



Marjorie Fleming 1803 – 1811

Gone but remembered,
or gone but forgotten?



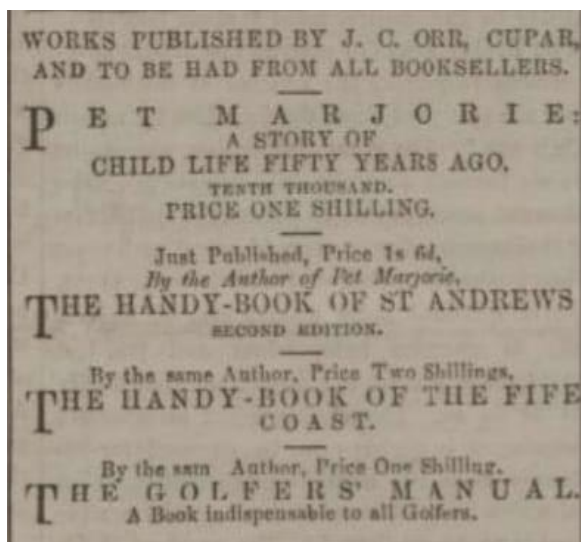
When this narrative was in its planning infancy a conscious decision was taken to avoid the previous, conventional, and well trodden, path of writings on Marjorie. Nothing is to be gained by re-working previous excellent publications and repeating their contents and context, simply by using different words. There are several excellent books on the life of this little girl still in print. These offer both the story and the complete collection of her writings. In addition, in this digital age, the National Library of Scotland has a wonderful collection of material which can be viewed at leisure from the comfort of the reader's home. The N.L.S. collection adds a fresh dimension to Marjorie's story. The reader is not simply looking at bland words but at poems, letters and journals, in her own handwriting, from over 200 years ago. Searching for and studying this unique collection is warmly commended as they unquestionably breathe life into the story.

The intention of this narrative is to examine her short life and her legacy, stripped of the epistles, diaries and journals. It is about Marjorie herself – the person. What effect did she have on those who knew her? What legacy has she left? How

important is/was Marjorie in the world of literature? Where are her journals now? How strong was her friendship with Sir Walter Scott? How much interest was there in Marjorie Fleming and how did it manifest itself? How has the “Lang Toun” remembered her? Does more need to be done to keep her story alive in Kirkcaldy for another 200 years?

And so, on to the story:-

Henry Broughton Farnie was born in Burntisland in 1836. He won a scholarship to Cambridge University, but returned to Fife in 1857 as Editor of the *Fife Herald, Kinross, Strathearn and Clackmannan Advertiser*. While in this post, Farnie wrote and published three books. These were “Flora of St. Andrews”, “City of St. Rule”, and “The Golfers Manual”. The



latter is believed to be the first instruction manual on playing golf and it was written under the pseudonym, “Keen Hand”. He left this post to go to London, initially to progress his journalistic career as Editor of a new music publication

“The Orchestra”.

However, music itself soon called and by the 1870s had become one of the best known British librettists and

adaptors of French Operettas. In time, he came to be considered one of the finest and, possibly, closest to matching the peerless works of Gilbert and Sullivan.

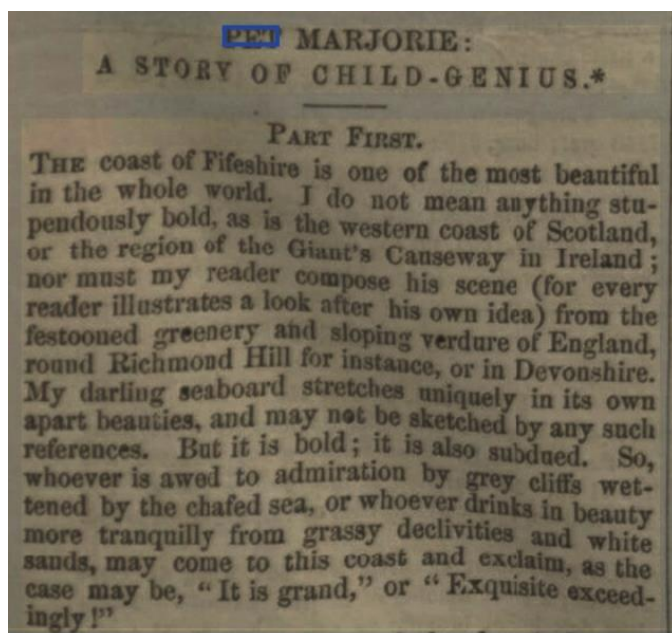
Dr. John Brown, FRSE., FRCPE., was born in Edinburgh on the 22nd September 1810. He was an eminent Scottish physician and essayist. He had a wide circle of major literary figures as friends, including Thackeray and Mark Twain. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. He wrote regularly for the "*Scotsman*" on a range of subjects which were eventually published in three volumes. He was a greatly admired man and, after his death in 1882, his son "Jock" worked tirelessly



with the intention of creating a tribute to his father. He collected his father's letters, writings and papers, eventually publishing a biography in 1907. He also succeeded in having a plaque placed on his father's house at 23 Rutland Street, Edinburgh, which remains in place to this day. In 1923, a memorial plaque to Dr. Brown was unveiled in the south west corner of St. Giles Cathedral. It was sculpted by R. Pilkington Jackson.



So why does a story relating to Marjorie Fleming commence with Henry B. Farnie and Dr John Brown? The answer is straightforward, in that Farnie was the first to write and publish an account of her life, supplemented by extracts from her journals. Astonishingly, for almost fifty years after her death, the journals and letters of “the child genius” had remained unpublished, eventually resting in the hands of Marjorie’s younger sister Elizabeth. Farnie secured access to the material, serialising his work in the *Fife Herald* over 6



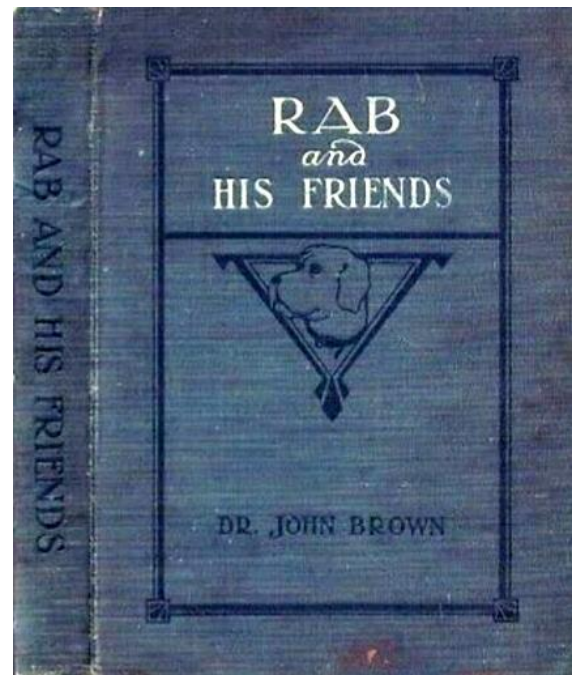
consecutive weeks. The story was printed in editions from the 15th October 1857 through to the 19th November. It was then published in booklet/ pamphlet form entitled “*Pet Marjorie*”. An important point, meriting a mention, is

that this was the first time the epithet “Pet” was used. While selling well locally, the story did not travel far afield from the Cupar locality and made no national headlines.

This is where Dr John Brown joins the story. Having obtained a copy of Farnie’s pamphlet from a friend, he was intrigued by the story. He also secured access to the journals. His resultant work appeared in 1863, again both in newsprint via the *North British Review* and in booklet form shortly

thereafter. Eventually, it was published in book form under the title of “Pet Marjorie – A story of Child Life 50 years Ago”. This book sold well and continued to be both published and re-printed long after Brown’s death.

There is no argument that it was a longer and fuller piece, augmented by quotations from Marjorie’s poetry and journal entries. Brown had already had some literary success, especially through a short story – “Rab and his Friends”. Set in 1830’s Edinburgh it was the story of a dog and his owners. It was a “tear jerker” – including both the death of the dog and a lady’s death from cancer. A best selling story in the 19th century – Brown certainly knew how to write an emotional tale.



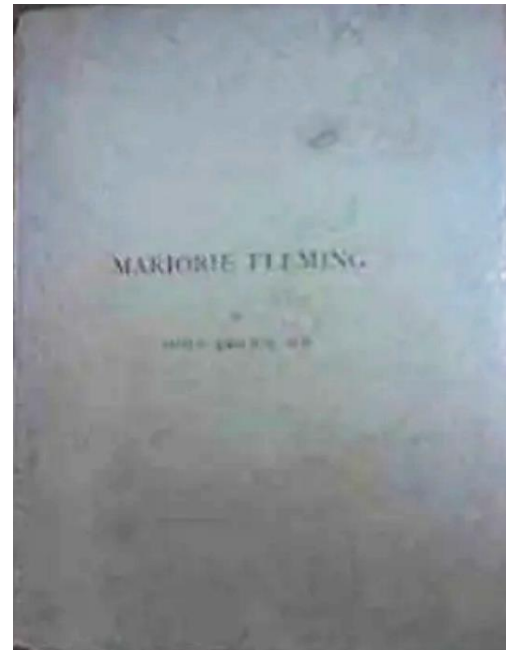
Rather than both authors embracing and enhancing Marjorie’s story, they appear to have become embroiled in unpleasantness:-

An article in the *London Sun* on Monday, the 21st December 1863, makes mention of the perceived issue:-

“It seems strange indeed that the fact of her existence should so long have remained hidden, more particularly seeing that the extraordinary powers of Pet Marjorie were familiarly known to, were fully appreciated by, and were

actually the boast of a wonderful man of genius like Sir Walter Scott. Such however is simply the fact, whether that fact may or may not be accounted for. We should probably have remained in ignorance of the whole story about little Marjorie Fleming but for that kindly Dr. John Brown. When we have said this, it must be observed also that Dr. Brown would not apparently have said anything whatsoever upon the subject but for the happy thought and the genial industry of Mr. H.B. Farnie. Mr Farnie was the first to hunt up all the particulars that could be obtained in regard to the little girl, long since dead and gone on that sorrowful 19th of December 1811. Five years ago Mr Farnie got all these particulars together and in 1857 published in the columns of the *Fife Herald* the story of "Pet Marjorie." Beyond the readers of that local journal however, the touching beautiful little story remained altogether unknown – until, in a happy moment, Dr Brown took it in hand. Those who have read works such as "*Rab and his Friends*" may readily understand that Dr. John Brown can take in hand a narrative such as that of the life and death of the Child Genius. Out of the issue of the publication of these miniature pamphlets, we grieve to see there has sprung up a horrid little angry altercation. With this squabble, we will have nothing whatsoever to say or do. We can only regret it. We would merely refer to it as something unseemly and out of place when reminiscing over the wee grave of Pet Marjorie! We can only say, at least before passing on, that Mr. Farnie has a distinct right to

priority, as having spoken out in regard to little Marjorie through the *Fife Herald* five long years before Dr Brown spoke out through the *North British Review*. Yet, Mr Farnie should also remember that his prior narrative remained in a manner invisible to the world at large until the luminous pen of Dr Brown shed these sunny rays of light upon it. The story of “*Pet Marjorie*”, published



in 1857, we only know about now in 1863 through Dr Brown’s charming re-write of it using different words and then initially having been printed in the *North British Review* and subsequently as a pamphlet”.

Irrespective of the fact that Farnie was first to publish, we have three small, but seemingly conclusive proofs, that it was Brown who made the “splash” of bringing Marjorie to a much wider audience.

Firstly, we can look at an advert contained in the *Illustrated London News* on the 6th February 1864. We find in the “New Music” column an advertisement for the music and words of a new ballad by F. Lablanche, described as “a touching

PET MARJORIE. Ballad. By F. LABLACHE. 3s. (Illustrated.) Founded on Mr. H. F. Farnie's popular story of the same name. A simple, touching melody united to appropriate words. CRAMER, WOOD, and Co., 201, Regent-street.

melody, united to appropriate words, based on H.B. Farnie’s story of

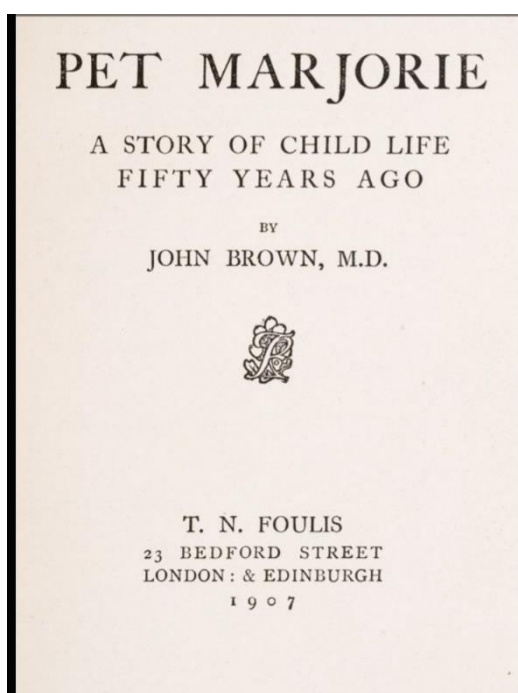
Marjorie”. As Farnie was now in London the question is, was

he behind the song? Without Brown bringing Marjorie's story to the wider world, would a song have been contemplated or considered?

Did he therefore use Marjorie's newfound "fame", created by Brown's efforts, to advertise his own writings from five years earlier? The answer as we see below was certainly yes!

Secondly, Farnie produced a reprint of his own work, following hot on the heels of Brown's success. This fact he acknowledged in the preface to his second edition with "Any further success of this book is due to the article/review written by the distinguished author of *"Rab and his Friends"* (John Brown) in the *North British Review*". We will see later that this reprint led to more ill feeling, not less.

Thirdly, as an illustration of the effect of Brown's writings, we can look as far afield as the Gloucestershire Chronicle of the 12th December 1863:-



"According to the *Scotsman* of last Saturday, the remarkable narrative entitled "Pet Marjorie" which appeared in the last issue of the *North British Review*, from the pen of Dr. John Brown, had attracted the notice of Her Majesty the Queen who commanded a copy of the little work, with the same title and containing the same materials from whence the

article was derived, to be forwarded to her.”

Before we leave the ‘spat’ between Farnie and Brown, we can enlighten readers that it was still going strong in July 1899, even after their deaths! Pens had again been lifted by readers of *The Scotsman* and a raft of correspondence supported one author or the other. It had been ignited by an article appearing in “The Queen” by a Drew Roberts entitled – “A Child’s Life Ninety Years Ago”. This article was apparently almost a straight lift from Brown’s book with no acknowledgements given. Some felt it served Brown right – others, that Brown was an innocent party and it was Farnie who had copied his material in his second edition. Past material was dredged up and articles, which had been published in *The Scotsman* in July 1881, were resurrected and these brought the arguments to a conclusion. These 1881 exchanges appear to have been as a result of the publication of Miss Elizabeth Fleming’s obituary, with Farnie seeking a correction to some

A CORRECTION.
Strand Theatre, W.C., July 8, 1881.
SIR,—Allow me space for a slight correction. The memoir of the late Miss Fleming’s sister, originally published at Cupar Fife, under the title of “Pet Marjorie,” was written, not by Dr John Brown, but by yours, &c.
H. B. FARNIE,
Member Dramatic Authors’ Society.

THE LATE MISS FLEMING.—By the death of Miss Fleming, recorded in our obituary of to-day, a link connecting the present with the past life of Edinburgh has been severed. Elizabeth Fleming was the daughter of James Fleming, of Kirkcaldy, and Isabella Rae. Her mother was the youngest daughter of James Rae, the father of surgical teaching in Scotland, and Isabella Cant, of the house of Thurston and Giles’ Grange. Mr Rae’s second daughter married Keith of Ravelston, and at her house Sir Walter Scott, a great friend of the family, was in the habit of almost daily meeting Miss Fleming, and her sister Marjorie, or “Maidie,” as he always called the latter, was an especial pet of Sir Walter’s up to the time of her early death. Her little tale was very beautifully told a few years ago by Dr John Brown, under the title of “Pet Marjorie.” The deceased lady, who has for the last two years been in declining health, resided principally in Kirkcaldy until about five years ago, when she took up her abode in Edinburgh.

of the article’s content. In fact what he received through the Reader’s Letters Columns, was a strong rebuke and a charge of plagiarism. It certainly does appear that Farnie had reworked his original pamphlet

and included much of Brown’s fresh material into this second

edition – much to Brown’s annoyance! Brown’s own second edition carried an editorial note above his initials – “this second publication of this sketch has been forced upon me by the somewhat free use made of it in a second and enlarged edition of the book from which I gained my introduction to Marjorie Fleming – but nothing more – a use so exceedingly free as to extend to almost everything that I had derived from the letters and journals of that dear child”. His annoyance is highlighted by the next sentence – “to be called ‘kind and genial’ by the individual who devised this little act of conveyancing has altogether failed to console me”.

As we move on to the short life of Marjorie her story, as narrated by Farnie and Brown, was later supplemented by Lachlan MacBean’s 1904 work. Farnie and Brown had both independently interviewed Marjorie’s sister Elizabeth in their quest, whilst MacBean had



spoken to her nephew – James F. Bremner. Lachlan MacBean was for many years a well known figure in Kirkcaldy, mainly as the Editor of the *Fifeshire Advertiser*. He was born in Kiltarlity, Inverness-shire, on the 6th November 1853. He died in Kirkcaldy on the 24th January 1931. His main interests, besides journalism, were the Gaelic language

and its hymns. He wrote many books on these subjects as well as others with a local interest.

The reader does not have to go too deeply into Farnie's initial work to realise that there is a wordsmith and craftsman of the language at work. His setting of the scene in his first part of the serialisation is both touching and poignant:-

"The winter of 1811 was wintry indeed. Everything was hard and white – white and hard. Most particularly, I refer to the 19th December at nightfall. The darkness closed around empty streets, apparently without light or life. These were not the days of the gas-lighted splendours of palatial shop-windows. Nor were there lamps in the street; nor a solitary watchman. Both of these protections for any belated wayfarer were yet in the future. There was not even the dim halo of a candle traceable through a window-bole, for each canny townsman had hermetically closed up every possible chink against the bleak Decembral influence. If bidden guests were abroad that night in search of their festive bourne, then they made out their house from the dead length of white snow, only by the peculiarities which prevailed in the row of shutters in repose. These dark specks were the only points of recognition in the white waste; just as you would make out a Turkish woman by the dark eyes which redeem the monotony of muslin.

Still, I doubt not, that within doors there was merriment to spare; for it was drawing nigh to the Christmas Tide, and the

exit of the year. In 1811 it was, as is now, accomplished to a flurry of music and to the sound of much mirth generally.



A little removed from the throng was a substantial house, just within the refrain of the sea. An upper window was lit up, and the rays came out onto the snow. Figures, faintly obscuring the light, crossed fitfully upon the blind. I have said it was the season of mirth, but these phantoms came not nor went in the mazy dance; it was the

peculiar time of social gatherings, but the taper's light illuminated not the haunt of gladness.

The year was going out, old, and at his time – he had rested among the sheaves of autumn and had seen the spring-seed garnered in. But, in that room, life was not calmly ebbing from one grown old – the dying year might not say faintly, “sister, it is enough; we have seen our desire, let us go forth together.” For a little girl, a tiny creature of some eight winters was ebbing there; the roses of life were fast falling from the loosened grasp of her, the sweet child-genius, who sat on the knee of the immortal Scott* and charmed his sadness away. She was dying there, whose wonderful

intellect had made her the cherished and the adopted of the highest talent of the day; and weeping kindred were watching the latest quivering emotion of that little one, whose passionate fondness and affection made her an angel in that house.” (*Fife Herald*, 15th October 1857, F.H.)

*Even when Marjorie is first brought to the public’s attention Scott is mentioned. As the story develops we will see that this is perhaps embroidery more than supported fact.

The family of Marjorie’s father, James, belonged to Perthshire and were said to be in comfortable circumstances, possessing property in Kirkmichael. James was educated at Blairgowrie School, Perth High School, and then finally the University of Edinburgh.



The Flemings were very proud of their highland heritage. Marjorie’s great-grandfather had employed a shepherd who had witnessed the fall of Viscount Dundee at Killiecrankie. Her grandfather had fought for “Bonnie Prince Charlie” at Culloden, which was a fact treasured by the Fleming family.

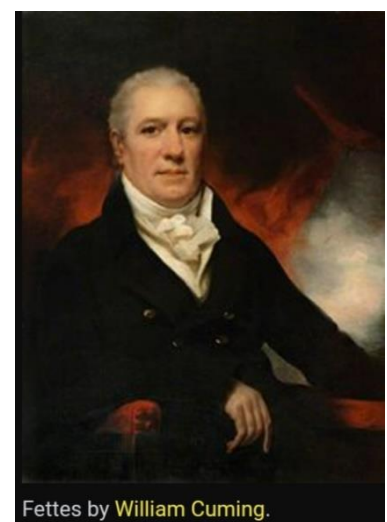
In 1788, James’ brother, the Reverend Dr. Thomas Fleming, was appointed by the Magistrates of Kirkcaldy as the minister of the Parish Church. Probably, at his invitation, James

followed his brother to Kirkcaldy and soon established a good business as an accountant.

Marjorie's mother, Isabella Rae, was the youngest daughter of an eminent Edinburgh surgeon. All the children were intellectually and educationally gifted, with Isabella considered the most accomplished. She was educated at the High School of Edinburgh. Some of her friends and companions were Walter Scott, Francis Jeffrey, and Henry Brougham. Isabella used to say "she liked Wattie better than Frankie or Henry". Walter was older than Isabella, while Henry was younger. On one occasion, when the children were playing in Parliament Square, there was some jostling and Isabella knocked Frankie over. It was certainly an experience for the future Lord Francis Jeffery! However, as one of the maids in charge of the children chided and shook Isabella, she probably had more reason to remember the incident.



One of her sisters, Margaret, was the mother of William Fettes, whose £166,000 bequest founded Fettes College in Edinburgh. It was 25 years after Fettes' death before building work commenced and a further 9 years still before the



Fettes by William Cuming.

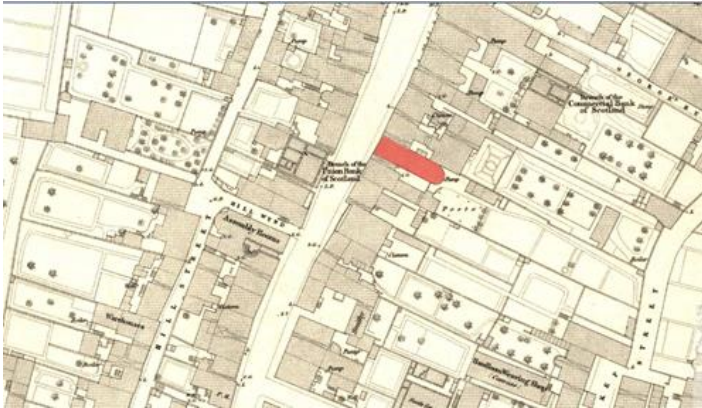
college opened. The Will stated that “it is my intention that the residue of my whole estate should form an endowment for the maintenance, education and outfit of young people, whose parents have either died without leaving sufficient funds for that purpose, or who from innocent misfortune during their lives are unable to give suitable education to their children”. Noble sentiments indeed! Today, term fees for 13-18 year olds are £9,975 for day children and £12,165 for boarders. From age 7 -12 we see £5,770 and £8,465 being the figures mentioned.

Elizabeth, Isabella’s eldest sister, was also an admirer of Sir Walter. Being much older than Scott, she was able to patronise and encourage him before he found fame. She was the author of the lines:-

“Go on, dear youth, the glorious path pursue,
Which glorious nature has provided for you.
Go bid the seeds her hands have sown arise,
By timely culture to their native skies.
Go, and employ the poet’s heavenly art,
Not merely to delight but mend the heart!”

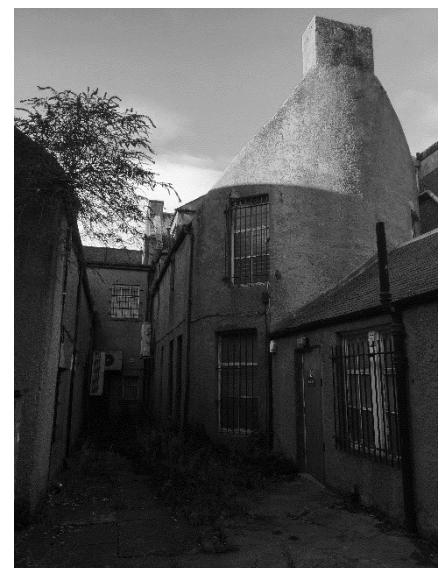
These lines have been incorrectly attributed by Scott’s biographer to Mrs Alison Cockburn, one of those who added words to the tune “*The Flowers of the Forrest.*”

James Fleming and Isabella Rae met at a dance in the Whyte House, Kirkcaldy, which at the time was the home of Mr Fergus. The couple were married in Edinburgh at Giles Grange which was the home of Isabella's grandfather.



The couple settled at 130 High Street, Kirkcaldy. Contemporary accounts indicate it was a three storey building with a bookseller's shop on the ground level. Behind the

bookshop was the kitchen for the dwelling house and above that a long drawing room where Marjorie loved to sit and read, even before she reached her fifth birthday. The end of the house facing the sea had a rounded gable and its dining room faced the street. Here, Marjorie would watch the stagecoaches (Aurora and Defiance) and other traffic from the windows. Marjorie's playmates were her brother William, and older sister Isabella. A younger sister, Elizabeth, was born in 1809. The large and extensive garden was her outdoor playing area and the indoor nursery was on the third floor, again looking onto the High Street.



This was the time Kirkcaldy could genuinely be referred to as the “Lang Toun”. The High Street had the sea on the south side with countryside bordering the rear of the buildings on the north side. The sandy beach and the country lanes and hedgerows were all spots the children enjoyed, but normally only when they were in the company of their nurse.

A favourite pastime was a walk in the policies of Raith House, the seat of the Fergusons. It is here that one of the earliest stories of her childhood is set. Marjorie and Isabella were walking with their nurse Jeanie Robertson. The nurse seems to have installed Marjorie as her favourite and, it is suggested, at times could be unpleasant to Isabella. The story was related by a member of the family and tells how the girls were running ahead. The nurse, aware that the Mill Lade was looming, called to the girls to come back. It would seem that Marjorie paid no attention and ran all the faster. Close to the water she tripped and fell. Isabella caught a hold of Marjorie and pulled her back, possibly saving her sister’s life but tearing her clothes. The nurse was furious with Isabella for damaging her favourite’s clothes and was determined to “give her it” but Marjorie stepped in between and said – “whip me and I won’t say a word, but touch Issy and I will roar like a bull”. Years after the event, Elizabeth remembered her mother taking her to the spot and relating the story.

“Pet” was never a name used by the family, with “Maidie” being the normal address used. There are several portraits of Maidie, mostly drawn by her cousin Isa Keith. Rather unflatteringly, Isa considered her young cousin “no great beauty”. Maidie herself seems to echo this view by writing that “I am very



strong and robust, not of the delicate sex or the fair, but deficient in looks”. This is a very sad self opinion but confirms that she was no “pale weakling” which is something sometimes suggested as being present in precocious children.

Mr and Mrs Fleming were both fond of books, with James having an extensive library. Mrs Fleming not only taught her children to read but guided them on choices of authors. “Mrs Fleming found her little pupil apt to learn. She was unusually clever for her age, though of that she was quite unconscious. Eager in her thirst for knowledge, seeming almost to divine that her life would be too short for the task of conquering all the realms of the mind, she made haste to learn. Yet, this longing for knowledge was not her chief characteristic. Her power and her charm lay in her affectionate disposition, her craving for love and her

lavishness in bestowing it. So rich and generous a nature as little Marjorie's was bound to develop early. The warm emotional temperament of her father's family, the intellectual brilliance of her mothers, the literary atmosphere of her humble home, the everyday sights of her native town, and the scenes of woodland and shore, all had their effect on the opening mind and all got curiously reproduced in the little girl's moralising." (H.B. Farnie)

Maidie enjoyed reading and hearing about both Hebrew and Scottish Kings, also having a taste for poetry and the language of poets. In the evenings, as a reward for good behaviour as well as to educate, James would read aloud to the children.

Maidie was allowed unlimited access to her parent's books and not only was she able to read them but committed long passages to memory. Whereas literature was a strong and enjoyable subject, arithmetic was not. Although some progress was made with the pianoforte, she displayed no great fondness for music.

It might appear an exaggeration to say that there could be a turning point in a life of only five and a half years. That said, there can be no doubt that the visit of her cousin, Isabella Keith, in the summer of 1808 had a material and profound effect on young Marjorie's life. Isabella told of the wonders of the great world beyond the Firth of Forth. Isabella saw a great deal to admire in her little Kirkcaldy cousin whose

knowledge of books, impetuous temperament, and loving disposition certainly impressed her. A sincere friendship sprung up. Isabella was exceedingly fond of Marjorie and she in turn almost worshipped her cousin. Isabella suggested that in time Marjorie should accompany her cousin back to Edinburgh. The friendship of the two girls and the educational advantages which such a move would secure for Maidie were the two motivators. The circumstances of the Fleming family at the time, and the fact that Mr Fleming's brother had left Kirkcaldy two years before to take charge of the parish of Lady Yesters in Edinburgh, all added weight to the proposition. With some reluctance, Mr and Mrs Fleming allowed their daughter to undertake the adventure.



One summer's morning from atop the stagecoach, Maidie bade farewell to the people and places with which she had been so familiar. A short trip to

Kinghorn, followed by sailing to Leith, saw the girls arrive at Mrs. Keith's house in Edinburgh. It was in the large city mansion at No.1 Charlotte Street that Maidie made her new home. Charlotte Square itself seems to have been the playground for the children and her aunt was certainly extremely kind to Maidie. The family was large and all were

older than Marjorie but she was happy in her new home among new friends. Her sister in Kirkcaldy sent letters to prevent homesickness and at same time give news of home. Marjorie's handwriting was never the best and she hated the drudgery of learning, but was induced to write a letter in reply. At the time of the following Marjorie was not yet six and her large handwriting filled a page with around 10/12 words.

"My Dear Isa

"I now sit down on my bottom to answer all your kind and beloved letters which you was so good as to write to me. This is the first time I ever wrote a letter in my life.

There are a great number of girls in the square and they cry just like a pig when we are under the painful necessity of putting it to death.

Miss Potune, a lady of my acquaintance, praises me dreadfully. I repeated something out of Deen Swift and she said I was fit for the stage, and you may think I was primmed up with majestick pride, but upon my word, I felt myself turn a little birsay. Birsay is a word which William composed, which is as you may suppose a little enraged. This horid fat simpliton says my aunt is beautifull which is intierly impossible for that is not her nature".

"This characteristic epistle, be it remembered, was framed before its composer was six years of age and contains

enough proof to show that it was the unaided efforts of the writer. I shall make no further comment upon it bar this that Marjorie's propensity for strong language, the results of her ardent temperament, is sufficiently marked in this letter and will be further developed when we come to her journals."
(Fife Herald, 15/10/1857 H.F.)

Shortly after arriving in Edinburgh, Marjorie's relatives took her to their country home which was Ravelston House. It is described as an old edifice with crotchety gables. There were terraced walks around the mansion, sun dials and inexorable hedge rows. A driveway bordered by ancient trees led to the property. Marjorie spent a great deal of her time in Edinburgh here, as well as at Braehead, which was close to Cramond Brig and was the residence of other relatives.



There is a commemorative plaque to Marjorie in nearby Brae Park Road. The '*bubblyjock*' mentioned in the wording is a turkey! Despite our best efforts we have not as yet been able to uncover further information on the plaque.

On the years spent in Edinburgh you take your pick from the various biographers' writings. Was there a long and constant friendship with Sir Walter Scott? Did he visit her at times when he sought inspiration for his work? Did Dr John

Brown exaggerate the friendship? It certainly seems strange that Sir Walter is only mentioned once in the diaries. In simple terms, it is impossible to separate fact from fiction, what is real and what is imagined, what might have taken place and what actually did.

However, make no mistake, Marjorie's intellect, comprehension, intelligence and thought processes, made her an outstanding and unique figure, with or without Sir Walter Scott being in the mix.

Despite the emotion and mystique surrounding the little girl, we must never lose sight of the fact Marjorie died in 1811, Scott himself twenty one years later, and yet it was left to Farnie in 1857 to "discover" the wonder child. So, why did Scott himself not bring her to the public's attention? Would he not have made mention of Marjorie in the 21 years of life left to him? This does suggest that this 'great friendship' was perhaps an 'invention' from the fertile mind of John Brown. However, Brown may not be the real 'culprit'. Our suspicion is that it was Marjorie's sister, Elizabeth, who may have sown the seeds of the friendship. She was interviewed independently by both Farnie and Brown five years apart with both making mention of Scott – especially Brown who wove the 'friendship' into being an integral part of his story. It appears that the only tangible evidence supporting a warm friendship is contained in part of a lengthy letter from Miss Fleming to John Brown.

As late as the 25th October 1930, *The Fife Free Press* was still suggesting the friendship was real – but by the 150th anniversary of her birth their opinion was not quite so firm. Their take on the relationship was now:- “it has long remained a point clouded with a little doubt whether the Immortal Scottish “Master of Romance” and Kirkcaldy’s child prodigy



actually knew each other”. It

would seem that this was a case of “not letting the truth get in the way of a good story”. Much as it might have been wished – illustrations, such as Scott hugging Marjorie, are simply well intentioned fiction.

Her mother and Isa Keith were clearly the main individuals who moulded and directed Marjorie’s education.

“Marjorie was undeniably a very indifferent scribe. Her reading and general information far outran her ability to commit their results to black and white keeping.”

FIFE FREE PRESS, SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 1953

“PET MARJORY” OF KIRKCALDY

NOTABLE CHILD PERSONALITY

150th ANNIVERSARY OF HER BIRTH

NEXT Thursday marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Marjory Fleming—fondly known as Pet Marjory—an unique child personality in the history of Kirkcaldy. The journals, poems, and letters of this chubby-cheeked, bright-eyed little girl, who died at the age of eight, are remarkable documents combining an ample sense of observation with a childish native humour and a natural, engaging candour.

Marjory Fleming was born in Kirkcaldy on January 15, 1803, and died on December 19, 1811. Although she was only vouchsafed a short span of life, her literary effort remains a notable legacy of achievement and creates for her a permanent place in the affections of townspeople and many others much further afield.

NOT EXACTLY KNOWN

Frequently referred to by her intimate friends as “Maidie” and “Muff”, it is not exactly known in what circumstances the affectionate name of “Pet” was applied to Marjory.

Prior to her birth, Pet Marjory’s parents resided in Linktown. Her father was a magistrate of the town and a brother of a parish minister of Kirkcaldy at that period, Dr James Fleming. Of Highland descent, the Fleming family possessed a proud tradition. Pet Marjory’s mother was the daughter of a well-known Edinburgh surgeon, James Rae. Pet Marjory’s relationship with the famous Sir Walter Scott is believed to be linked through Mrs Keith of Ravelston (Mrs Fleming’s aunt, Marianna) who was a great friend of Sir Walter. It has long remained a point clouded with a little doubt, however, whether the immortal Scottish “Master of Romance” and Kirkcaldy’s child prodigy actually knew each other.

An important phase in Pet Marjory’s life came at the age of six when she was sent from Kirkcaldy to Edinburgh on a visit to her cousin, Isabella Keith. A rich bond of affection flowered sweetly into being between the two. Isabella’s name is enshrined in Pet Marjory’s

homour and red it so carelessly and fully that she took it from me and her blood ran cold, but she never punished me she is as gentle as a lamb to me an ungrateful girl to-day.” The child continued: “To-day I pronounced a word which should never come out of lady’s lips it was that I called John an impudent bitch and Isabella afterwards told me that I should never say it even in a joke but she kindly forgave me because I said I would not do it again I will tell you what I think put me in so bad a homour is I got one or two cups of that bad bad sin a tea to-day.”

Pet Marjory’s apportioning of the blame for her “bad homour” is indeed naively deemed and asserted!

AFFECTIONATE DISPOSITION

Pet Marjory has been described by one authority as being unconscious of her unusual cleverness. Her greatest charm, it has been stated, was her affectionate disposition, her craving for love and her lavishness in bestowing it.

The young child, in her educational development, had an eager appetite for historical and poetical works, which seemed to fire her young but sparkling imagination. She produced a number of little books and her poems for a number

WELL-KNOWN

Death of

The death of his home in Kirkcaldy and a permanent trade in the city of Edinburgh.

Mr Tom Mr John brother plumber’s way. He had of the motor apprentice one of the dusty in the Station H.

During with the 1 demobilisation of Miller a spell a Dunfermline.

For son Edinburgh rance co-born, who officer & formerly Galt City original Memorial.

Mr Tom wife, a Dunfermline.

The fu cally Ce

FOR POLI

It was thanks to Isa Keith that Marjorie's journals came into being. In an attempt to improve her handwriting and spelling, Isa suggested that the journals be used to note down whatever came into her head. Without this effort to improve her writing, would there have been any journals? Isa Keith is due great credit, not just for the part she played in Marjorie's education, but in creating (if inadvertently) the records which we can now enjoy.

In September 1826, *The Belfast Chronicle* reported that a witness had been called in the celebrated trial of David Landale. This followed his fatal duel with George Morgan



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KIRK WYND
KIRKCALDY

KIRKCALDY CIVIC SOCIETY
AND
THE AULD KIRK PLAYERS
PRESENT

**THE LAST FATAL
DUEL IN SCOTLAND**

HEAR THE ARGUMENT ESCALATE TOWARDS A DEADLY
MEETING ON A DAMP MORNING AT CARDENBARN FARM

PERFORMANCES AT 1PM, 1.45PM, 2.30PM & 3.15PM

DOORS
OPEN
DAYS
2021

earlier in the year. Both were Kirkcaldy men and it is also noted as being the last fatal duel fought in Scotland. Landale's defence was based around the fact that, although he had been the challenger, he had been driven to it by the behaviour of Morgan, who was determined to force such an outcome.

The witness testified that “the deceased (Morgan) had said he was not satisfied with a letter he had received from Landale in respect of some differences about the Bank –

deceased told witness that in consequence of a second evasive letter he should put his cane across Mr Landale's shoulders the first time they met".

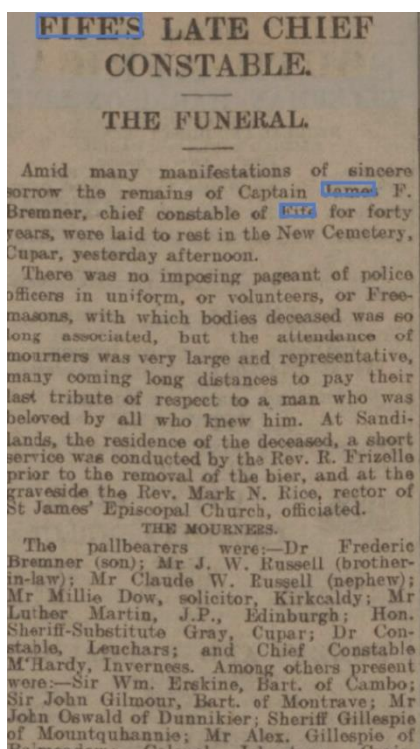
The witness added that Mr Morgan had disclosed sensitive information to him:- "once or twice he (witness) had been given confidential information about a £5,000 cash account granted by the Bank to Mr Landale and something about a £3,000 loan which Mr Landale hoped to raise".

The witness:- James Fleming, (merchant, accountant. and father of Marjorie).

The Fifeshire Advertiser published an item on the 14th July 1883. The article suggested that an ability to write poetry might run in the family. It transpires "that under the nom de plume of Goose Quill a number of poetical pieces have

appeared in the columns of our contemporary, The Fifeshire Journal. The poems are of more than average merit, and are now to be collected and published in book form. We may add that the author is Mr James F. Bremner, junr., whose father is Mr Bremner, the nephew of "Pet Marjorie" and Chief Constable of Fife. The book will be published next week".

In 1885, in the "Dictionary of National Biography," Sir Leslie



DICTIONARY
OF
NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY

EDITED BY
LESLIE STEPHEN

VOL. I.
ARMADON—ANNE

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1885

Half bound maroon

Digitized by Google

Stephen*, the Editor, concluded the section devoted to her with, "Pet Marjorie's life is probably the shortest to be recorded in these volumes, and she is one of the most charming characters." *The father of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell.

The Scotsman of the 16th November 1903 brought news of the death of James Fleming Bremner. James had been Chief Constable of Fife since 1863 and had still been in harness when he died. He was a nephew of Marjorie and had left a wife and grown up family. James had been born in Kirkcaldy on the 1st January 1826, the only child of John Bremner, a sailcloth manufacturer, and Isabella Fleming - yes, the older sister of Marjorie.

James married Isabella Russell in December 1863 and they went on to have seven children. This family is relevant to the story as Isabella Fleming is the only one of Marjorie's siblings to have had a child. William had died in his mid-teens and Elizabeth had remained a spinster throughout her life. It is therefore Isabella Bremner's son and grandchildren who continued the direct line from Marjorie. They were:-

James Fleming Bremner	30/09/1864
Mary Fleming Bremner	07/08/1866
Frederick Russell Bremner	19/09/1867
Keith Bremner	24/01/1869

Herbert John Bremner 12/04/1870

Maitland Bremner 09/07/1871

Louis Rae Bremner 17/03/1874

A number of these family members will feature later in the narrative.

Isabella was the second wife of James Bremner. He had married Mary Ferrier on the 31st October 1853. Mary was the daughter of Alexander Ferrier who was mentioned in *Object 17* as being Provost of Kirkcaldy in 1837/38. Sadly, Mary passed away on the 19th August 1855.

The *St Andrew's Citizen* of 16th January 1904 carried a review of Lachlan MacBean's new publication, "The Story of Pet Marjorie (Marjorie Fleming)". After paying tribute to both Farnie and Brown, the article read "it has been left to the Editor of the *Fifeshire Advertiser*, Kirkcaldy –

Mr. L. MacBean – to bring together and arrange, in appropriate setting, practically all that can be known about the winning Marjorie. Mr MacBean's printing works happen to occupy the site of the dwelling and garden that belonged to Marjorie's father and, in the preface to this book, we learn



of the unique coincidence that the pages of the publication were written, and the illustrations with which it is enriched were prepared, “in the centenary year of her birth” and on the spot where she was born and died. The preface further notes “for much of the material we are indebted to obliging friends and chiefly to Marjorie’s nephew, Captain Bremner (who alas, passed away ere the printing of this book was completed)”.

The review covers various points in Marjorie’s short life, both in Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh, before concluding with:-

“It is an altogether fascinating story that is here unfolded and, in Mr MacBean, “Pet Marjorie” has found a most sympathetic biographer. The work has obviously been to him a labour of love. He enters into the ever varying moods of Marjorie’s ever opening mind, enjoys her playful humour, and smiles kindly and tenderly over her self- accusations and her brave struggles to be good. The illustrations add materially to the value of the book which is well printed and tastefully got up. While of genuine interest to every sympathiser with childhood, it should be of special interest to all connected with Kirkcaldy.”

It is worth noting that a wide geographical spread of newspapers covered the publication of the book, showing the genuine interest the public had in Kirkcaldy’s “child genius”. Titles covering the launch included the “*Knaresborough Post*”, “*Pateley Bridge and Niddersdale*

Herald” and the “*Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*”, demonstrating how far her fame had spread.

The *Fifeshire Advertiser* of Saturday, 1st July 1911, devoted copious space to a historical drama which had taken place the previous Wednesday. A performance had been given of “*Caer Caledon*” which contained “Dramatic Scenes from the History of Kirkcaldy”. The entertainment took place, thanks to Michael Nairn, in what is now Ravenscraig Park, but at the time was

The pageant had several patrons named as follows:

- The Right Hon. The Earl of Rothes
- Rt. Hon. Provost R.C. Munro Ferguson, MP, PC
- The Right Rev. The Bishop of St Andrews
- John Oswald, Earl of Dunniker
- Michael Nairn, Esq., Dysart House
- Provost Dickson, Markinch
- W.D. Dixon, Esq., Markinch
- J. Davidson, Esq., Kirkcaldy
- Peter Greig Pye, Esq., Kirkcaldy
- Robert Stocks, Esq., Kirkcaldy
- The Rev. Canon Harper, Dunimarle Castle, Culross
- The Rev. C. Gardyne, The Rectory, Forfar

part of the policies of Dysart House. Four hundred and fifty children from St Peter’s Episcopal Church took part as the event was a celebration of the centenary of the church. The drama contained ten scenes, each dealing with a separate part of Kirkcaldy’s history from 500 A.D. entitled “Foundation”, through to 1818, which carried the title “Vacation”. Almost all the “names” from the Town’s past were featured. They included druid chiefs, King Malcolm, Sir William Kirkcaldy, Provost Robert Whyte, Adam Smith, Robert Adam, Oliver Cromwell, and Michael Scott. Our attention focuses on episode IX – “Recitation” – featuring only two people - J. Beaton as Walter Scott and Margaret Cameron as Pet Marjory. The

Episode IX. Recitation, AD 1811

Walter Scott and the child writer Marjory Fleming appear in this episode. Scott enters carrying the child; he refers to her as his ‘wee crodlin’ doo’ and asks her to read to him from her writing journal. She reads some passages and a piece of Burns’ poetry she has learned. Scott then asks her to read the verse ‘Rosabelle’ [from the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*] which he has written for her recently. The child reads the verse and when finished wipes away a tear before leaving the stage. Scott picks up the copy of the poem and kisses it before also exiting. The text of a verse entitled ‘Pet Marjorie’ is included in the pageant book of words, but it is unclear if this was included as part of the performance. If

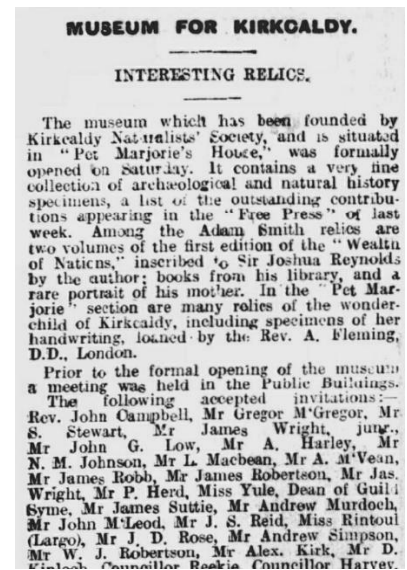
little thumbnail described the scene as “many liked this episode best of all, the dialogue being distinct, and Sir Walter’s big deerhound enjoying the proceedings. The Pet Marjorie song was beautifully sung”. The day was a great success with the grandstand, which could accommodate 900, being filled. Even details of the costumes were provided - “Sir Walter Scott, with plaid and tall white hat. Pet Marjorie was dressed in a blue and white muslin dress with pale blue sash”.

The event was based on the book “Caer Caledon” by Lachlan MacBean. The event ended with a grand parade where Kirkcaldy led the “Sister Towns of Fife”. Each town had their own banner, with the children dressed in the chosen colour of their town. Kinghorn as an example “were in deep red, with 6 little soldiers in khaki trundling a cannon behind them”.

This is further clear evidence of the standing of ‘Pet Marjorie’ in Kirkcaldy at the time – a whole episode devoted to her! If copious space was given in the Advertiser, keep in mind that the Editor was Lachlan MacBean! It also confirms the pipe-dream of a close relationship between Scott and Marjorie was still very much alive.

In 1951, there was a suggestion that the pageant could be re-enacted as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations. It did not come to pass!

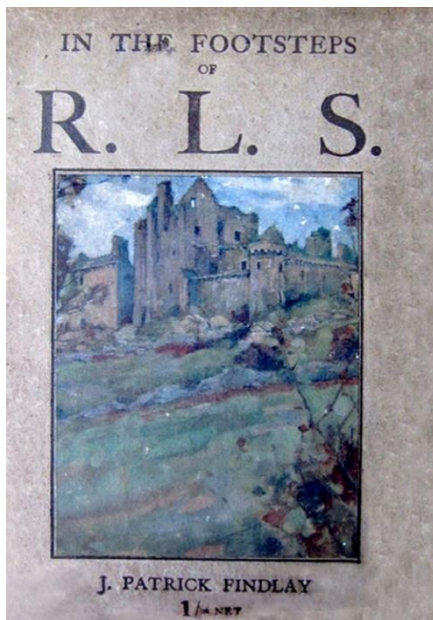
The *Scotsman*, on the 13th September 1913, reported on the opening of a new museum. “The formal opening of Kirkcaldy Museum, which has been founded by Kirkcaldy Naturalist Society, took place on Saturday afternoon. The Museum is situated in the house where “Pet Marjorie,” Sir Walter Scott’s wonder child, resided. The society has already secured an admirable collection of archaeological and natural history specimens. There are numerous Adam Smith relics, including two volumes of the first edition of the “Wealth of Nations” inscribed to Sir Joshua Reynolds by the author, books from the Adam Smith Library, and a rare portrait of his mother. In the “Pet Marjorie” section were many relics of the wonder child at Kirkcaldy, including copies of her letters loaned by the Rev. A. Fleming, D.D., London. Mr W. Young, president of the Naturalist’s Society, occupied the chair at the opening ceremony. Provost Munro Ferguson, in opening the Museum, said he had long looked forward to the formation of such an institution in Kirkcaldy. For want of such an institution in Kirkcaldy there had been great wastage, as many relics had been scattered and lost. Such a collection was not only of interest to those who were advancing in life, but it was a great help to the youth of the town. It kept up the continuity of the life in the burgh and inculcated a



reverence for the past. The Rev. Dr. Fleming then spoke on “Pet Marjorie.”

On the motion of Mr L. MacBean, votes of thanks were accorded to those who contributed to the Museum. After the ceremony, the door of “Pet Marjorie’s room” was opened by Mrs Tennant Gordon*, a grandniece of the wonder child.

* This is the Keith Bremner mentioned previously. She is covered in greater detail later in the narrative.



The 5th August 1925 saw some reminiscences of Marjorie again published in *The Scotsman*. The article was one from the pen of Jessie Patrick Findlay* who wrote a weekly column for the paper and had also, in 1911, published “In the Footsteps of R.L.S.”. (Robert Louis Stevenson). She had connections with the Kirkcaldy Literature Society and her father

and brother had photographic studios in Leven, Wemyss and Kirkcaldy (9 Wemyssfield).

*This same lady, in 1890, had written a poem in honour of the bells of St Brycedale Church (Object 17).

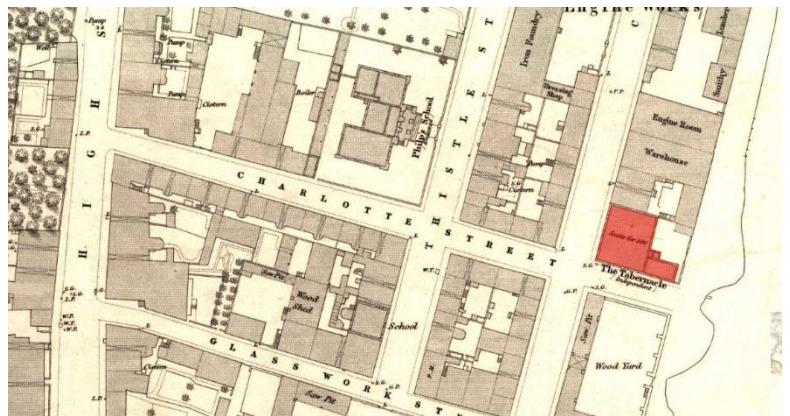
Mrs Findlay was harking back to her childhood in Kirkcaldy and was remembering Marjorie’s first biographer. The lengthy article contained passages which included:-

“In the fascinating story of Pet Marjorie as it unfolded itself to me throughout the years, I dimly remember having seen her first biographer, Henry Farnie, a versatile journalist and playwright, and some considerable years afterward, her sister Elizabeth, then a lady of over sixty years. As is well known, the meeting of these personalities was the “first cause” ensuring Pet Marjorie’s fame as the most loveable and original child prodigy of eight brief years in literature. In all probability, the world might never have heard of Pet Marjorie had not Farnie, in one of his periodic tours of the Fife coast, had the good fortune to meet her sister, Miss Elizabeth Fleming, the last survivor of the family, in residence at Kirkcaldy in the house wherein Pet Marjorie was born and died”.

“Pet Marjorie’s” Sister

“Miss Fleming survived her sister for over 70 years. She was a gentlewoman of great originality of character, noted for her hospitality and quiet generosity towards struggling worth. Many stories are extant of her methods of providing needy students and clergymen of the district with coveted books and even substantial meals and no doubt Farnie, with his light heart and lighter purse, would gravitate towards the arched “close” in Kirkcaldy High Street which was the entrance to Miss Fleming’s house. There she spoke of her

Mrs Findlay concluded by telling of the only time she saw Miss Fleming. The scene was the “Tabernacle” which was the home of the “Congregationalists”.* It



was a week-night and both were attending “a dramatic recital by the elocutionist Bellew”. It would appear “that the audience in the hall failed to appreciate the humour of the piece. Truth to tell, the atmosphere was somnolent. Suddenly, a hearty laugh impinged on the stodgy decorum. It was the sound of pure hilarity and I glanced at the pew from whence it came. “That is Miss Fleming, the sister of Pet Marjorie”, whispered my companion. How eagerly I looked through the half lit gloom! I saw only the point of a dominant nose emerging from a deeply-poked bonnet and

the grotesque shadow of the laughing lady cast on the white washed walls at her side. But her laugh has lingered in my memory and still at times surprises me out of the silence of the years”.



It seems “Bellew stopped to express his pleasure at the solitary response (applause) to his entertainment, somewhat spoiling his case by a bitter protest against our responsiveness and lack of applause. Finally, we dispersed feeling snubbed and resentful. The last words I heard as we plunged into the darkness were “The man forgets that we

were blate (bashful) in the House of God” – it was the voice of Miss Fleming”!

* Our research for Object 17 shows that the event took place in 1873/74, before the Congregationalists moved to West End Church.

As reminiscences often do, they can attract further memories. The Scotsman carried a letter on the 10th August from Caroline Roberts in Murrayfield Gardens:-

THE LATE MISS FLEMING.—By the death of Miss Fleming, recorded in our obituary of to-day, a link connecting the present with the past life of Edinburgh has been severed. Elizabeth Fleming was the daughter of James Fleming, of Kirkcaldy, and Isabella Rae. Her mother was the youngest daughter of James Rae, the father of surgical teaching in Scotland, and Isabella Cant, of the house of Thurston and Giles' Grange. Mr Rae's second daughter married Keith of Ravelston, and at her house Sir Walter Scott, a great friend of the family, was in the habit of almost daily meeting Miss Fleming, and her sister Marjorie, or “Maidie,” as he always called the latter, was an especial pet of Sir Walter's up to the time of her early death. Her little tale was very beautifully told a few years ago by Dr John Brown, under the title of “Pet Marjorie.” The deceased lady, who has for the last two years been in declining health, resided principally in Kirkcaldy until about five years ago, when she took up her abode in Edinburgh.

“Sir – I was greatly interested in yesterday’s article on “Pet Marjory” and the reference to her sister Elizabeth. Miss Elizabeth Fleming was an old and valued friend of my mother’s family, one of my aunts being called after her. I think she was younger than Marjorie and believe I am correct in saying there is no reference to her in the “journals”, but I have not got a copy by me. Many were the times I was taken to see her in her flat in Gillespie Crescent and, when she died, I fell heir to her pet bullfinch. She always had a pet of some kind and loved all things that lived. Latterly, she was an invalid and was wheeled about in a chair. She had a maid, also Elizabeth, who was with her for a number of years and was absolutely devoted to her, being the old Scottish type of retainer. Once I remember calling with my mother, and Elizabeth announced as she let us in:- “She’s fine the day. I wheeled her to the drawing room windae. There was a funeral up the road. I kent it would cheer her up”.

She sleeps in Greyfriars Churchyard and the stone simply says “Elizabeth Fleming, died 1881.”

Yours etc.

Miss Fleming had resided in Kirkcaldy until the last few years of her life. There is a suggestion that she had previously spent time in Edinburgh nursing her Aunt before moving permanently to the capital. Greyfriars Churchyard contains the graves of her Mother’s ancestors which would explain the choice.

The *St Andrew's Citizen* of the 18th December 1925 carries two stories relating to Marjorie. Firstly, "on St Andrew's Day in London, Mr Baldwin, in speaking of Sir Walter Scott's influence on Scotland made a casual reference to Pet Marjorie – Kirkcaldy's wonder child, and the door in Castle Street, Edinburgh, where she was welcomed by Scott".

(Stanley Baldwin was the dominating figure in British politics between the World Wars. He served as Prime Minister on three occasions and was in power at the time of the abdication of Edward VI in 1936).

Secondly, but more localised, "Last week, relics of Pet Marjorie were lent by relatives to Kirkcaldy Museum. Mr L. MacBean, the author of the story of Pet Marjorie, introduced Mr J. Tennant-Gordon, Chief Constable of Fife, and his wife Mrs Keith Gordon, a grandniece of Pet Marjorie, who brought



Pet Marjorie's necklace, now on view in the Museum at Pet Marjorie House, Kirkcaldy, was worn by Mrs Tennant Gordon, wife of Mr J. Tennant Gordon, Chief-Constable of Fife, when Mr Tennant Gordon and Mrs Gordon were present at the garden party given by the King and Queen at Holyrood. Mrs Tennant Gordon is a grand-daughter of Pet Marjorie's sister, Isabella.

with them a little table and stool and a necklace and locket.

Miss Bremner*, Mrs Gordon's sister, lent original portraits of Pet Marjorie painted by her cousin and teacher, Isa Keith, her bible, catechism, school book and a small table". On going through the display on the 1st Fife Volunteers, they came across a document with the signatures of those who had 'joined up' – the first

signature was that of James F. Bremner – the father of both ladies.

* By elimination this has to be Mary F. Bremner.

The *Fife Free Press* on the 14th November 1926 tells of an evening's entertainment at the Erskine Literary Guild in Burntisland. "A delightful programme was provided on Tuesday evening and an audience, which completely filled the Church Hall, thoroughly enjoyed a happy and interesting evening". The programme was divided into three parts. The first being a very interesting lecture on "Pet Marjorie, the 'Wonder Child', by Mr L. MacBean of Kirkcaldy". Part two was described as "Tea and Talk" which was the social part of the evening, and part three was a soiree featuring several talented individuals from both Burntisland and Kirkcaldy.

We find a very interesting letter published in *The Scotsman* on the 12th November 1929. It is from Robert T. Skinner and caught our interest:-



"Sir, - Lovers of Scott tell you that when Marjorie Fleming (1803-1811) crossed from Kirkcaldy to Edinburgh to be the guest of her aunt, Mrs Keith, she was visited almost daily at No.1 North Charlotte Street by Scott. The latter is said to have proceeded from No. 39 Castle Street along Young Street, to have

opened the door, and walked in. Examining contemporary copies of the Edinburgh Directory, there are no “Keiths of Ravelston” in North Charlotte Street. From the year 1804 onwards “Alexander Keith of Ravelston, W.S.” resided at 43 Queen Street and here he continued to reside until 1813, perhaps later.

In 1813 the North Charlotte Street house would appear to have been occupied by another Alexander Keith, an accountant.

Is there a reader who can throw any light on the subject?

I am, etc.

We show both the original letter and the one response it secured followed by our own efforts at clarification.

“Pet Marjorie.”
Edinburgh, November 9, 1929.
Sir,—Lovers of Scott tell you that when Margaret Fleming (1803-1811) crossed from Kirkcaldy to Edinburgh to be the guest of her aunt, Mrs Keith, she was visited almost daily at No. 1 North Charlotte Street by Scott. The latter is said to have proceeded from No. 39 Castle Street along Young Street, to have opened the door, and walked in.
Examining contemporary copies of the Edinburgh Directory, I can discover no Keiths of Ravelston in North Charlotte Street. From the year 1804 onwards “Alexander Keith of Ravelston, W.S.” resided at No. 43 Queen Street, and here he continued to reside until 1813, perhaps later.
In 1813 the North Charlotte Street house would appear to have been occupied by another Alexander Keith, an accountant.
Is there a reader who can throw any light on the subject?—I am, &c.
ROBERT T. SKINNER.
(Other Letters are given on Page 13.)

“Pet Marjorie.”
Edinburgh, November 16, 1929.
Sir,—My letter of 9th inst. has called forth two correspondents, while several friends have been good enough to communicate with me privately. “A Lover of Scott” quotes Dr John Brown, the latter speaking of “Mrs William Keith of Corstorphine Hill” as “niece of Mrs Keith of Ravelston.” I was under the impression that Marianne Rae, Mrs William Keith (Pet Marjorie’s aunt) was daughter-in-law (not niece) to Alexander Keith of Ravelston.
The Edinburgh Directory places “Alexander Keith, Esq., of Ravelston, W.S.” at No. 43 Queen Street, and in the same year (1812) another Alexander Keith, described as “accountant,” appears at No. 1 North Charlotte Street.
The year 1812, that in which the surname Keith is first associated with No. 1, cannot satisfy me. How could Pet Marjorie, dying on 19th December 1811, have been the guest of any Keith in that North Charlotte Street residence?—I am, &c.
ROBERT T. SKINNER.

This tempted us to probe a little and again without the aid of Census Returns it is slightly problematic. The issue is certainly clouded by the fact that there were three Alexander Keiths. The first and original purchaser of Ravelston died in 1795 and through his marriage came the Scott/Keith connection. Sir Walter’s grandmother was Jean Swinton and it was her sister Joanna who married this Alexander Keith.

His son, also Alexander Keith of Ravelston and Dunnottar, died in 1819. It was he who had built the new Ravelston House in the 1790s.

He in turn had two sons – Sir Alexander, who inherited the title and died in 1832, having been knighted during King George 1V's visit to Edinburgh in 1822. Sir Walter Scott was one of the main organisers/ architects of the visit.

The younger son was William Keith and he built Corstorphine Hill House again in the 1790s. It was William who had married Marianne Rae and this lady was Isabella Keith's mother. Therefore, Marianne and Isabella were respectively the aunt and cousin of Marjorie. Sir Alexander's wife Christian Forbes would be Marjorie's aunt by marriage. As Sir Alexander did not secure his title until 1819 when his father died – he could well be living there with his family. On the other side of the coin – William Keith had died in 1803, so did his widow and family leave Corstorphine Hill and take up residence at 1 North Charlotte Street? The one certainty is that mention is made of a large family and that has to be that of Marianne Rae as Sir Alexander had only one child Helen. Another one to add to the "to do" list – when time permits!

The Courier of the 23rd May 1930 made mention of a ceremony which had taken part the previous day;

Unveiling Ceremony At Kirkcaldy

“A ceremony which will occupy a proud place in the literary annals of Fife was performed yesterday afternoon at the graveside of Sir Walter Scott’s “Pet Marjorie” in Abbotshall Churchyard, Kirkcaldy.

For a hundred years and more the grave of the wonderfully gifted child has been marked only with a rough stone cross, with the inscription, “Pet Marjorie. Marjorie Fleming, born 1803; died 1811”.

The ceremony carried through yesterday was that of unveiling a statue to her.



Provost Kilgour, Kirkcaldy, presided and, in asking Miss Marjorie Fleming, Cupar, a grand niece of “Pet Marjorie” to unveil the memorial, said that they had met to perpetuate the memory of a little maiden who lived one hundred and twenty years ago who was born in the High Street, Kirkcaldy, and died at the age of barely nine years.

Youngest Immortal.

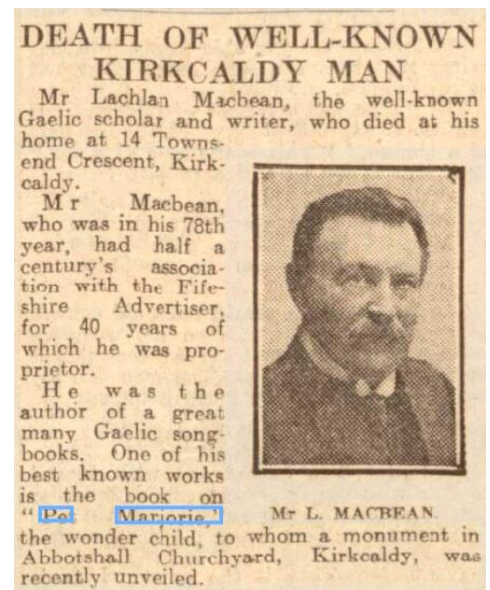
When they examined the monument they would find the inscription: “To the youngest immortal in the world of letters”. He doubted not that many of those present would wonder if this was justified. If they had any doubt, he would

ask them to ponder over the work which the little girl had left behind her. For anyone, who had read her journals and also pondered over her poems, must come to the conclusion that she was a wonder child. She was recognised as a wonder child by all who had written regarding her. We need merely mention Dr John Brown, Mark Twain and Sir Walter Scott.

Gifts of the Heart

Her gifts were not only of the head, but of the heart. Love begot love and this was the secret of the great affection enshrined in the hearts of those with whom she came in contact. It has the same effect today upon those who ponder on her short and glorious life.

The Provost expressed his regret that there was absent one who had popularised their little heroine – Mr Lachlan MacBean, Kirkcaldy. (Note – no reason was given for the absence, possibly illness? He was certainly still alive, dying in January 1931).



When Miss Bremner drew off the veil which covered the statue there was revealed a beautiful monument depicting Pet Marjorie sitting on a chair with an open book in her hand and with a quill poised as if ready to transfer to the book one of the quaint and charming

phrases which attracted the attention of Sir Walter Scott.

The work is a tribute to the art of Mr. R. Pilkington Jackson, Edinburgh.

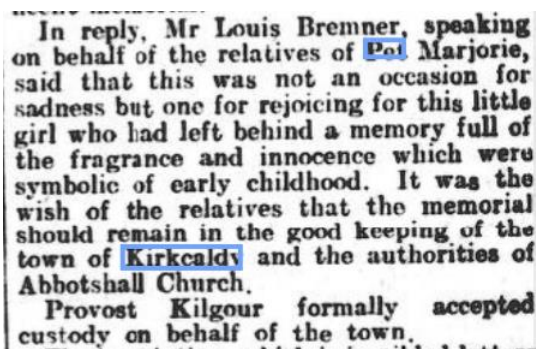
As well as the plaque to Dr John Brown mentioned earlier, he has an impressive body of work, mostly in collaboration with the architect, Robert Lorimer. His most famous work came 34 years later with the creation of Robert the Bruce mounted on a war horse in the centre of the Bannockburn battle site.

Miss Peggie Hunter, the youngest daughter of Mr and Mrs J.K. Hunter, Dalales, Kirkcaldy, laid a lovely bouquet on the grave and also sprayed flowers around the kerbside of the monument.

Community's Thanks

The memorial was dedicated by the Rev. J. M. Hunter who also, on behalf of the community, expressed thanks to the donor of the statue Mr Louis Bremner of Edinburgh. He was a son of the late Chief Constable, James F. Bremner, and a great nephew of Pet Marjorie. Miss Bremner was his sister, Mary Fleming Bremner.

On behalf of the relatives of Pet Marjorie, Mr Bremner thanked the public for their interest in the ceremony.



In reply, Mr Louis Bremner, speaking on behalf of the relatives of **Pet** Marjorie, said that this was not an occasion for sadness but one for rejoicing for this little girl who had left behind a memory full of the fragrance and innocence which were symbolic of early childhood. It was the wish of the relatives that the memorial should remain in the good keeping of the town of **Kirkcaldy** and the authorities of Abbotshall Church.
Provost Kilgour formally accepted custody on behalf of the town.

It was the wish of Pet Marjorie's relatives, he said, that the Town Council and authorities of Abbotshall Churchyard should take over the keeping of the monument. On behalf of the Town Council, Provost Kilgour accepted custody.

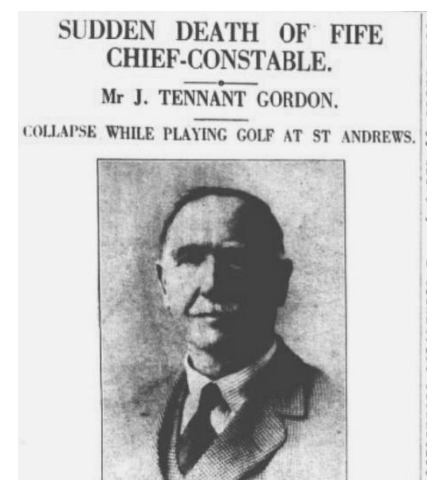
Mr J. T. Lockhart, in expressing appreciation of the generous gift of Mr Bremner, thanked Miss Bremner for her part in the ceremony and Mr Jackson for his fine work.

Mr and Miss Bremner's sister, Mrs Tennant-Gordon, has an interesting distinction in that both her husband and father were Chief Constables of Fife and also consecutively.

James F. Bremner died in 1903 whilst still in

PET MARJORIE'S NECKLACE
MISS KEITH BREMNER, who was married last week to the Chief Constable of Fife, is a direct descendant of the Keiths who held the high office of Knights Marischal of Scotland. At the wedding the only ornament she wore was the necklace worn one hundred years ago by Pet Marjorie, the child genius of Kirkcaldy. Marjorie, sister was the grandmother of the bride.

post, although working his period of notice. He was succeeded by James Tennant-Gordon



who had been born in Aberdeenshire

in 1865. Although coming to Fife as a widower in 1905 he married Keith Bremner, the younger daughter of the late Chief Constable. He was awarded an O.B.E. in the 1918 Honours List. As with his father-in-law, he also died in office when he collapsed on the Eden Golf Course in St. Andrews on the 24th November 1934. He was still Chief Constable at the age of 69 and his opponent on the fateful day was Provost Struth of



Cupar. A contemporary report suggested that they golfed together on most Saturdays for the previous 15 years. James and Keith had four children together and once again, through their great grandmother, there is a direct link to Marjorie. The children are:-

Maitland Bremner Gordon	22/10/1906
Marjorie Tennant Gordon	14/04/1908
Betty Tennant Gordon	20/06/1909
Guthrie Tennant Gordon	18/09/1910

It will be an interesting exercise, when time permits, to see if further descendants can be traced.

A significant and far reaching event in the preservation of Marjorie's material was headlined by *The Scotsman* carrying a story on the 17th October 1930 under the heading of - "Diaries of "Pet Marjorie" –

"It is announced that the original diaries of "Pet Marjorie", together with a contemporary medallion of the child, are to be presented to the National Library of Scotland. The details of this generous gift are stated in the following letter to the trustees of the Library; dated 16th October, from Messrs Cornillon, Craig & Thomas, W.S., acting for the trustees and executors of the late Dr James MacGregor and Mrs MacGregor. "The original diaries of Marjorie Fleming (Pet

Marjorie) were given in the year 1880 by her sister, Miss Elizabeth Fleming, to the late Very Rev. Dr. James MacGregor of St. Cuthbert's Edinburgh. On his death in 1910 they came into the possession of his widow and she almost immediately thereafter handed them over to the Rev. Dr. Archibald Fleming of St Columba's Church of Scotland, Pont Street, London – a namesake, though no relative of the child. They remained in his custody until 1927 but at that time, having felt increasingly anxious that so priceless a literary relic should be in danger of passing out of reach and so fail to become a Scottish national possession, he initiated correspondence and conversations on the subject from time to time with the late Mrs MacGregor which resulted in the cordial agreement that, waiving any possible 'right of property' in them by either, the diaries should be handed over without delay, along with a contemporary medallion of the child (which had also been given to Dr. MacGregor by Miss Elizabeth Fleming), to the trustees of the Scottish National Library."

It was proposed that, as there should be no doubt as to the validity of the gift, Mrs MacGregor and Dr. Fleming would each write letters to the trustees confirming the position. The letters were prepared but, before Mrs MacGregor could sign it, she passed away. However, Dr Fleming was her senior executor and he was able to get approval from her heirs that the gift could be made. This allowed the material

and portrait to be offered as a gift to the Library Trustees and they, in turn, gratefully accepted.

Letters of "Pet Marjorie"
British Museum, London, W.C.1,
November 25, 1931

SIR,—I am preparing a facsimile of the letters, diaries, and poems of Marjorie Fleming. The bulk of the original papers are in the National Library of Scotland, and these, together with two letters still in private ownership, have been freely put into my hands for reproduction. But of those which have already been printed by the late Rev. Lachlan Macbean, one has disappeared since 1905, or at least is not with the rest. This is the characteristic letter of Marjorie (and much her longest) to her mother, written at the beginning of 1809. The small writer asks her mother to return it, and it was therefore probably preserved by Isabella Keith, and may have stayed in the possession of her husband's family, the Wilsons. It would be a pity to represent it merely by a transcript, if the original survives. It is also just possible that other papers, not known to Dr John Brown or to Mr Macbean, may be in existence, and if so I should be obliged if you would allow me to use your pages as a means of appealing to their owners for the use of them. They would be temporarily kept safe in the British Museum, photographed in the Museum studio, and returned at once insured in transit. Grateful acknowledgments would, of course, be made.—I am, &c.

ARUNDELL ESDAILE.

We find the following year that no less a figure than Arundel Esdaile is preparing to publish a book covering the collection of Marjorie's works. He was a major British librarian and also for many years secretary to the British Museum. The clips show an appeal for a missing letter and also an advertisement for the 1935 publication of

the resultant book.

While there may be doubts over Sir Walter Scott's knowledge of Marjorie's work, the flyleaf carries a quote from Robert Louis Stevenson -- "Marjorie Fleming was possibly - no, I take back possibly - she was one of the noblest works of God".

LITERARY
CATHEDRAL CANTO SERVICE. By Hugh Walpole. 2s. 6d. net. London: Faber.
THE COMPLETE MARJORIE FLEMING. 5s. net. London: Sidgwick & Jackson.
THE JOURNALS, LETTERS, AND VERSES OF MARJORIE FLEMING. Edited by Arundell Esdaile. 42s. net. London: Sidgwick & Jackson.
THINKING ALOUD. By A. G. Street. 6s. net. London: Faber.
BATTERSEA RISE. By Dorothy Pym. 10s. 6d. net. London: Cape.
THE LAWYER'S LAST NOTEBOOK. 5s. net. London: Secker.
AYOWALA AND DENIATA. By G. K. Chesterton. 6s. net. London: Methuen.

Mark Twain described her as being "made out of thunderstorms and sunshine".

The Scotsman of the 27th October 1932 brings us something novel and new. "It is a welcome circumstance that in the year of the Scott Centenary there should be a new edition in a musical setting of the rhymes of Sir Walter's friend, "Pet Marjorie".

Robert McLeod has set to music seven of Marjorie's rhymes:-

"My Dear Love Isabella"

"Princes Street Parade"

"Requiem on a Turkey's Fate"

"Of Summer I am very fond"

"Isa's Bed"

"Death the Righteous Love to see"

"Then I would all happy be"

"Their musical setting involved something of a problem. The work of precocious intelligence, it was necessary that they should not be treated altogether childishly, while the element of the child-like should, nevertheless, not be wholly absent. Mr McLeod has solved his problem very effectively. The music follows the light line of verse with a graceful

freedom while the accompaniment, well within the powers of a pianist of modest attainments, affords just the right amount of support and no more".

The Scotsman on the 20th December 1932 again highlights Marjorie's fame with its *Radio Guide* alerting listeners to "Children's Hour" at 5.15 pm. The

SCOTTISH REGIONAL PROGRAMME	
(797 Kc/S.)	(376.4 M.)
10.15—The Daily Service.	
10.30—Time, Weather Forecast for Farmers and Shipping. National Programme.	
10.45—11.0—What Will You Make?—Miss Helen Simpson. National Programme.	
12.0—Ernest Parsons and his Orchestra, from the Palace, Erdington, Birmingham. Midland Regional Programme.	
1.15—The Manchester Tuesday Midday Society's Concert. A Programme of Christmas Carols, given by the Manchester Cathedral Choir, conducted by Dr A. W. Wilson, relayed from the Houldsworth Hall, Manchester. North Regional Programme.	
2.0—The Midland Studio Orchestra, directed by Frank Cantell. Midland Programme.	
3.0—The Pini Tango Orchestra. National Programme.	
3.45—Sonata Recital. Gladys Noun (Violin), Bertram Harrison (Pianoforte). National Programme.	
4.15—Rene Tapponnier and his Orchestra, from the Carlton Hotel. National Programme.	
5.15—The Children's Hour. Famous Scottish Children—Pet Marjorie, by Marion Angus.	
5.50—Birthdays.	
6.0—Time, Weather, News, Scottish Market prices for Farmers.	
6.30—Whaling Days. Mr Charles Hutton.	
6.50—Scottish Country Dance Tunes. The Scottish Studio Orchestra.	

Scottish Regional programme is broadcasting “Famous Scottish Children – Pet Marjorie” by Marion Angus. The programme had a duration of 25 minutes.

The Fife Free Press of the 18th September 1937 tells of Kirkcaldy having made an appearance on the national stage on the previous Sunday :- “In announcing the broadcast of a children’s service from Abbotshall Parish Church, Kirkcaldy, last Sunday, the *Radio Times* had an illustration of the Pet Marjorie statue which Mr Louis Bremner, Edinburgh, erected in Abbotshall Churchyard a few years ago. The inscription which is easily read in the *Radio Times* illustration, says – “Marjorie Fleming “Pet Marjorie” died at Kirkcaldy, 19th December 1811, aged 8 years 11 months. The youngest immortal in the world of letters”.



The Scotsman of the 3rd July 1941 announced the death of a major player in the story and that was the Rev. Archibald Fleming who passed away in his 78th year. As we learned earlier it was his decision to place Marjorie’s material into the hands of the National Library – thereby possibly saving them for the nation.

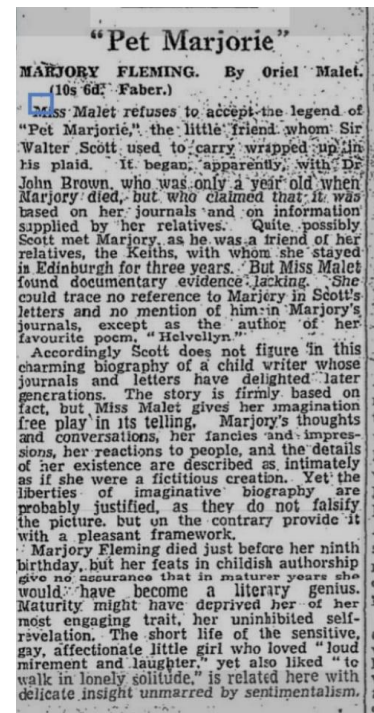
When reviewing and revising this narrative, we came upon an interesting article which had been published in *The Scotsman* on the 8th August 1946. It centred on the publication of a new book on Marjory Fleming

by 'Oriel Malet'. The author's name alone elicited a need for some research. The lady in question was born Lady Auriel Rosemary Malet Vaughan in 1923. Her father was the 7th Earl of Lismore. She wrote under the title - 'Oriel Malet' and specialised in literary fiction and biographies. She was friends with Daphne Du Maurier over a 30 year period and their friendship was also the subject of a book.

It transpires that the book came firmly down on the side of the Sir Walter Scott connection with Marjorie being myth and indeed made no mention of him in the text. We did not come to our own conclusion having seen this article - more that it cemented our own thoughts.

Again' a serious researcher can trace not a single word on Marjorie penned by Scott. The only mention of Scott in the journals is to name one of Scott's poems. Interestingly however we discovered that this book had been translated and published in French and there was also an English reprint as recently as 2000.

The Fife Free Press of the 18th October 1947 looked forward to a play which "should have a special appeal to Kirkcaldy audiences as apart from its principal theme, which portrays the heroic struggles against debt of Sir Walter Scott, it



presents Pet Marjorie whose poignant associations with Kirkcaldy are renowned”.

The play was “Scott of Abbotsford” which had been written by Miss W.E.Gunn. The author, the producer, and also David Steuart, who was cast as Sir Walter, had attempted to prepare for the production by both visiting Abbotsford and reading Scott’s material and letters.

“The Art Gallery of Kirkcaldy has kindly loaned a necklace which was originally owned by Pet Marjorie and it will be worn for the production”.

Last night the Kirkcaldy Museum told the company that they could have, on loan, the necklace originally worn by Pet Marjorie. Miss Margaret Christie, the young actress who is taking the part of Pet Marjorie in the play, is delighted and hopes to wear the necklace when the company comes to the Gateway Theatre in Edinburgh next week.

The supporting roles were filled by Joy Harvey, Elinor Lithgow, Terrance Duggan and Edmund Bailey. Pet Marjorie is played by Margaret Christie, a promising young Glasgow actress”.

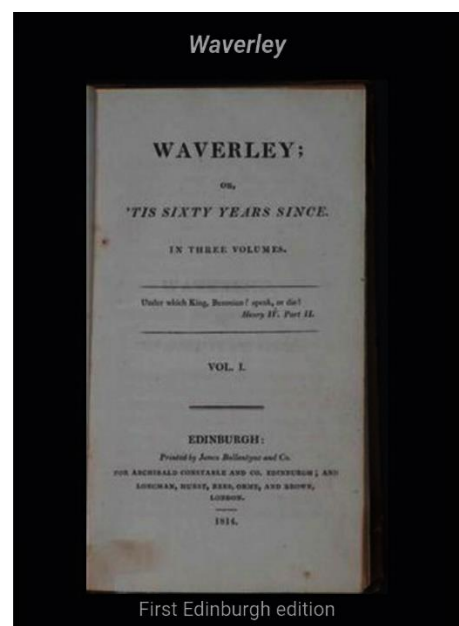
PET MARJORIE.
Kirkcaldy people were mostly interested in the second scene of Act I—which takes place between Scott and Kirkcaldy-born Marjorie Fleming (Pet Marjorie) because keeping strictly to fact it tells of the association between the gifted child and the famous author. Many of the remarks brought into the play are famous and throughout the scene the tenderness of the association was well brought out.
David Steuart had the difficult role of Walter Scott, and while I personally did not care for his performance it was evident that the audience on Wednesday night did. My opinion was that he overacted the part and failed to live up to my expectations of the Laird of Abbotsford. Margaret Christie as Pet Marjorie gave a competent study of the child prodigy, but to me it lacked the spiritual quality with which we have come to associate Marjorie Fleming.
Among the principal characters I specially liked newcomer Rikki Fulton's portrayal of J. G. Lockhart, son-in-law of Walter Scott; Alison Malcolm as Williamina Belches, first love of the poet; Rhona Anderson as Sophia Scott; James Roughead as Tom Purdie, the John Brown-like retainer of Scott; and Wolfe Morris as the clerk to the Jewish firm which threatened legal proceedings against Scott.
Elinor Lithgow's performance as Lady Jane Belches was a supporting role which sparkled all through; while Donald Pleasance gave a beautiful rendering of Sir William Forbes, the banker who won the heart of the fair Williamina. Others in the cast were Joy Harvey as

Further research highlighted that, as far back as the 14th August, Miss Gunn had mentioned to *The Scotsman* a concern that she had over casting. “One difficulty which Miss Gunn expects to encounter is finding a young girl to play Pet Marjorie. If there is any child in Edinburgh capable of taking on the part Miss Gunn would be glad to meet her. Otherwise, the part will

go to a young professional actress. The play opens in Perth on September 8. Later it will go to Kirkcaldy and to the Gateway in Edinburgh". (Kirkcaldy girls, it would seem, were not considered for the part).

The Scotsman, on Thursday, November 27th 1947, considers the content of the *Scottish Historical Review*. The Review had used its very first edition to look at Marjorie and - "In its first number the revived *Scottish Historical Review* set high standards, both in scholarship and in interest for the general reader, which the second admirably sustains. Frank Gent's *Marjorie Fleming and her Biographers* demonstrates inaccuracies that have found their way into records of that gifted child's life and deals especially with her friendship with Sir Walter Scott. In his portrayal of this in "Pet Marjorie", Dr John Brown is held to have given an "exaggerative tendency" pretty free scope.

Our own take, and we are no experts, but having read Brown's works, there is no question that he could write a warm evocative story. However, can we really believe that three advocates could come down Young Street in the driving snow, laughing and joking? They were named as Lord Kinneder, William Clerk and Sir Walter Scott. They parted with Scott going home to work on his *Waverley*



Novel but found himself unable to get into any kind of flow. We are told that he then flung down his pen, wrapped himself in a shepherd's plaid and set out through the deep snow with his wolfhound to 1 North Charlotte Street where Marjorie flung herself into his arms. Supper was suggested and Scott and Marjorie made their way on foot – with this seven year old carried in the internal pocket of the plaid – which would probably have been capable of carrying two / three lambs. No, it seems that all the characters were real, but they have been woven into a fictional story which endured for over 80 years. It is a charming story but far from reality. There certainly was a connection, however tenuous, between Scott and the Fleming family through Marjorie's aunt Marianne. Perhaps the connection was allowed to get out of hand?

RADIO PLAY

**Norma Will Play
"Pet Marjorie"**



It is indeed fitting that a Kirkcaldy girl should have been chosen to play the part of Pet Marjorie, the Kirkcaldy-born child genius, in the first of a Scottish heritage series, entitled "Marjorie Fleming – a portrait," to be broadcast on the Scottish Home Service on Wednesday, at 3 o'clock. Script is by Barbara Kerr.

The lucky and talented lass is Norma Chalmers, 12-year-old daughter of Mr and Mrs Chalmers, 13 King Street, Kirkcaldy.

Norma, who is at present attending George Watson's School for girls, has shown considerable acting ability from an early age. She has appeared in several plays produced by Miss Young, of the Girls' Club.

Tutored in speech-training by Miss Florence Reid, Kirkcaldy, she has always been a keen reader whether of verse or prose.

She made her first radio appearance in the Children's Hour when she read two short poems. But Norma really impressed by her cool and crisp views given in a discussion on children's films, broadcast about a month ago. Norma is quite a thinker!

Shortly after she was asked to attend an audition and was selected

The Fifehire Advertiser of the 13th September 1948 brings both welcome and advance news of the success of a young Kirkcaldy girl. We learn that the first in a Scottish Heritage series will be broadcast on the Scottish Home Service on Wednesday the 17th. "The title is "Marjorie Fleming – a Portrait". Not only is it a local subject, but Marjorie will be played by Norma Chalmers, a 12 year old from 15 King Street, Kirkcaldy. Norma, who at the time was attending George Watson's School for Girls, had

shown acting ability from an early age. She had appeared in several plays produced by Miss Young of the Girls' Club. She has also been tutored in speech-training by Miss Florence Reid of Kirkcaldy. The young lady it seems had always been a keen reader of both prose and verse.

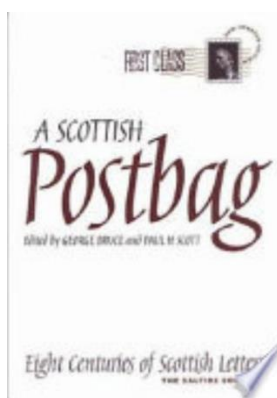
Young Norma was no stranger to the radio having already appeared on "Children's Hour" when she read two short poems. It appears that her cool and crisp views given in a discussion on children's films a month before had impressed. Shortly afterwards, she was invited to an audition and was selected from a number of children to play "Pet Marjorie". The final paragraph was "surely the greatest honour a Kirkcaldy girl could be given!"

The paper added, quite correctly, that the garden of Marjorie's former home now housed its offices.

The Fifehire Advertiser of the 4th February 1950 featured the jubilee of a well known and prestigious gent's outfitters in the town. Alexander Melville, who had started his working life as an apprentice draper in Upper Largo at 2/- per week, had gone on to establish A.K. Melville at 118 High Street. As the business prospered he purchased, in 1921, a three storey building occupied by J & D Young, Stationers, and the Pet Marjorie Museum at 132 High Street. The Museum was entered by a door in the *Fifehire Advertiser* pend. Mr Melville had been born in a house on the site of the property in which Alexander Selkirk had been born in Lower Largo.

This, he said, prompted him to purchase this historic High Street building.

Although the alterations which turned the building, “a proper warren of rooms, up to one, down to another”, into two storeys were extensive, the original gable end of Pet Marjorie’s house remains”. Credit must be given to Mr Melville for recognising the historical worth of his shop facade and ensuring that it was retained. This is a lesson which has failed to have been learned or recognised by generations of Kirkcaldy’s civic fathers.

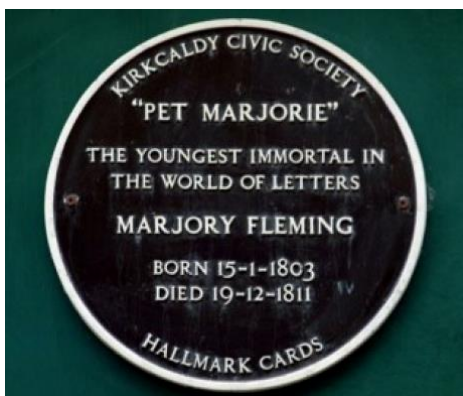


October 1986 saw the publication of an interesting book of some 270 pages. The authors were George Bruce and Paul Henderson Scott. The title of the book was “*A Scottish Postbag*”. Lord Byron said “the great thing about reading old letters is that they do not need a reply”. This book was based around letters written over eight centuries involving many of the great Scottish historical, literary, and political figures of the past.

Amongst the many varied and diverse figures included were Mary, Queen of Scots, John Knox, Adam Smith, David Livingstone, Alexander Graham Bell, Mary Slessor, Ramsay MacDonald, John Buchan, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Eric Liddell, Mungo Park, Sorley MacLean, Walter Scott, Robert Burns, Andrew Carnegie and Madeline Smith.

By any stretch of the imagination each and every one of these individuals is a colossal figure in our history. That two letters by a little Kirkcaldy girl should be included in this exalted company demonstrates the high regard in which Marjorie was still held.

The year 2003 brings us another little link to Marjorie. Bruce Durie, the Kirkcaldy born and internationally renowned genealogist and heraldist, published a book far removed from his normal genre. The book is *The Murder of Young Tom Morris* and it is classed as Victorian crime fiction. It surrounds the sudden death of the champion golfer and is based on the then recently discovered writings of James F. Bremner. Yes, it is indeed Fife's Chief Constable who lived at Sandylands, South Road, Cupar, and was Marjorie's nephew. In Bruce's excellent narrative, "Bremner leads us through the tangled skeins of society politics and gold in Victorian Scotland".



The Courier published an interesting story on the 15th June 2016. Kirkcaldy Civic Society had placed a plaque to Marjorie on the wall of 132 High Street in 1994. Astonishingly, in 2016, the plaque was almost completely obscured by workmen

who placed a parking restriction sign immediately in front of the plaque. The Council when contacted said “they were aware of the situation and confirmed the matter would be dealt with in due course”.

Below is the final work of Marjorie, written five days before her death. It was written after Marjorie had contacted measles, but had seemingly made a recovery. However, it was to be a short recovery and she was stricken by severe pains in the head. She died on the 19th December from “water on the head”, now believed to be meningitis.

Address to Dear Isabella on the Author's Recovery

O, Isa pain did visit me
I was at the last extremity
How often did I think of you
I wished your graceful form to view
To clasp you in my weak embrace
Indeed I thought I'd run my race
Good care I'm sure of me was taken
But indeed I was much shaken
At last I daily strength did gain
At length the doctor thought I might

Stay in the parlour till the night

I will continue so to do

Farewell to Nancy and to you. (wrote by MF)

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

“The house that was hallowed by the birth and death of Pet Marjorie is little changed and around it clings an atmosphere of pensive memories”. Therefore, the conclusion to this narrative perhaps cannot be bettered other than by quoting the evocative thoughts of Jessie Patrick Findlay. She seems to have hit just the right note aided by a correct choice of words:-

“I sat lately in the sacred rooms which witnessed the closing scene of Marjorie’s last Sabbath on earth. In a corner, behind the door, once stood the piano on which her mother played *The Land O’ the Leal* while Marjorie pondered in her little bed upstairs. Somewhere on that space of floor had paced Marjorie’s father with his spirit-like girl held fast in his strong arms; somewhere on that space of floor, the ethereal child had knelt by a chair to write that last message from her loving heart. As I gazed in solemn reverie, Marjorie’s death seemed so real, so recent, so personal of sorrow, that it was impossible in that room to realise that the grass had been green and the snow white over her tiny grave for fully eighty seven years”.

Her father survived her death by about thirty years, but the thought of her never left him and it was said that he could never bring himself to speak her name. Her mother lived ten years later still and often told the story of Pet Marjorie to her youngest daughter, the baby of Marjorie's day.

Marjorie's brother, William, was thirteen years old when she died. He had obtained a commission in the Army of the East India Company, took part in one naval engagement, and whilst still a youth died in India. The story of Marjorie's two sisters, Isabella and Elizabeth, have already been recounted.

Her friend, tutor and cousin, Isa Keith, married James Wilson of Edinburgh. They were married in 1824, taking up their residence at Woodville, near Edinburgh. Mr Wilson travelled much and was a well known naturalist and writer. They had two children who often reminded their mother of her lost 'Maidie'. Isa died in 1837.

Mackenzie, silk-mercer, Edinburgh, to Agnes Greig, second daughter of Mr Robert Anderson, merchant, Leith.

May 6. The Rev. John Peel, son of Sir Robert Peel, Bart. to Augusta, daughter of John Swinfen, of Swinfen House, in the county of Stafford, Esq.

— At Camberwell church, the Rev. William Swete, second son of the late Rev. John Swete, of Oxtou House, Devonshire, to Mary Ann, youngest daughter of David Gordon, Esq. of Abergeldie, N. B., and Dulwich Hill, Surrey.

7. At Mrs Keith's, Corstorphine Hill, James Wilson, Esq. to Miss Isabella Keith, youngest daughter of the late William Keith, Esq. of Corstorphine Hill.

8. At Pennyland, near Thurso, Robert Rose, Esq. writer in Thurso, to Elizabeth, third daughter of the late Alex. Paterson, Esq. Pennyland.

11. The Rev. H. H. Milman, Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford, to Mary Ann, youngest daughter of Lieutenant-General Cockell, of Sandiford Lodge, Berkshire.

— At the parish church of Blackburn, James Hozier, Esq. advocate, younger of Newlands and Barrowfield, to Catharine Margaret, second daughter of William Feilden, Esq. of Fenniscollies, Lancashire.

12. At London, the Marquis of Exeter, to Miss Isabella Poyntz, daughter of W. S. Poyntz, Esq. of Grosvenor Place.

15. At London, John Cross Buchanan, of Auchintoshan, Esq. to Jean, eldest daughter of Andrew Wardrop, Esq. of the island of Madeira.

18. At Edinburgh, S. Callender, Esq. merchant, to Amelia, youngest daughter of the late Mr

It has been a source of pleasure and satisfaction to work on this narrative and formulate a fuller picture of Marjorie's life and legacy. Two sad facts have emerged during the research for this story. Firstly, the gradual destruction of the myth which had painted a close and warm relationship between Sir Walter Scott and Marjorie Fleming. From complete

acceptance in the mid 19th century, it is now accepted as flawed and only existing in the minds of Elizabeth Fleming and John Brown. He can be easily forgiven for this excess; after all it was his work which propelled Marjorie into the public consciousness in the first place. Secondly, our small sample in a straw poll shows that Pet Marjorie is all but forgotten in the town of her birth and death. From 23 people asked, 22 had no idea of her or her story. That seems a sad statistic.

The foregoing has attempted to paint a picture of the high regard in which Marjorie was once held, but it now seems to have dissipated. Kirkcaldy has few enough heroines to allow one to be swept under the carpet.

Her work for one so young is beguiling, bewitching and bewildering. On reading from the National Library of Scotland archives – the first question is – how could an eight year old with no formal education produce this? We would again commend the archive to all our readers – in its own way, the material speaks a thousand words and unlike this narrative they are the words of Marjory Fleming herself.