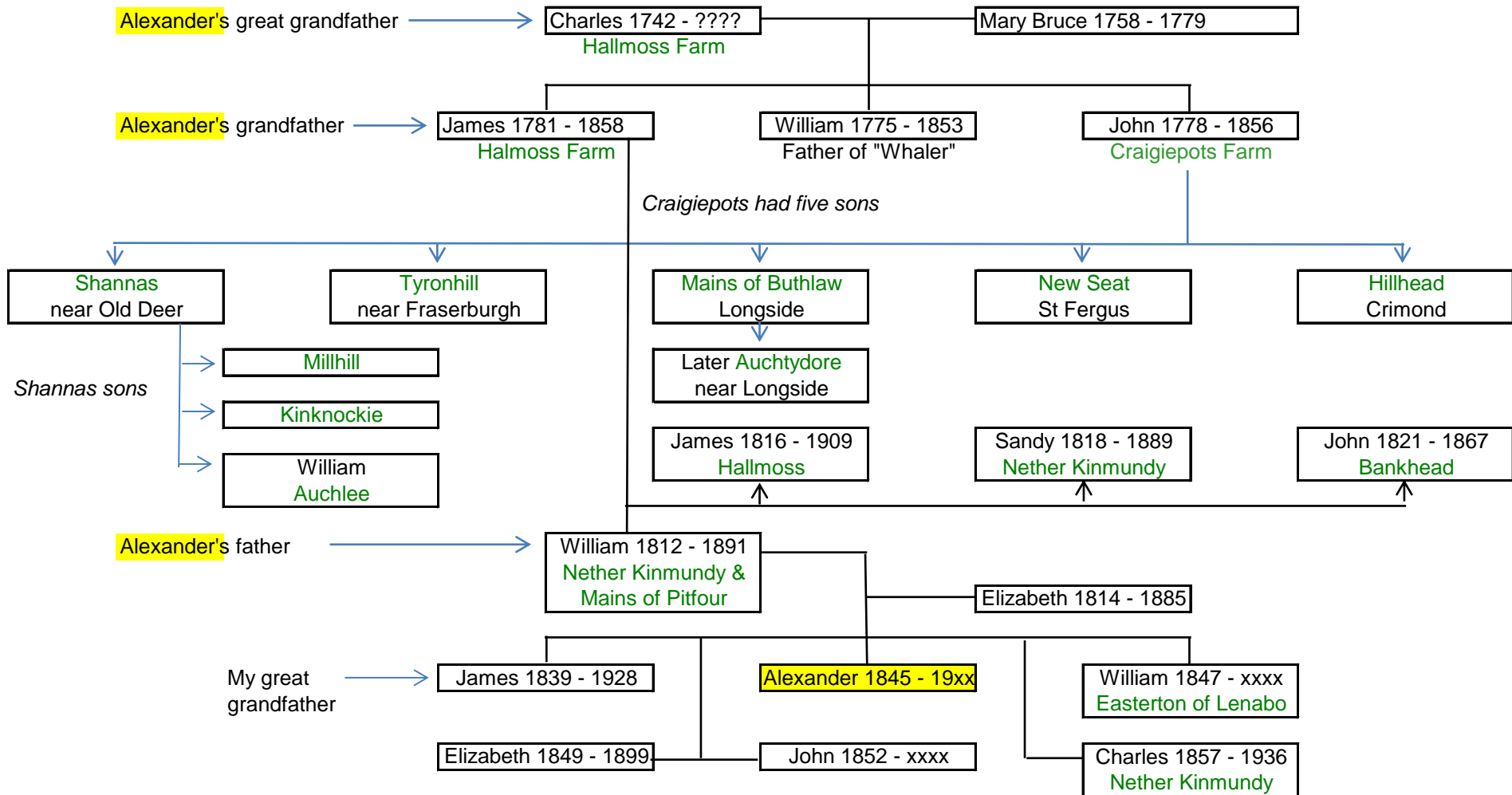
At Kinmundy, we had five men and one woman who worked outside, and one woman in the house. My father did not do any of the farm work unless it was a rush time. My brother worked on the farm. I never did - only herded the cows one summer, and carried the dinners to the harvest field, and went to the merchants with the butter and eggs. This was only in the harvest time, but I was little over 13 when I went to be a merchant's apprentice.

Our harvest hands at Kinmundy were two men cutting with scythes, two women gathering, two men binding, and one man stooking and one raking. The sheaves were stood up against each other, and it was at the side of these that the people ate their dinners. Perhaps one woman was hired for harvest time - the rest were all the year round men - ploughing, sowing, and attending to the cattle. Harvesting is altogether different now, as all farmers have reapers and binders.

Alexander also gave an insight into the running of other farms in Buchan by Penny family members. Mains of Pitfour was a larger farm than Nether Kinmundy having three more harvest hands. Alexander's father took it over and had his hands full buying and selling cattle, hiring the hands, and carrying on the farms. It was taken by Alexander's uncle in 1858 or 1859 but after two or three years he was taken sick and Alexander's father had to take the management of it.

About 1922 / 23 Alexander's brother Charles bought Nether Kinmundy and had the Creeshieraw thrown in. This "greasy row" was a hamlet inhabited by people who worked in a nearby wool mill.

There is sufficient information in "Reminiscences" to trace out who in my wider Penny family had or ran farms in the 1800s. There are many more that are more distantly related.



After 6 1/2 years at Peterhead, in 1866, Alexander moved to London to a store - C Meeking in Holborn, where he was hired "on the spot". His narrative about his 4 years in London is full of detail. The trip by boat cost 15/- (75p); vivid descriptions of the Hyde Park Riots; his salary in his first year was £30 with bed and board; he and other staff seemed to live "over the shop" with the owner and his wife; he saw Queen Victoria twice - once when she opened Holborn Viaduct in 1869.



Holborn Viaduct completed

Holborn Viaduct was part of central London's biggest redevelopment in the mid-19th century. The River Fleet was covered over and slum properties in the Fleet Valley were demolished.

The redevelopment created a wide, new street that ran south from King's Cross to the new Embankment at Blackfriars Bridge. The scheme was opened by Queen Victoria in 1869.

Holborn Viaduct open by Queen Victoria
Alexander Penny was there - 1869



Picture of construction of Holborn Viaduct - Transport Museum
Norman Penny was there - 2014
145 years later

He mentions seeing Asquith when he was Prime Minister and regretted not going to Charles Dickens' farewell reading tour.

Alexander recalls the train home leaving Kings Cross at 09:15, getting home to Mains of Pitfour 24 Hours later; the round trip cost 52/- (£2.60). In 1910 he saw the ruins of the Tay Bridge - which years before he crossed.



On 9th June 1870 Alexander and "Mr Gentles" (he does not say how or where he met him) left London for and sailed "steerage" to Montreal then to New York and Cincinnati en route to St Louis. Mr Gentles "got a situation" with Barr's [William Barr's Dry Goods Company] which later became part of Macy's; Alexander joined him in Barr's after a month or so with Vandervoorts. In 1873 Penny & Gentles came into being at 912 Franklin Avenue later moving to No 504 then to the corner of Broadway and Franklin. The "Penny" name is first because at the outset Alexander put up more money than Mr Gentles.

When Alexander and his family came back on holiday to the North East they went to see his parents at Mains of Pitfour. This adds another piece to the jigsaw of which Penny was at which farm as his father took over management of Mains of Pitfour, his brother had joined his father at Nether Kinmundy which he later bought. He mentions visiting his brothers during this 1910 trip - Charlie at Kinmundy, Willie at Lenabo and Jamie at Coulter. The reference to Jamie i.e. James (1839 -1928) being in Peter Coulter in 1910 and my father being born in 1909 and not in Scotland before 1912 suggests he visited Jamie/James - his grandfather in Peter Coulter rather than Nether Kinmundy unless they were both holidaying there at the same time.

In his 1920 visit - with only his daughter and her husband, his wife and son having died - he saw bayonet trenches in Verdun, France with *guns still standing out of the ground*; he found the grave of one nephew. In London they *visited the American store, and met Mr Selfridge, the owner* who entertained them quite a while. Whilst walking down Downing Street to see No 10, *Lloyd George came out and saw his wife into her automobile*. After visiting family in Buchan he went to Coulter as he had done 10 years before to see his brother (Jamie) then about 80 years old - who would celebrate his 60th wedding anniversary a year later.

When in 2009 I started this family research, I Googled the name and author of this book that I have relied so heavily on as a source of information. To my amazement there was a copy for sale in the US - duly bought and filed away. After re-reading my original copy I flicked through the additional one - first page in has handwritten "*To Mr Howard Gentles from the Author Christmas 1923*". So I have purchased a copy that ended up in the hands of a member of Alexander Penny's partner's family - one of the Gentles.

If that was not coincidence enough, in January 2014 whilst writing this "booklet" I again casually Googled - this time for "Penny" in general then more specifically for "Penny and Gentles". The latter produced much historic material about the company in St Louis and - for sale on eBay - an advertising card for Penny & Gentles. It now sits with pride of place on my desk just next to "Reminiscences"!



detail





<----- This picture in his book is Home Farm, Nether Kinmundy which Alexander referred to as "home".

Apart from double glazing and solar panel not too much different from this photograph I took (with permission of the current owner Jennifer Bain) in April 2011.



This photograph of Alexander was posted on Wikitree by <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Schliebe-2> on 19 Mar 2020. It was taken 100 years ago!

<https://www.wikitree.com/photo/jpg/Penny-1192>