



## The Elders – Just Who Were They?



*Since 1839, Elders has been an integral part of Australia's rural business landscape. With 180 years of knowledge, experience and advice for its clients, Elders continues to focus on its future as a pure agribusiness both within Australia and internationally.*

### *Elders Ltd website*

This 15th object deviates from our normal template in that Kirkcaldy itself is not the backdrop to the story - rather it recounts the achievements of members of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Kirkcaldy family in a land some 10,000 miles from these shores.

Many towns and cities have produced sons and daughters who have found fame and fortune away from their native heath. Some remain relatively unknown in their birthplace despite being respected, honoured and celebrated, in the places where they made their mark and name. Such circumstances tend to support the old adage that 'a prophet is without honour in his own land'.

Kirkcaldy is certainly not unique or any different in this respect, but what is perhaps surprising is the number of individuals who fall into this category. Without having to expend a great deal of thought four names spring to mind of 'sons' who have made good in foreign climes, but paucity can be the only description for the level of recognition offered by the 'Lang Toun'

John McDouall Stuart, Sir Thomas Elder, William Arnott and Sir Sandford Fleming are all illustrious names still celebrated and remembered in the continents where they found fame and

sometimes fortune. Buildings, universities, parks, statues and other monuments, stand to their memory far from 'the shores of the Forth'. There is very little tangible evidence of their connection to Kirkcaldy or the recognition of their subsequent achievements to be found.

It is rightly accepted that Adam Smith is the most famous historical figure connected to Kirkcaldy. The fine Adam Smith Halls stand to his memory, albeit it was one hundred years after his death before the monument/memorial was finally erected.



For all Smith's fame at home and abroad, he should not be allowed to eclipse the efforts and memory of other talented Langtonians. A strong argument can be constructed that this is indeed what has happened in the cases of those mentioned above. Each deserves more recognition and this narrative is intended to be an attempt to shine a light on their background, achievements and legacy.

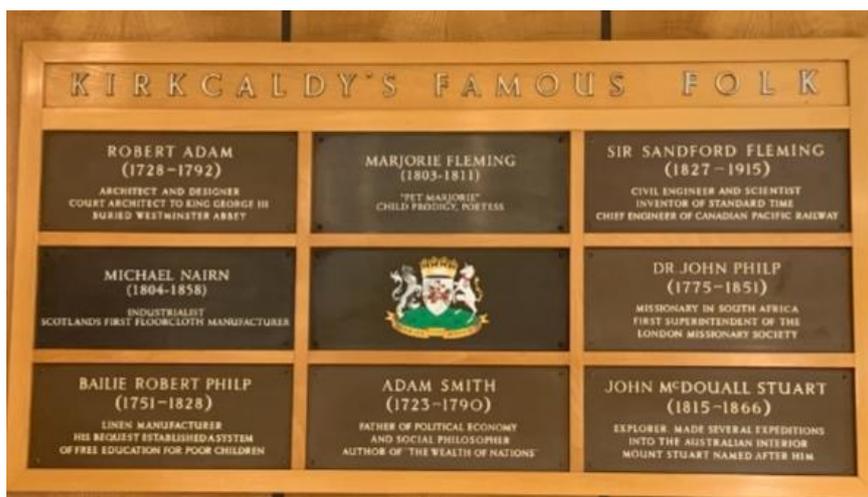
Kirkcaldy it would appear seems to, perhaps rightly, value a street name as a satisfactory accolade of recognition. That however begs the question, is a street name sufficient in every case? The answer is probably not.

Sir Thomas Elder has two streets incorporating his name and Sandford Fleming may have one – but *Fleming Drive* could also be in recognition of 'Pet Marjorie.' John McDouall Stuart is recognised by a street in Dysart, but William Arnott appears to be without. Can a street name really be the pinnacle of civic recognition?

In a Charlotte Street car park stands a weathered and shabby information board. It encourages, amongst other activities, visiting the McDouall Stuart Museum in Dysart! That appears to be the

extent of appreciation for the man and his attainments. The Council closed and sold his museum many years ago, but in fairness there is a carving on the pavement outside his birthplace giving some details of his immense achievements.

That said, if street names are discounted, then the carving is the sum total of Kirkcaldy's recognition of four notable men.



Kirkcaldy really needs to find a better way of recognising and honouring her illustrious children. As a first step, the excellent display feature in the Town House of 'Kirkcaldy's Famous Folk' should be

replicated and displayed in prominent parts of the town. What worthwhile purpose does it serve almost secreted from public gaze?

The initial concept of this story was to feature all four men. It was then whittled down to three on the basis that Fleming's work and achievements had an international impact as opposed to the others having more of a national significance.

As the results of the initial research unfolded it became very clear that the story of the Elder family and their contribution to the building and advancement of the infant South Australia was immense. It is also virtually untold and unknown in Kirkcaldy. For this reason we are embarking on their story, despite the fact that this is certainly the least known of the subjects we have covered to date. It could be considered as something of a risk but we are convinced that the story needs exposed – and why not now?

Our intention is that readers will, like ourselves, ponder on why this family have remained under the radar for so long.

Sir Sandford Fleming, John McDouall Stuart and William Arnott, will have their stories told – but not today. The team genuinely feel that there is a more pressing need to unveil and recognise the Elder family.

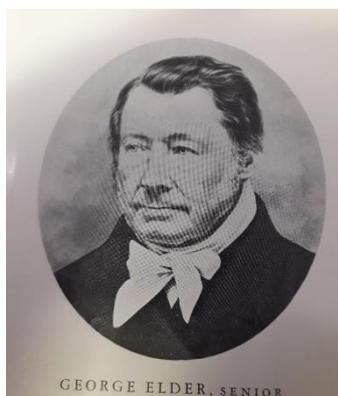
With the backdrop and rationale explained we can move onto Sir Thomas Elder himself. That statement in itself is a contradiction in terms. It is simply not possible to ignore or dilute the part played by other members of his family. While Thomas is without doubt the best known and best remembered, his achievements also reflect the ambition and fortitude of the wider family.

The building blocks were already in place before Thomas arrived in Australia. Unquestionably, he took the business to another level through his drive and acumen but the spadework had already been done and the Elder name established long before he set foot on Australian soil. For this reason the narrative must stray into the domain of other family members.

A quote from over eighty years ago is a worthwhile introduction to the story:--

“Great though the record of the founders and builders of Elder, Smith and Co. in forwarding the material progress of South Australia, they will be remembered with equal gratitude for their contributions to its wellbeing in other spheres for, without exception, they were animated by a splendid spirit of public service which manifested itself in munificent philanthropic gifts and the history of religious, educational and charitable institutions is rich in their names” (Elder, Smith & Co – the First One Hundred Years 1940)

As the story unfolds the team will advocate that it should be a source of civic pride that one of the longest established and most iconic businesses in Australia should have its roots here in Kirkcaldy. This statement is fact - not embellished fiction!



Thomas Elder was the youngest of four sons born to George Elder and his wife Joanna. The family lived close to the Port Brae in an area known as Elder's Brae which was situated between the High Street and Hill Place. An early census shows their house listed as number 16.

George's parents had arrived in Kirkcaldy from Leith. His father, William, was a glove maker which was a prestigious trade at the time. William would almost certainly have been well connected with many of the local middle and upper classes, who would be those in a position to afford such items. William died in 1846, sixteen years after his wife Agnes Bain. Both are buried in the Old Kirk graveyard. It is apparent that William changed his trade as he is listed as a merchant, in both the 1841 census and on his death certificate. Some accounts suggest the family had first found wealth, during the Napoleonic Wars, by fitting out privateers.



In 1812, George married Joanna Haddo Lang in Leith. George was certainly a successful man whose interests included being a merchant, a ship's chandler, and also a ship owner. He imported flax and other essentials through the harbour, but also had a number of other interests. In particular *George Elder and Sons* were involved in insurance, being agents for two companies. The firm initially

provided maritime cover through the *Scottish Sea Assurance* before moving into a more general market via the *Scottish Union of Fire and Life Society*. An advert for that company is attached and shows George as one of the six Fife Agents.

**SCOTTISH UNION FIRE & LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY.**  
 INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER.  
 Head Office—47, GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH.  
 Office in London—37, CORNHILL.  
 Office in Dublin—22, DAME STREET.

**THE** Directors request the attention of Parties proposing to effect Life Insurances to the advantages offered by this Company, which they are confident may be most favourably contrasted with those of any similar Institution.

**SECURITY.**  
 This Company possesses a very large subscribed capital, divided among a numerous body of Proprietors, and the absolute necessity so essential to a Life Assurance Society is afforded in its most substantial form.

**PREMIUMS.**  
 The Rates of Premiums have been calculated expressly for this Company, and will bear a fair comparison with those of other Companies. **NO EXTRA MONEY IS CHARGED.** Parties may assure either a specific sum, payable at death, on payment of a reduced rate of premium; or, on payment of an increased rate, may participate in the profit scheme of the Company.

**DISTRIBUTION OF PROFITS.**  
**TWO-THIRDS** of the Profit arising on the Participation Class of Policies (without being subject to any charge for Management) are divided **EVERY FIVE YEARS** among those entitled to participate, on the **MOST EQUITABLE** principles, viz. in the proportion each party has contributed to the fund.

At the First Investigation of Profits on 1st August, 1841, the Directors were enabled to declare a Bonus averaging about 3 per cent. per annum on the sums insured, as exhibited in the following Table:—

Table showing the conditions made in a Policy for £1000, which had been seven years in existence.

Age when Assured under	Additions	Total Sum now Payable.
20	£120 7 6	£1120 7 6
30	135 19 0	1135 19 0
40	138 15 6	1138 15 6
50	142 9 0	1142 9 0
60	145 7 6	1145 7 6

**PARTIES EFFECTING INSURANCES ON THE PROFIT SHARES** prior to 1st AUGUST NEXT, will secure the ADVANTAGE of ONE YEAR'S ADDITIONAL RAYING AT THE SECOND INVESTIGATION, WHICH TAKES PLACE IN 1844.

Copies of Prospectus and all other information may be had on application at the Head Office of the Company, 47, George Street, Edinburgh, or at any of the Company's Agents.

By order of the Directors,  
**GEORGE RAMSAY, MANAGER.**

**AGENTS.**  
 CUPAR-FIFE—Thomas Dryburgh, Writer.  
 Dundee—A. Gossie, Bookbinder.  
 Perth—Henry Kirk, Banker.  
 Inverkeithing—Wm. Fraser.  
 Forth—Robert Tod, Banker.  
 Kirkcaldy—George Elder, Merchant.  
 St. Andrew—William Gilman.

George was certainly an influential figure in the burgh. In the days before the Town enjoyed local newspapers collecting detailed information could be taxing. A number of articles which have been unearthed will hopefully give a flavour of the man. They appear where appropriate in the text.

We first come upon George in 1825 and this is perhaps an indication of his standing. On the 11<sup>th</sup> April a letter was sent to the

Provost of Kirkcaldy and the Bailies of Linktown and Pathhead. The letter which was published in the press is asking that a meeting be called to consider petitioning Parliament to have the “protecting duties” on imported linen reduced. 'It had gradually become accepted that the abolition of all import duties would make goods cheaper to produce, making them more competitive, thereby increasing exports and prosperity. The merchants of the three largest trading cities, London, Manchester and Glasgow, petitioned Parliament for this purpose. Bit

**WE**, the Undersigned, request that you will call, on an early day, a Meeting of the Inhabitants within your bounds, interested in the Linen Trade, to take into consideration the proposed Reduction of the Protecting Duties on Foreign Linens imported; and in connection therewith, to consider of the propriety of petitioning Parliament to allow of Foreign Corn being at all times admitted into this Country on a similar principle.

To the Provost of Kirkcaldy, The Bailie of Linktown, and The Bailie of Pathhead.  
 WILLIAM MILLIE, Pathhead.  
GEORGE ELDER, Kirkcaldy  
DAVID LANDALE, Kirkcaldy  
JAMES BOGIE, Kirkcaldy  
JAMES JAMIESON, Kirkcaldy  
 WILLIAM STOCKS, Linktown.  
 ARCHIBALD MACDONALD, Linktown.  
 MICHAEL DUFF & SON, Pathhead.  
 THOMAS MILLIE, Pathhead.  
 JAMES AYTOUN, Linktown.  
 WILLIAM SWAN, Kirkcaldy  
 ROBERT PHILP, Kirkcaldy  
 MICHAEL BARKER, Kirkcaldy  
Kirkcaldy 11th April, 1825.

In compliance with the above requisition, We hereby appoint a Meeting of the Inhabitants within our respective bounds, to be held in the Town-house of Kirkcaldy, on Friday, the 15th day of April current, at One o'clock afternoon.  
 GEORGE MILLAR, Jun., Provost of Kirkcaldy,  
 JAMES HENDRY, Bailie of Linktown.  
 DAVID INGLIS, Bailie of Pathhead.

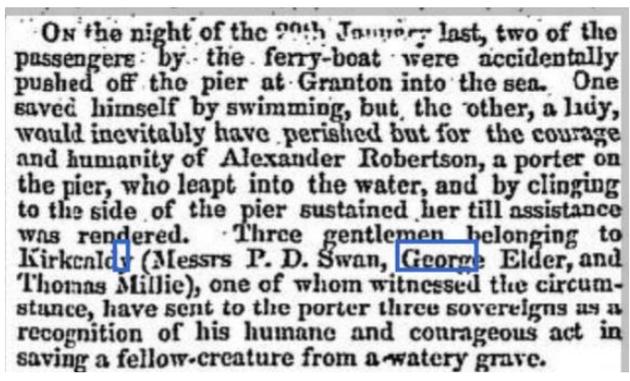
by bit the Navigation Laws which had underpinned the whole policy of the protection of British goods for over 200 years was dismantled. It was also asked that the same should apply to imported corn. The signatories are of the highest calibre that it would be possible to secure and include many whose names are still recognised today – Landale, Stocks and Swan to name but three. The meeting was agreed to and set for the 15<sup>th</sup> April in the Town House. It was not until 1846 that the detested Corn Laws were repealed. The above letter and others like it may have had an effect as a sliding scale on wheat and corn was introduced in 1828.

William Stewart, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
John Stockdale, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
J. D. Thorneley, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
James Dennistoun Wood, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
Miss E. G. Wood, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
William Earle, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
James Aytoun, <b>Kirkcaldy</b>	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
George Anderson, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
David Landale, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
Samuel Davidson, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
James Jamieson, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
<b>George</b> Elder, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
Alexander Russell and Sons, ditto	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
Edward Briggs, Blackburn	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
F. Schwann (advertised 400l., increased to 500l.)	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
John Armstrong, Lancaster	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
A Friend, per John Gadsby	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
Joseph Acton, Wigan	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
Arthur Morse, Swaffham	-	-	-	-	100	0	0
Wm. Holmes and Brothers, Hebden Bridge	-	-	-	-	50	0	0
Hinchliffe Brothers ditto	-	-	-	-	75	0	0

In 1845 George is still active against the Corn Laws and both he and James Aytoun contributed £100 each to the ‘Anti-Corn Law League.’ Kirkcaldy was certainly a hotbed of opposition to the Corn Laws and Richard Cobden, the

leader of the ‘Anti-Corn Law League’, given the freedom of the burgh.

We find George mentioned in *The Scotsman* of the 16th February 1853 in the company of another two Kirkcaldy men - P.D. Swan and Thomas Millie. On the 20th January, a man and a woman had fallen from the ferry at Granton. The man had managed to swim to safety but the lady would certainly have drowned had a porter, Alexander Robertson, not leapt into the water to keep her afloat until assistance was rendered. The three gentlemen, who were



passengers, sent three sovereigns to Mr Robertson as "recognition of his humane and courageous act in saving a fellow creature from a watery grave".

The children of the marriage who reached maturity were; William (1813-82), Alexander Lang (1815-85), George (1816-97) and Thomas (1818-97), along with three daughters, Jemima, Elizabeth (Betsy) and Joanna.

The 1851 census finds George and Joanna at 16 Elder's Brae with two of their children, Thomas and Elizabeth. All but Joanna are listed as general merchants. There are also two servants mentioned in the record.



The Fife Herald of the 5th April 1855 demonstrates that George was an important figure in Kirkcaldy's Free Church. He was selected to be the congregation's representative at the forthcoming General Assembly along with the minister, the Reverend John Alexander.

Not only was their relationship elder and minister, but also father-in-law and son-in-law, as John Alexander had married Elizabeth Elder on 8th December 1853. George was in fact replacing one of Kirkcaldy's most illustrious figures, Patrick Don Swan as the assembly representative.

We find George embroiled in church politics in 1857. *The Edinburgh Courant* of the 5th May carries a letter signed by lay members of the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church suggesting the two churches should explore the benefits of an

amalgamation. George is a signatory, but it was all a damp squib as amalgamation did not take place until 1900.

The above shows the depth of George's involvement with religion, and it was certainly something which transmitted to his children.

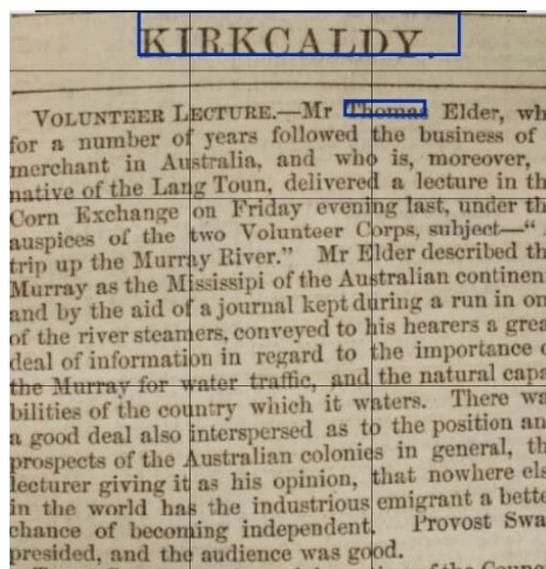


In 1857 Joanna died at age 62. Her death is registered as having taken place in White's Causeway.

The year 1861 demonstrates the strides made by the family as the census discloses George and Thomas now residing at *Adelaide House* along with three domestic servants. George is now listed as a retired Australian merchant, with Thomas as an Australian merchant\*.

Research revealed that Ex-Provost Birrell had bought *George Elder and Sons* in 1853. Birrell had worked for Walter Fergus before striking out on his own. While it all began well for him – the poor Provost ended up being examined in the bankruptcy court!

\*This came as a surprise as Thomas had emigrated long before 1861. Research uncovered that he gave a number of talks at the time and a summary of one given in Kirkcaldy is attached. Another was probably given in Inverkeithing as Provost Swan is again mentioned as being in the chair. A reasonable assumption is that this one was organised by brother George. Seems therefore, that he was home on holiday at the time of the census.



In 1862 we find that George has married for a second time. His bride was Kirkcaldy born Ellen Turner (Kennedy). For the new Mrs Elder it was also a second marriage. The announcement in the press discloses that the bride was the widow of John Kennedy M.A., who was the headmaster of Kirkcaldy Grammar School.



George had built Adelaide House, an opulent property with extensive grounds, which evidences that a great deal had happened since the previous census. Given that Joanna Elder died in 1857 it makes sense

to assume that she died in this new abode which at the time would be classed as White's Causeway. Adelaide House, as the map shows, sat in the area which now encompasses the Town House and its square. After George's death in 1868 (at age of 84), Ellen continued to



live in the property until her own death in 1894 aged 89. The property then passed into the hands of the Methven family, of pottery fame, and was both refurbished and extended. In 1936 the house and grounds were purchased by Kirkcaldy Town Council to form part of the site for the new Town House. Given the intervention of the war it was not until the 1950s that the new civic headquarters were ready for occupation.

Along with Adelaide House its neighbour Tylehurst also suffered the same fate to ensure sufficient space was available to accommodate the new municipal buildings. In the 1950s the rear gardens of the two properties were incorporated into the new bus station. A road which we take for granted as being long standing was in fact only built at that time. This road joins Hunter Street to Whytescauseway also allowing entry and exit to the bus station. To allow its construction a third villa, St Olafs, which had become a children's home in 1946, was another victim.

What is surprising, or possibly not, is that the civic fathers sold the old Town House on the High Street – before they had secured a site for its replacement! Being in limbo, the Council had to meet in the Police Station for a lengthy spell.

The Elder family were certainly successful, on both an individual and family basis, with Adelaide House adequate testimony to that. The name of the property is a clue that South Australia was involved. The



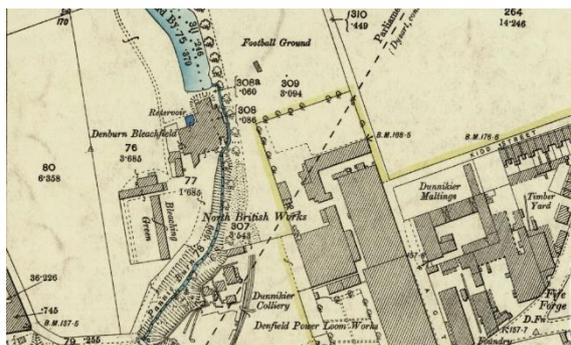
connection came from George who, with typical Scottish enterprise and foresight, wished to expand his business interests to include trading with Australia, or more precisely South Australia. This may seem a strange choice but the 'Wakefield' colonizing theorists advertised their experiment of building a new British Province and sought migrants from Scotland, painting a bright picture of the prospects.

More probably, friends of George from Leith (The Smillies) had settled and prospered in South Australia and advised George that there were unlimited opportunities in the colony. Mathew Smillie had secured a lease on 5,000 acres of land and his son, William, was

the immigration agent in the colony. They stressed the opportunity for great rewards for those who got in early.

A family conference decided that they would indeed undertake this long shot of establishing a business in South Australia, running it in conjunction with the existing Kirkcaldy based concern.

Alexander was the first to set out on the journey in July 1839, aged 24. Prior to that, he had been involved in the family firm with his principal responsibility being the running and management of the Pannie Bleachfield.

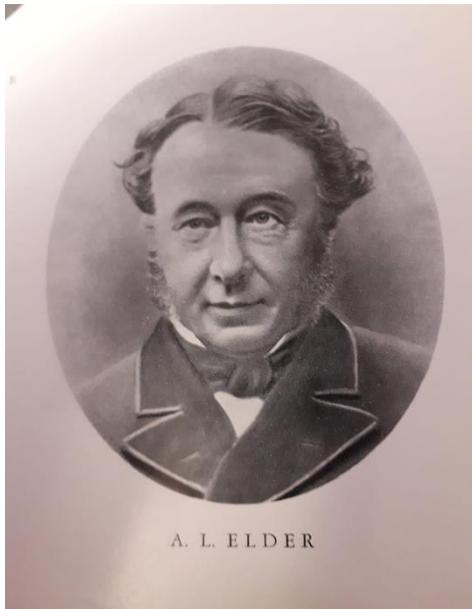


The voyage on his father’s ship *Minerva*, under Captain Reid, lasted for six months (6/7/39 – 02/01/40). The port in Adelaide was known, at the time, as the *Port of Misery*. The name stemmed from the atrocious conditions which met passengers on their arrival. Thomas Horton James wrote in his 1839 book “Six Months in South Australia” of ‘myriads of mosquitoes’ and “the eerie tangle of mangroves with black and viscous mud”.

The small schooner of under 100 tonnes carried a cargo of whiskey, rum, brandy, tar, biscuits, tin ware, gunpowder, seed, agricultural implements and 60,000 roof tiles. This enabled Alexander to almost immediately establish himself both as a merchant and a commission agent. To bring in money, he quickly organised the *Minerva* in regular trading between Adelaide and Launceston in Tasmania.

His infant business was named A.L.Elder. Initially, he traded from space given to him by an existing retailer (Flaxman & Rowlands) but

within months he had moved to his own premises in Hindley Street where he remained for a number of years.



Alexander survived a depression between 1841 and 1843 and thereafter extended his interests by purchasing pasture land and also becoming an agent for shipping companies and farmers.

When copper was discovered at close by Kapunda, in late 1842, he quickly established himself as a metal broker.

The discovery of copper saw South Australia shoot like a rocket into a period of unexpected great prosperity, taking the young Scot with it. Alexander prospered handsomely from his activities as a broker.

Copper had been discovered at Kapunda by Francis Dutton and Charles Baggot who were running sheep in the area. They kept their discovery secret until they were able to purchase the land and then commence production – initially exporting the ore to Swansea, but eventually smelting it locally. In 1846 Alexander, in partnership with Frederick Dutton (brother of Francis), took a lease over 20,000 acres of pasture at Mount Remarkable and here Alexander established his own stock brand of 'AE'.

Elders Ltd had expanded in many directions with both William and George Jnr having joined the firm and playing active roles. Activities included involvement in establishing a gasworks in Adelaide, quarrying guano deposits in the Spencer Gulf, and erecting an iron smelting furnace.

Along with these more industrial related undertakings, the firm expanded into commercial related projects such as; acting as agents for Lloyds of London, tendering to transport criminals to Tasmania, acting as agents to landed property owners, and also representing ship owners whose vessels had been seized.

Dwarfing all of these activities, and a precursor of what was to come, was the move into pastoral activities. Pastoral farming had arrived in South Australia in 1836. Australia has a climate which results in over 70% of its landmass being described as either semi-arid or arid. This makes arable farming nigh on impossible, but sheep and cattle can thrive. Pastoral farmers had a degree of ownership via their leases and therefore were more inclined to improve the land to enhance production. Australian pastoralists are sedentary and remain static as opposed to the more traditional nomadic lifestyle in other continents of constantly moving to seek fresh pastures.

So, how did this system come into being and operate? It was the brainchild of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. In 1831 Wakefield promoted a scheme to help populate the infant colony of South Australia. He firmly believed that many of the social problems in Britain were caused by overpopulation. He saw emigration to her colonies as one way to solve the problem and so set out to design a scheme aimed at producing a workable combination of labourers, artisans and financiers. The scheme would be financed by the sale of land to the capitalists, who would then support the other classes of emigrants through employment on their land.

Most assuredly, Alexander Lang Elder was such a capitalist. He already had his own stock brand as he and the firm moved into farming. He saw opportunities open in the granting of leases along with the opportunity to deal in and transport wool and cattle.

In Kirkcaldy, George Snr was active in the maritime activities in both the transportation of passengers and cargo to Adelaide. Adverts from the period between 1843 and 1847 demonstrate his involvement.

Clearly Alexander, in tandem with his business, was flourishing and he was elected in 1851 to the Legislative Council of South Australia representing West Adelaide. He constantly battled to have the whole of its Upper House elected rather than a high percentage of members nominated. Nominations allowed the British Governor-General to hold sway over final decisions. Alexander was determined that South Australia alone should have control of its future and legislative decisions.

Away from business Alexander became a Justice of the Peace, a director of the local savings bank, as well as of the Adelaide Auction Company. He was also a trustee and treasurer of the Church of Scotland in Adelaide.

The firm also became interested and involved in both mining and internal transport, having an eye on establishing faster transporting of copper and wool. Before leaving Australia, Alexander was involved in the inauguration of English–Australian mail and steamer services. As well as offering swifter transportation of goods and passengers, the gradual replacement of the sailing ship by the faster and more certain steam ship reduced the feeling of isolation from home.

The P & O shipping line set up in 1853 the England-Singapore-Australia route. The company made a trial run in 1852 and on the return journey the ship berthed in Adelaide. This was met with great excitement as it evidenced a steamer could be berthed in the harbour. The Crimean War led to the temporary halting of the route and when it was restarted Adelaide was no longer a port of call. The

area had to arrange alternative shipping to catch the monthly vessel at Albany – the nearest point a steamer docked at. Eventually the service was restored and Elders played a significant lobbying part. Elders became the Adelaide agents for P & O.

In 1847 Alexander had married Mary Eliza Austin, the daughter of a congregational minister. Mary had also emigrated to Australia having been born in Camberwell, Surrey. They went on to have fifteen children.

In 1853, having successfully seen the fledgling firm through its formative years, Alexander and Mary left Adelaide, eventually settling in London. He acted as the London agent for Elder & Co. for many years before establishing A.L. Elder & Co in 1884 along with two of his sons. The new firm traded principally with New Zealand where Elder owned land at Langdale near Masterton. Three of his sons eventually settled in the area.

His family as already mentioned numbered 15 and were born between 1848 and 1869. Three were born in Australia and eleven after returning to Britain. Another child was born on the barque “Alpha” on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1850 but sadly, while still at sea, died seven days later. In total three of the children predeceased their father who died on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1885 aged 70. Joanna, who was fifteen years younger, survived until the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1915.

One interesting find in relation to the children is that Adelaide Lashbrooke Elder was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1854 in Dysart! Given they had left Australia in 1853, is it safe to assume that they



returned “home” before heading for London? A search of parish records reveals that in December 1854 the four children were baptised in Leith South Church where their grandparents had been married forty-two years previously. This is simply an observation – no explanation can be offered. Given Joanna’s father was a minister in Adelaide, it is hard to believe they would not have been baptised.

One of the London properties in which the family resided was in Porchester Square, where several more of the children were born. The property itself is in a row of Victorian terraced houses, which are now entirely flatted. The final family home was ‘Campden House’ in Kensington where Alexander died. This property is again now flatted – with each being valued at 1.6 million pounds!

When Alexander died and news reached the colony, the *Adelaide Observer* noted:-

‘While he was in the colony he was highly esteemed and popular in all classes of society, as well for his lofty integrity which marked all the dealings of the firm as for the readiness with which he assisted all good causes, having as its object the advancement of the people.’

What this man achieved in fourteen years is nothing short of remarkable. He can only be regarded as a man of brains and resolution.



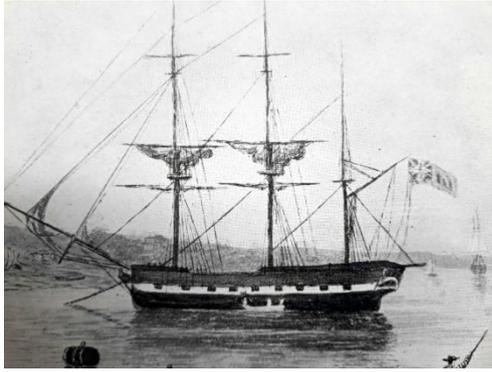
In the same year as Alexander had arrived in Australia (1840), his brother William had

brought 190 settlers to Adelaide on the “William Nicholl”. William had not joined the family firm but rather had chosen a career at sea. He had married a local girl – Ann Malcolm (a well-known Kirkcaldy maritime name). They had been married in the Old Kirk on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1841, by the Reverend John Alexander. William’s brother-in-law, Captain James Malcolm, in time became an agent with the firm.

The passengers singled out William as being a calm, courteous and excellent captain. All too often the discomfort of long voyages was aggravated by savage quarrels amongst the crew and sometimes by brutality of command against some passengers. None of these were present under William’s captaincy.

William had been involved in a dramatic incident in the winter of 1835/36 while serving on the whaler “Viewforth” from Kirkcaldy. Eleven ships including the “Viewforth” had been trapped by ice in the Davis Straits. One of the ships was lost (the Jane) and a number of sailors succumbed to the twin threats of cold and hunger. Miraculously, the ice broke and ten of the ships escaped. A journal of the event was maintained by William Elder in which he makes mention that six of “Viewforth” crew perished. The journal itself was presented to the Scott Polar Research Institute by Elder’s great niece Mrs Anne M. E. Jackson. Despite his experiences, William twice captained another Kirkcaldy whaler, “Regalia”.

The “Viewforth” appeared none the worse for the experience as, in June 1836, it was carrying 160 passengers from Cromarty to Quebec with William as captain. Given the Highland Clearances lasted from 1750 until around 1860 there is every possibility that this voyage was via the “assisted passage” scheme where landowners paid the cost of travel, ‘allowing’ their tenants to emigrate (for or against their wishes).

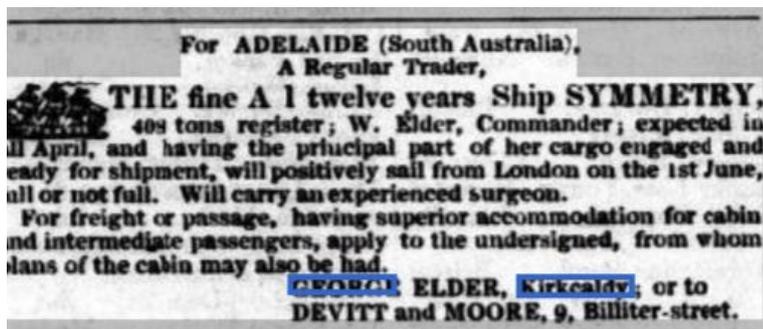


In 1844 William returned to Australia with his wife to join the family firm. He commanded the *Symmetry* and in her hold were two steam engines destined for local flour mills.

The ship was certainly quickly put to work and William had hardly arrived when he was gone again. *The Fife Herald* of the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1845 reports that Kirkcaldy will be cheering the news that Captain Elder and the *Symmetry* had arrived safely in London from Port Adelaide on the 12<sup>th</sup> May. The vessel had left Australia on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1844.

It was a notable voyage which attracted significant media attention (such as media was at the time). The reasons being, firstly, there were in total twenty cabin passengers who were all described as ‘colonialists’ “making the journey home to visit their native land”. The report describes that, prior to departure, the port resembled a gala day with friends, relatives and well-wishers, thronging the quay. Numbers were further swollen by 100 aborigines bidding farewell to three of their number who were also undertaking the voyage.

Secondly, this was believed to be the most valuable cargo to have, until then, left Port Adelaide. It included 1190 bales of wool, wheat, gum, whalebone, lead and



copper ore, bark, horns, and other miscellaneous items. Captain Elder, on leaving, “expressed the fervent hope, that all being well, he would return within the twelve months”. The newspaper wished him and the passengers a safe journey adding it hoped he would “return

with more emigrants” The *Symmetry* was also often found in shipping news trading between Port Adelaide and Yankalilla. Advertisements are shown offering passage to Adelaide from Leith by the *Symmetry* under Captain Elder. It would be comforting to know an experienced surgeon was on board!

William spent almost ten years principally, although not exclusively, captaining the firm’s trading ships before retiring and returning to



Scotland. He settled down at ‘St. Margaret’s’ in North Queensferry, which looks out on the ‘Hope’ or anchorage in the Firth. He spent over twenty years there, taking an interest in many aspects of local life. In particular, he took a great

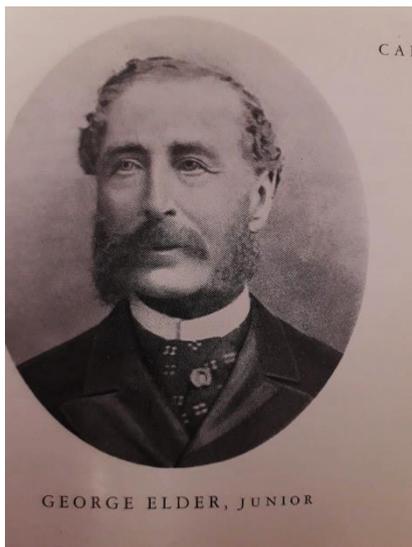
interest in the Volunteer Movement and was himself instrumental in the formation of the Inverkeithing Company, where he rose to the rank of captain. His efforts were rewarded by being promoted to the post of Lieutenant-Colonel of the Fife Artillery Brigade. He also, quite naturally, took an interest in the warships in the Forth. A strong free churchman he played a principal part in the building of the new church in North Queensferry.

In his later years he suffered from ill health and for the two years prior to his death spent the winter in Cannes in France. He had been about to return home, with his health having been restored, when he died unexpectedly.

Mrs Elder died at home aged 90 in December 1906 and, as they had no children, the property passed to William George Elder, the eldest son of Alexander. Shortly thereafter the house was sold to the

Admiralty as the home of the Commander of the new Royal Navy Base at Rosyth. The property was renamed Admiralty House and remained in the Navy's hands until the Navy left the base in 1996. It seems quite fitting that a man who spent most of his life at sea should ultimately have his home used for that purpose.

Mrs Elder's obituary mentioned that the estate was small but very tastefully laid out. Visitors were welcome to walk in and enjoy the grounds. Mention was made in the same article that the work and noise from the construction of the new dockyard was having an effect on the amenity. It was also reported that many prominent Australian visitors enjoyed her hospitality at St. Margaret's. (Fife Free Press, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1906).



With business booming, re-enforcements were required. Following Alexander and William's example, in 1845, third son George was the next to arrive and join the firm. His early working life had seen him sent to Glasgow to gain experience in the dye trade. George had then left for Canada where he prospered in business before making the long journey to Adelaide. In time, George became chairman of the firm when Alexander and William had both returned home. One of the most important aspects of his term in office was the building of the railway connecting Adelaide with Port Adelaide. He was chairman of the company carrying out the construction and he and his fellow directors were known as the "undertakers". The reason for this epithet was that, on one of the trial runs, an issue with the locomotive almost ended in disaster. The work itself was beset by labour problems due to workers suddenly leaving for Victoria where

gold had just been discovered. Wages had to be increased to retain and attract a workforce. The railway was finally completed in 1856.

His obituary in the *Fife Free Press* of the 24<sup>th</sup> July 1897 gave a wholesome account of the man who it appears was well liked and respected by all. George died in Largs where he had made his home on returning from Australia purchasing Knock Castle in 1858.



The property had been originally built for Robert Steele, a shipbuilder, from Greenock.

This supports the premise that George had done well for himself being able to cease working at an early age and then enjoy almost forty years of retiral. It was said that “he was suited to the life of a country gentleman and that he was ‘of fine presence, gracious and with polished manners, cultured mind, eloquent tongue and wide and liberal sympathies’”. George had also been deputy lieutenant of Ayrshire as well as a director of a number of companies. George was politically active with the Liberal Party in Ayrshire but, despite being asked several times, refused to put his name forward to stand for Parliament.

In keeping with the whole family he was a strong churchman and gave generously to the Free Church of Largs. He was one of the wealthy members who provided the necessary funds to; “extend, embellish and improve the church”. It is also reported that along with his brother Thomas an organ was gifted to the Church.

George was reported as being in “feeble health” prior to his death. He had suffered the blow of the loss of his wife the previous October and then his brother Thomas earlier in 1897.

His Will allowed for a number of legacies other than those of a family nature. The monies were not to go directly to the beneficiaries but were to be invested with the interest/dividends alone to be made over. £5000 was gifted to the Largs hospital, £1000 to the Burgh Commissioner of Largs for the winter relief of the poor of the town, £1000 to the poor of Largs as part of the donations from the Church congregation, £5000 towards supplementing the stipend of the minister of Largs Free Church and £1000 to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The funeral took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July. ‘While private, the funeral was attended by a considerable number of prominent gentlemen from the town and neighbourhood. As a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased, the shops along the route which the cortege had to pass from Knock Castle to the cemetery were closed’ (Fife Free Press 31<sup>st</sup> July 1897).

As an aside, the *Fife Free Press* of the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1897 carries an article headed “Our Australian Letter” – which appeared in the newspaper from time to time – with an intriguing address. The address is *Dunnikier House, South Terrace, Adelaide*. The writer is an A. Carmichael. This possibly/probably has to have been a Kirkcaldy individual and when time permits it would be interesting to follow up on the author. These were first published in May 1894 and over the next few years eight were published. The author would seem to be male, as they mentioned being involved in Western Australia’s gold rush. The only other clue so far is that a brother Laurence was also in Australia. The article carried the information that Sir Thomas had left

£10,000 in his Will to his only surviving brother. Poor George probably did not get the chance to receive the money, never mind spend it, dying only months after Thomas.

A fitting tribute is paid to George as chairman in Elder's centenary history:- "a resolute and able chairman who refused to depart from what he believed to be the correct course of action even at the behest of the government".



**Thomas Elder**

To date, we have seen Alexander arrive and establish the firm of A.L.Elder. Alexander was joined by William in 1844 and then by George in 1849. At that stage all three were working in tandem to expand the business until Alexander left for London in 1853. The company continued to trade under its original name. When William also

decided to return to Britain in 1854 – Thomas arrived to replace him that same year. This led to a reconstruction with George and Thomas as the sole partners in what was now Elder & Co.

The two oversaw solid progress with the activities becoming more multifarious. In particular, pastoral pioneering took on more importance and sites were looked at to build larger wool stores and also employ hydraulic presses to compress the wool bales. Better transport links were always uppermost in planning and a road was driven over a peninsula to allow a new jetty to be built.

However, George also decided that he wished to leave which he did in 1855.

This meant that only Thomas was left and he remained resident in Australia for the rest of his life. Until this point the business had only been in the hands of the Elder family. This now changed and for the first time saw the introduction of 'outsiders' in the ownership of the firm. The strengths which Thomas brought to both the firm and the state were that of being an exemplar of pastoral expansion, exploration and widespread philanthropy.

This reconstruction saw the birth of the firm Elder, Stirling & Co. In this venture Thomas was joined by; Edward Stirling, John Taylor and Robert Barr Smith. Stirling and Taylor were brothers-in-law and before too long the same could be said of Elder and Smith. In essence, there was very little change initially but some difficulties started to become apparent after a few years. Thomas had travelled by paddle steamer up the Murray River and had been impressed by the potential of the land. He impetuously bought large tracts. He also decided that as he considered the business to be in good hands he would arrange for a trip home – taking in Egypt and the Holy Land en route. It was here that he encountered working camels for the first time. This was something he did not forget and stored up for the future.

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN**, that the Partnership hitherto subsisting between the undersigned **GEORGE ELDER**, the Younger, **THOMAS ELDER**, and **ROBERT BARR SMITH**, under the style or firm of 'ELDER & Co.,' as General Merchants in South Australia, has this day been Dissolved so far as concerns the said **GEORGE ELDER**, the Younger. And **NOTICE IS ALSO HEREBY GIVEN**, that the Business of the said firm will be continued as heretofore by the said **THOMAS ELDER** and **ROBERT BARR SMITH**, in conjunction with the undersigned **EDWARD STIRLING** and **JOHN TAYLOR**, under the name, style, or firm of 'ELDER, STIRLING, & Co.,' to whom all monies due to the late firm are to be paid, and by whom all liabilities of the late firm will be discharged.

Dated this 31st day of July 1866.

**THO. ELDER.**  
**RO. B. SMITH.**  
**ED. STIRLING.**  
**J. TAYLOR.**

**GEORGE ELDER, Junr.**  
 Kirkcaldy, 2 Decr. 1866.

Witness to the Signatures of **THOMAS ELDER**, **ROBERT BARR SMITH**, **ED. STIRLING**, and **JOHN TAYLOR**,  
**ARTHUR HARDY**, Solr. & Notary Public, Adelaide, South Australia.

**DAVID PEARSON**, Writer, **Kirkcaldy**. Witness to the Signature of **GEORGE ELDER, Junior**.

**THO. JACKSON**, Writer, **Kirkcaldy**. Witness to the Signature of **GEORGE ELDER, Junior**.

Meantime, back in Adelaide, Stirling and Taylor, who were becoming very nervous over the potential liabilities which Thomas's land purchases could create, attempted to resign. Smith managed to forestall the resignations and travelled back to Scotland with his wife to sort matters out with Thomas - the new wife being none other than Joanna Elder – the sister of Thomas.

The upshot was that Stirling and Taylor left the firm with compensation of £32,639 and a year's profit. Today, that sum would be worth around 3.9 million pounds. Yet again, another reconstruction was required and Thomas and Robert, the only two partners, changed the name to Elder, Smith & Co. This business would successfully continue for the next 25 years. Thomas was imaginative, dynamic and entrepreneurial. Robert provided the steadiness as the "guiding genius with the sagacity of a financier and the judgement of a statesman".

In 1859 a risky venture had been undertaken by investing in the newly discovered copper at Wallaroo and Moonta. The discovery was on the land of William Watson Hughes who had come to South Australia from Pittenweem. The discovery required extensive and expensive exploratory work to be carried out before the rich seams could be reached. Elder and Stirling, as the financial backers, had at one point liabilities of £80,000 before the 'Wallaroo Mining and Smelting Company' became profitable. The associated Hunter River Copper Works also proved profitable.

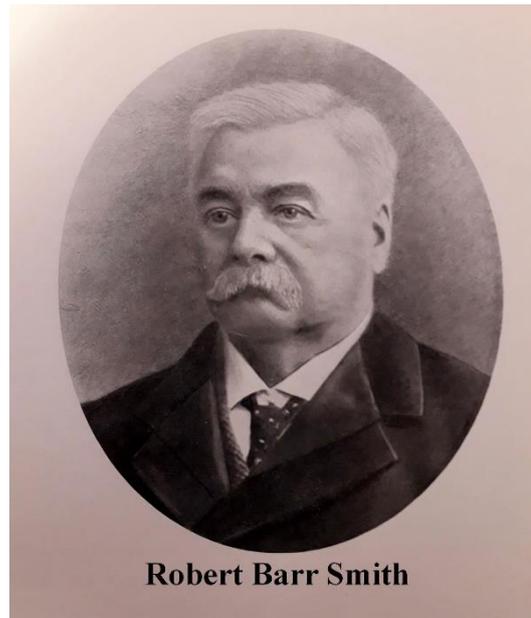
This venture resulted in enormous wealth for the partners and the colony. This, along with the tremendously successful Moonta mine, which exceeded the wealth of Wallaroo, allowed Thomas and Robert to expand their interests far and wide.

Their financial support saw that in 1877 these mines produced £500,000 of copper in what had been a bad year. In that year the export of their copper was one seventh of the total exports of the colony. In a good year it was estimated that this could be as high as one third. (Australian Sketcher, July 1878)

Thomas Elder and Robert Barr Smith invested much of their new wealth in extending the firms's interests in buying, settling and

stocking land on a vast scale. They even managed to extend into Western Australia and Queensland. Between the two, it was said that they owned land equivalent to the area of Scotland.

Surveying was an important part of the establishment of South Australia. Rainfall nearer the coast meant land could be used for arable farming. The hinterland was more arid and liable to drought and, until the land was surveyed to see if it could support



Robert Barr Smith

crops, short term leases were granted for '*squatters*' to herd cattle and sheep. By the end of the 1850s wool production was equal to wheat in terms of export value. *Squatters* occupied 24,000 acres of unsurveyed land at an average rental of one farthing.

Elder, ever the visionary, encouraged exploration and was keen to exploit newly discovered regions, at the same time expanding the firm's pastoral interests into the interior. This was not without risk as opening up vast areas for animals could see disasters in the shape of disease, fires, rabbits, dingoes and above all drought. As already mentioned, movement of the wool also presented problems in the shape of transportation. The only way isolated sheep stations could reach railway terminals was horse or bullock drawn carts.

The vast wealth of Elder, Smith & Co could, and did, support and sustain long term investments which would prove economical in the long term as against short-termism. Tens of thousands of pounds were spent on fencing their '*runs*', with a manager appointed to

each. The theory was that sheep would be turned loose in these paddocks which in reality did away with the need for shepherds.

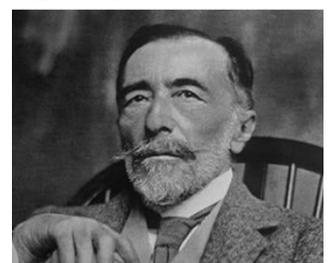
Machinery was imported, such as steam diggers, to create earthen dams and artesian wells in an effort to eliminate drought – if not completely, to a large extent. On top of that, their properties were so extensive that sheep could be moved to counteract drought. In time, the firm became one of the world's largest wool-sellers – never mind Australia.

The company also established subsidiary companies for some of their activities. Such an example was 'Elders Wool & Produce Co'. In time these companies merged with the parent company which, to better spread the financial risks, became a limited company – *Elder, Smith & Co. Ltd.* This 'new' version had multiple personal shareholders including many of the wider Elder family members. The decision was probably taken to help withstand the depression of the 1890s. The company was sufficiently stable to endure the difficulties and, in the succeeding good years, wool production expanded greatly – with Elders richly sharing in the benefits.

Another extremely important aspect of the firm was their shipping fleet whose numbers were further boosted by other ships which they owned jointly with other individuals or firms. One of the most famous was the 'Torrens' which was a full-rigged passenger clipper. It was built in Sunderland for the Australian trade. In 1870 it sailed from Plymouth to Adelaide in 64 days – a record for a sailing ship. Turning to the succession of sail by steam, Elder and Barr Smith were the founding directors of the Adelaide Steamship Company in 1875.

At one point the novelist, Joseph Conrad, was first mate on the *Torrens* which is mentioned in his novel

Joseph Conrad



‘Chance’. On his final voyage he met fellow novelist, John Galsworthy, and they became life-long friends.

Elder, Smith & Co Ltd now had a board of directors and Thomas and Robert were no longer the sole owners. However, Robert was elected as the first chairman. In 1883 Robert resigned as chairman and was replaced by Peter Waite, one of the board members. Waite had been born in Kirkcaldy before emigrating to South Australia, aged 25. He was a completely different figure to Elder and Smith as he had ‘hands on’ experience having spent many years in the dry north part of the state and had experienced firsthand the problems of occupying vast semi-arid areas. He had earlier experience of long range sheep station management and knew the value of sinking wells and making dams to alleviate drought. It is estimated that between 1871 and 1872 he imported some 250 tons of fencing wire from Britain.

Robert’s resignation had been necessitated by Alexander Lang Elder having, as previously mentioned, resigning as the London agent to start a business with his sons.

As the dusk starts to fall on the exploits of the four brothers and with the ownership of the firm in corporate hands, Thomas retired in 1883. We can now look at Thomas Elder’s legacy. The State certainly prospered through many of their activities and a huge business still operating today is a monument to their endeavours. Without having been mentioned so far, make no mistake, the Elder brothers also achieved wealth which could hardly have been imagined when the undertaking began in 1839.

Thomas Elder has an impressive legacy in both his lifetime and by the legacies provided in his Will. Possibly his support of exploration, which allowed the opening up and understanding of much of

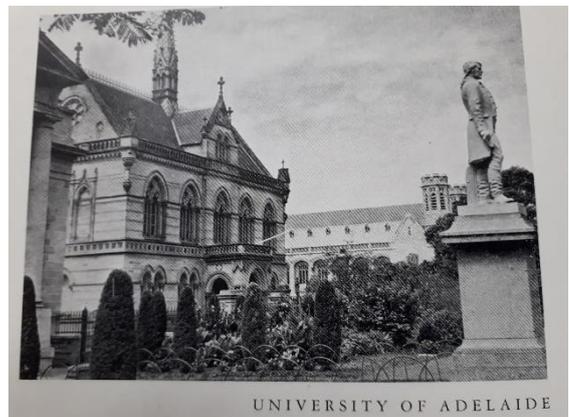
unchartered Australia, is his greatest achievement. Thomas had always had a thirst for travel and was an energetic, adventurous traveller and enjoyed visiting many countries. He knew that Australia still had large tracts of territory unexplored and unmapped. Thomas wished to lift the veil from the mystery of the great desert which lay between the boundaries of the settlements in South and Western Australia.

Elder, either wholly or partly, financed a number of expeditions in the 1870s which opened up the north of South Australia to the coast of Western Australia. John McDouall Stuart had been financed by two men who had also made fortunes from copper – James Chambers and William Finke. Stuart's great journey, which crossed the continent from south to north, started at Chamber's house in North Adelaide. Elder carried on that tradition of private sponsorship of exploration. In 1862, Elder purchased and imported 124 camels from India. He also brought out 31 Afghan cameleers. Although not the first to introduce them into the country, he was the first to do so effectively. The camels he imported were eventually moved to a breeding station which Elder had built at Beltana – north of Adelaide. His camels were exported to Queensland, New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Much more beneficial in arid and desert conditions they were used extensively in exploration, with Beltana often being a starting point. They also proved their worth as pack and wagon animals. The camels had a part to play in the completion of the overland telegraph line which ran from the north to the south of the continent. His intentions were certainly achieved, as three expeditions found their way to the West Australian coast. It may be wrong to suggest that the support of exploration was only in the interests of scientific advancement.

Doubtless, an eye would be kept open for opportunities for pastoral pioneering advancement.

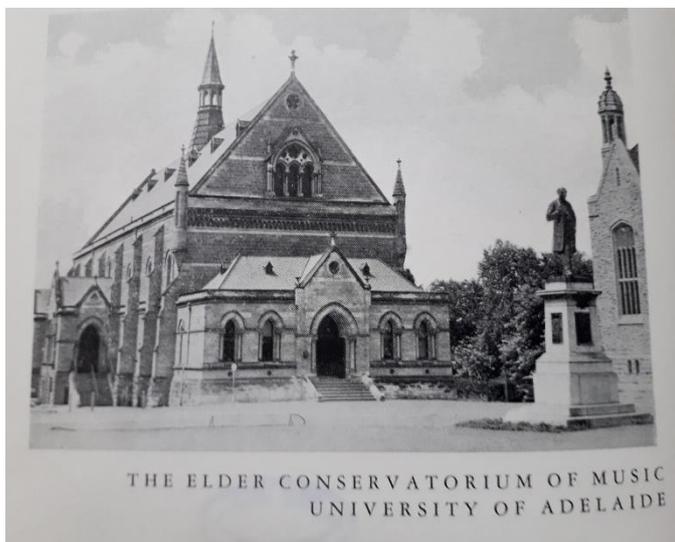
The "City of Adelaide" Port Adelaide's steam lifeboat was built in 1894 by R & H Green, Blackwall, London. The cost was met in full by Sir Thomas Elder. She was stationed at Beechport for many years till converted into a fishing boat.

In the field of education Thomas Elder played a major part in the founding of Adelaide University. Walter Watson Hughes had gifted £20,000 as an initial donation towards its foundation. In 1874, after the passing of the act incorporating its establishment, Thomas Elder added another £20,000. Hughes had selected chairs in literature and the humanities, with Elder favouring science and mathematics.



Elder also presented annual prizes for Practical Physiology. In 1883, at the time of his retiral, he gifted £10,000 for the establishment of a Chair in the Medical Faculty.

From this beginning, The Adelaide School of Medicine evolved. His Will bequeathed a further £65,000 to the University. The terms apportioned £20,000 to the School of Medicine, £20,000 to the School of Music and the remaining £25,000 for the authority itself to determine its use.



This bequest, which in 2021, equates to almost six million

pounds. The £65,000 made possible the building of the Elder Conservatoire of Music (completed 1900) and also the Anatomy School (completed 1902) The Elder Hall where many of the important University events took place is named after their great benefactor. A statue to Thomas Elder, in the University Grounds also perpetuates his memory. A grant of £300 per annum was also established, to run for a five year period, with the intention of assisting in establishing the Conservatoire plus founding a scholarship at the Royal College of Music in London for South Australian Students.

Adelaide University was not alone in benefiting from the terms of his testamentary disposition. He gave or left:-

£10,000 to Presbyterian churches, alongside, £4,000 to the Anglican St. Peter's Cathedral.

In education Prince Alfred College received £4,000 and the Way College £2,000

£25,000 for the foundation of Working Men's Homes with a further £10,000 to hospitals and other charitable organisations

£20,000 was bequeathed to the National Art Gallery for the purchase of pictures. He supported the Zoological Gardens during his lifetime and left £2,000 in his Will.



Thomas was a foundation member of the Royal Geographical Society, a member of its Council as well as a generous donor. He left £2,000 to boost its funds.

To give a little perspective, a £300 gift now equates to £27,000 and a £2000 gift reaches £180,000. The terms of the Will show money used wisely to assist many charities and institutions whose aim is help those less fortunate. Among st a raft of deserving causes are –

Bernardo's Home in London, Strangers' Friend charity in Adelaide, The Children's Hospital and also the Children's Convalescent Hospital in Adelaide, The Adelaide Home for Incurables and the Seamen's Home in Port Adelaide.

Sir Thomas owned two houses at his death. Birksgate and its possessions was bequeathed to his erstwhile partner and brother-in-law, Robert Barr Smith. The Pinnacles where he died was left to his niece, Mabel Barr Smith.

The residue of the Estate was split into fifths, with one share to the children of his sister Jemima Alison or Patrick, two fifths to the children of his late brother Alexander and finally two fifths to the children of his sister Joanna Barr Smith.

Birksgate, which he bought first, saw his constructing a gas plant for lighting, making wine from his own grapes, growing bananas and establishing a private zoo in the grounds.

Coming from a seafaring family, it is not surprising, that he was the owner of a number of racing yachts. Thomas had a tower constructed in his garden – this allowed him to signal to his yachts from the comfort of his home!

In 1885 he built The Pinnacle on Mount Lofty. This was and may still be one of the most prestigious addresses in South Australia. The properties on Summit Road mainly consisted of the summer homes of some of the most distinguished figures in the area. Reflecting his heritage, the property was built in Scottish baronial style. The name was later changed to Carminow.

Thomas was also very interested in horse racing, with his own stables and for ten years his jockey's, in their tartan silks, were a familiar sight on the tracks. On the death of his trainer, he sold his racing horses preferring to breed horses on his stud farm.

Thomas Elder also found time to serve in the State's Legislative Assembly twice – from 1853 -1868 and 1871-1878.

Knighthood in 1887 for services to exploration and education, Sir Thomas passed away on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1897 at noon from influenza. "His body was taken from The Pinnacles to Birksgate and on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup> he was buried in Mitcham Cemetery at the top of the hill in the old section. His grave is the tallest and most imposing in the section and he lies close to Robert and Joanna Barr Smith. The cortege was of great length and Sir Thomas was lauded by all classes of society". (Archives of the University of Adelaide)

The last words on this great businessman, philanthropist and recipient of a Kirkcaldy Street named after him, should be left to himself. They come from an 1878 speech, given by Elder, to a Working Man's Organisation in England :-

*Wealth is a great gift, but it is not a blessing in itself. Its potency for evil is quite equal to that of the good it may bring. Wealth all powerful as it is cannot of itself make a gentleman, and frequently serves but to bring out in high relief faults in a person's nature which might have remained unsuspected but for the glare of his ostentation. This class is a natural growth of young colonies, where in the eagerness of the race after riches, the means of enjoying them when attained are overlooked, and their power for good is missed. But time throws the light of experience on the fallacies of the past, and men find that the grand edifice their wealth has built up for them lacks its chief good – the substantial foundation of culture and education.*

We reach the end of our narrative on George Snr. and his four sons together with their contribution to the advancement of South Australia. Yes – their wealth and philanthropy did not reach the "Lang Toun" – but surely we can celebrate the reflected glory of their endeavours on Kirkcaldy.

In football parlance – "The boy's done good"

## The Elder Ladies

It would be wrong to complete this narrative without also looking at George's three daughters.

In terms of Australia, *Joanna*, the youngest, was the most involved. Robert Barr Smith was born in Lochwinnoch in 1824 and was a son of the manse. His father was a minister in the established church but, like so many others in 1843 at the disruption, he followed his conscience and gave up a comfortable living. He became part of the new Free Church of Scotland, but at times the family was close to destitution. Robert enrolled and studied at the University of Glasgow before emigrating firstly to Melbourne and then on to Adelaide. He had emigrated in 1854 along with Thomas Elder sailing on the *Queen of the South*. It appears that Barr Smith's sister was friendly with Joanna Elder and he wrote to her from Melbourne asking for her hand. She was 18 at the time and initially refused but, two years later, at the age of 21, she sailed, in the care of the ship's captain, to Melbourne to marry Robert in 1856.

Between 1857 and 1879 the couple had 13 children, but sadly six died during childhood. Those who reached adulthood were; George, Tom, Robert, Erlistoun, Mabel, Jean and Joanna.

Joanna had a long life dying at age 84 in Adelaide. Joanna's obituary in *The Adelaide* of the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1919 tells us further sad tidings in the shape that George, Robert and Erlistoun, had all predeceased their mother.

Robert Barr Smith and his business and financial acumen had been the driving force behind the rapid and spectacular growth of



Elder, Smith & Co in tandem with Thomas who was more the visionary in the firm's activities. It had made them wealthy men but both were extraordinarily philanthropic. The obituary mentioned above paid a glowing tribute to Joanna and certainly suggested that she was also very liberal towards deserving individuals and institutions. Joanna was by this account "an intelligent and witty woman who took a deep interest in political, social and industrial matters. She was also kind and would often dispense gifts and money to the poor and distressed".

Interestingly, the obituary reports "that she was friendly with people from all social classes, even with Hallam, The Lord Tennyson, and his wife Lady Audrey, despite her reservations over royalty (she described herself as having socialist leanings)." Hallam himself was not royalty, but as Governor-General of Australia he would be appointed by the Monarch. He had previously been Governor of South Australia between 1899 and the end of 1902.

In keeping with all her siblings Joanna was a strongly religious individual and this is reflected in her gifts and legacies. Joanna was a member and monetary supporter of the established church, but was however happy to assist her catholic friend, Mary MacKillop, financially with the establishment of the Josephite Convent in Mitcham and also her home for unwed mothers and women in distress. Astonishingly she, along with her husband and children, was prepared to make the journey back to Britain no less than six times.

The same obituary pays a glowing tribute to her in writing that "she was a sister of Sir Thomas Elder and emulated both her brother and her husband in their liberality and public spiritedness. By innumerable acts, of which by far the greater proportion never

became known generally, Mrs Barr Smith brought happiness to other people and found her reward in realising that she had done so.”

The above is a very fine tribute to Joanna who lies in Mitcham Cemetery alongside her husband. The grave is close to that of Sir Thomas but, in keeping with Robert’s background and philosophy, the headstone is far less ostentatious.

The philanthropy of Robert Barr Smith is the stuff of legend in South Australian especially in the fields of religion and education. On his death his Australian estate was valued at 1.8 million pounds. Such was his dislike of the glare of publicity that the only tangible memorial to his name is the Barr Smith Library at the University of Adelaide. Even then, the only memorial was built after his death, named and funded by his family.

Every report and article tells of the devotion of Robert and Joanna to each other. It is said that each day, when he was at home, he would pick a posy of flowers from the garden presenting them to her at the breakfast table.

*Elizabeth*, the middle daughter’s life is in many ways a sad story. Elizabeth was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 1825. She married the Reverend John Alexander in 1853. The bridegroom would be 50 at the time, with his wife then aged 28. Alexander is himself an important figure in the religious history of the town. He was born in Lochwinnoch – the same town as



Robert Barr Smith. Alexander came late to the ministry, commencing working life as a mason. He then entered Glasgow College and subsequently held posts in churches in both Dumfries and Ayr. In 1838 he answered a call from Kirkcaldy’s Old Kirk to be

their minister. In 1843, just as Barr Smith's father had done at the time of the Disruption, he left the Church, taking a considerable number of the congregation with him. He became the first minister of the Free Church in Tolbooth Street, but did not live long enough to see the move to St. Brycedale.



The wedding took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1853 and the ceremony was conducted by Dr Candlish. The couple had one child – a daughter - Joanna Haddo Lang Elder. This is almost as far as any happy element to this part of the story goes.

In March 1858 Elizabeth died from consumption aged only 33. Five years later, on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1863, we find John also passing away aged 60. The reports of his death tell us that he had been ill for some time and was all but fully incapacitated. His condition was so severe that a second minister had to be appointed to shoulder the bulk of the duties. John was then classed as the 'Senior Pastor'.



Young Joanna, who was only 7 at the time, goes to live with Ellen at Adelaide House. Both are shown on the 1871 census and Joanna is now aged 14. However on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1878, we find the young lady being married in Adelaide House.

Joanna's husband is the Reverend James Stalker who is now the minister of her father's old charge. Most assuredly, James gave his bride-to-be an unexpected wedding gift. He became involved in a heated argument with the Dunfermline branch of the Fife and Clackmannan Miners Assoc. James had taken umbrage at the behaviour of some of the miners during a Monday excursion to

Kirkcaldy. The result was a strong and sharp exchange of views through the columns of various newspapers. He was in fact publicly censured, in print, by the miner's executive for what were termed uncharitable and unchristian words from the pulpit. That said, he gave as good as he got! (Fife Herald 4<sup>th</sup> July 1878)

The congregation presented the young couple with a purse containing 100 sovereigns and a very handsome marble black and gold mantel timepiece. It carried the inscription: - "Presented, along with one hundred sovereigns, to the Rev. James Stalker, M.A., Kirkcaldy Free Church, by the members of his congregation, on the occasion of his marriage. July, 1878."

Sadly, on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1880, Joanna died in the Free Church Manse from tubercular disease of the abdomen. She is only 23!

James Stalker continued as minister of Tolbooth Street and then St. Brycedale until 1887 when he left for Glasgow. He remarried a year later to Charlotte Melville and the couple had five children. He never quite recovered from the loss of his eldest son at Gallipoli and then the death of his second wife a few years later. He died in Florence in 1927. Dr Stalker had risen to great heights in the Free Church, although only occupying two pulpits – Kirkcaldy and Glasgow.

It is sad and disappointing that many of the printed obituaries, including the local press, failed to mention Joanna, an orphan at age seven and dead at 23.

There is failure and then there is partial failure. Jemima Elder, the eldest daughter, was born in Kirkcaldy on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 1821. She married James Alison, a merchant from Leith, on the 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1840. The minister was John Alexander, who in time, became her brother-in-law.

The Will of Sir Thomas Elder is clear in stating that the residue of his Estate be split amongst the children of his late brother Alexander, and those of his sisters, Jemima and Joanna. The adjective 'late' is not used in relation to the sisters, therefore the assumption is that they were both alive in 1897. Matters are further complicated by the Will indicating that Jemima was named as Alison or Patrick. Research has unearthed the birth of three Alison children - Joanna (28/5/1841), Jemima (18/10/1842) and Isabella (28/8/1844). A marriage in Largs took place between a Robert Patrick and a Jane Elder on the 6th June 1846. If this is Jemima and it is a big if - what has happened to Mr Alison and when? To date, efforts to establish what life brought Jemima and where it was played out have failed to answer the question. Research continues - all that is needed is time and luck.

There seems only one way to bring this narrative to an end and that is largely thanks to Jemima. A vain attempt to locate her resulted in a very appropriate concluding find. It transpires that a Mrs Simpson from Ramsay Road had loaned to Kirkcaldy Museum four large bibles and other devotional books which had once belonged to the Elder family of Adelaide House. In the blank pages between the Old and New Testaments the names and dates of birth of the children are noted. Given religion was such an important aspect of all their lives it seemed a fitting way to end.

THE **ELDER** FAMILY—RELICS IN MUSEUM.—  
 Mrs Simpson, Ramsay Road, has kindly lent to  
 the **Kirkcaldy** Museum in the Pet Marjorie  
 House 4 large Bibles and other devotional  
 books, once the property of the **Elder** family of  
 Adelaide House. The blank page between the  
 Old and New Testaments contains the following  
 family register:—

George **Elder** and Joanna Laing,  
 married 4th June, 1812.

William <b>Elder</b>	born at Kirkcaldy,	25 Mar. 1813.
Alexander Laing <b>Elder</b>	do., do.,	18 Apr. 1815.
George <b>Elder</b> ,	do., do.,	17 Nov. 1816.
Thomas <b>Elder</b> ,	do., do.,	15 Aug. 1818.
<b>Jemima</b> <b>Elder</b> ,	do., do.,	17 Feb. 1821.
Elizabeth <b>Elder</b> ,	do., do.,	19 Jan. 1825.
Joanna <b>Elder</b> ,	do., do.,	11 Oct. 1835.