

## George Heriot, Founder of Heriot's School, and the Heriots of Trabroun

by Ray Harriot

It is often said that George Heriot, jeweller to King James VI and founder of the Heriot School in Edinburgh by way of his will, was a son of the Heriots of Trabroun, but nobody has been able to state how with any accuracy. The problem is that the early documents concerning George Heriot and the Heriots of Trabroun contained errors, some of which have been perpetuated for over 200 years. I hope this article will correct some of the errors and spawn some additional research into this great man.

The earliest such publication was the *Memoirs of George Heriot, Jeweller to King James VI with an Historical Account of the Hospital*, by Archibald Constable in 1822. It states "George Heriot was the eldest son of a goldsmith, in Edinburgh, of the same name, who was descended from Heriot of Trabroun, a family of some antiquity of East Lothian..." It goes on to state that George Heriot's father "appears to have been one of the most respectable men of his day, served often as a commissioner of estates, and parliament of Scotland."

On 14 January 1586 George Heriot, the younger, entered into marriage with Christian Marjoribanks, daughter of Simon Marjoribanks in Edinburgh. By Christian Marjoribanks he had no children who survived him: indeed, it is not known for certain whether there were any children of this marriage.

After Christian died, he married Alison Primrose, eldest daughter of James Primrose, clerk of the Privy Council and grandfather of the first Earl of Roseberry. Unfortunately, his second wife died soon after the marriage. George Heriot died on 12 February 1624. He had no legitimate heirs, though in his will he acknowledged two illegitimate daughters, Elizabeth Band and Margaret Scott.

The founder's father, also George Heriot, had also been married twice and left children by both wives. By his first wife he had two sons (George and Patrick) and a daughter (Margaret). Christian Blaw, the second wife, was alive at the time of the death of her stepson and was recognized in his will. It indicated that by his second wife George Heriot senior left three sons (David, James, and Thomas) and four daughters (Christian, Sybilla, Janet, and Marion).



George Heriot, goldsmith  
and founder, picture in  
George Heriot's School

The next such publication was the *History of George Heriot's Hospital with a Memoir of the Founder*, by William Steven in 1845, Revised and Enlarged by Frederick W. Bedford in 1859. This book contains a fold-out chart depicting the founder's family, pretty much as described above, but also expanded to show some grandchildren. It is generally this chart that is provided by the Heriot Trust in answer to enquiries about the founder's family. It shows a relationship to the Heriots of Trabroun, but jumps directly from James Heriot of Niddry-Marischal to George Heriot, the founder's grandfather, skipping the many generations in between.

Probably the document referred to most heavily is *Heriots of Trabroun*, which was published in 1894 by G.W.B., himself a son of Trabroun. This book does not specifically get into the family of George Heriot, the founder, but describes the descent of the Lairds of Trabroun and indicates that George Heriot, the founder, is a descendent. Unfortunately, the book contains some errors that, I believe, have for hundreds of years thwarted George Heriot's placement within the tree.

Finally, to see how this information has been perpetuated throughout the years, a recent book, *Jinglin' Geordies's Legacy, A History of George Heriot's Hospital and School*, by Brian R. W. Lockhart, contains a Chapter on George Heriot and his family. Although he has made some corrections, the book still contains many of the same errors.

From the above sources has derived most of the information published today about George Heriot, the founder: that he was one of 10 children of his father, George; that his father had married twice; that he had no children himself; and that the Heriots are somehow connected to the Heriots of Trabroun. The question is how?

Let's address each of these:

**George Heriot was one of 10 children:** In 1624-5 when James Heriot, the younger son of George Heriot, elder, and a half-brother to the founder, was married to Elizabeth Josey in St. Mary Magdalen's Church, Bermondsey, there was a comment in the margin of the marriage ledger, in the handwriting of the time, stating, "one of forty children of the father, a Scotchman." Could this be?

George Heriot, the eldest son, was born about 1563 and his half-brother James, the youngest son, in 1598, which is a span of about 35 years. Oldest son and youngest son do not equate to oldest child and youngest child, as there could have been daughters outside this range. As you'll see, George Heriot, elder, married several times, always younger women of child-bearing age. There's at least one documented natural child. Could there have been more children? There's at least one documented set of twins. So, forty children is a possibility; however, more than 10 is a reality.

The following children have been identified that are not included in the original 10, and I suspect there are others:

Clement – baptised 18 January 1595 (did not survive)

Robert and Alexander, twin sons - baptised 22 March 1601

Elizabeth (Elspeth) – mentioned in will of Andrew Heriot and in Burgess Records

Adam – from apprentice records

Michael – from apprentice records

**George Heriot, Senior was married twice:** The above documents indicate that George Heriot, senior, had been married to Elizabeth Balderston and then to Christian Blaw. We have found evidence of at least a third marriage to Katherine Outheane (Loutheane).

This has been confirmed from Burgess Records:

George Heriot, G, elder, goldsmyt, B of befoir. Be R of W, Katherene, dr. to Alexr Ousteane, B and G 30 November 1591.

**George Heriot had no children himself:** The Heriots of Trabroun indicated that Robert Sibbald had found a reference to George Heriot, founder, having two sons who had died en route to England from Scotland. This has also been reported in several other publications. Here is proof that he had at least two and possibly more:

Robert – 25 November 1599 – George Heriot, younger, goldsmith, ASN Robert

John – 27 December 1601 – George Heriot, younger, ASN Johne. Witnesses include George Heriot, goldsmith, elder

Andrew – 27 December 1601 - George Heriot, younger goldsmith, asn Andrew (John's twin?)

### **Now for the connection to the Heriots of Trabroun:**

A connection cannot be disputed: just take one look at the founder's Coat of Arms. George Heriot used the Heriots of Trabroun Coat of Arms with the addition of a Star. In heraldry, the Star is a symbol of a third son, so it is likely that George Heriot descended from the third son of a Laird. But which one?

George Heriot, elder, and George Heriot, younger, are mentioned in the will of Andrew Heriot, brother of the Laird of Trabroun, in 1585-87. Andrew refers to George Heriot, younger, as his "very friend". This would indicate that they are related, but not very closely, as he does not refer to him as brother or even cousin. By their respective Coats of Arms it is obvious that both belong to the Heriots of Trabroun. Thus, James Heriot (married to Isabell Maitland), Laird of Trabroun, appears to be a contemporary of George Heriot, elder.



Coat of Arms  
of the Heriot School  
incorporating that  
of the founder

The book *The Account Book of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston (1671-1707)* states that James Foulis, the eldest son of Sir Henry Foulis, married Agnes of the family of

Heriot of Lumphoy (otherwise of Trabroun), "to which family George Heriot, King James's goldsmith, and the founder of Heriot Hospital in Edinburgh, belonged." Later it states that Mr. Thomas Craig was the godfather of Jonnett Foulis. This Thomas Craig is the husband of Helen Heriot, daughter of Robert Heriot, and sister to the above Agnes. Finally, it is stated that the godmother of Johnne Bannatyne was ????? Swynttoun, the wife of Mr Robert Herreott. This is a reference to Robert Heriot and his wife Helen Swinton.

These references are confirmed in the book *The Swintons of that Ilk*: "John Swinton obtained in 1518 a dispensation from Pope Leo X for his marriage to a relation in the 3rd and 4th degrees of consanguinity. The lady was Marion, daughter of David Hume of Wedderburn... (by) this marriage, contracted with so much deliberation, there were two sons... and eight daughters... The eldest Helen, was twice married. By her first husband, Robert Heriot of Lymphoy, otherwise designed of Trabroun, she had three daughters who married respectively Sir James Foulis of Colinton, the celebrated lawyer Sir Thomas Craig of Riecarton, and John Laurie, Bailee of Edinburgh."

*Heriots of Trabroun* erroneously indicates that Helen, wife of Sir Thomas Craig, was the daughter of James Heriot, Laird of Trabroun, and his wife Isabelle Maitland, making the assumption that, since this was the second daughter named Helen, it was not uncommon for families to provide the same name for siblings. This mistake has been perpetuated in most Craig family trees noted online.

There are other references in the Foulis book which relate the Heriots of Trabroun to the family of George Heriot, the founder:

George Foulis, or second sone was borne 6 April 1606. His godfaders George Bannatyne, my godfather, and George Heriot, elder; his godmother being Beatrix Chirnsyd, spouse to Sr Luyes Craigy...

*The Accounts of Sir John Foulis* provides strong indications that Robert Heriot of Trabroun and George Heriot, the jeweller, are somehow related. This would also be supported by the fact that Thomas Foulis, a close relation, was also a jeweller to the king.

My analysis would indicate that the godparents of the Bannatyne children would be separated by one generation, as the children are separated by one generation; that would make Robert Heriot of the same



Heriot Tomb in Greyfriars' Kirkyard, Edinburgh, burial site of George Heriot, senior, goldsmith (1540-1610)

generation as George Heriot's grandfather, since he would be a generation before George Heriot's father...and they would likely be related as inferred in the Foulis book.

So what do we know about this Robert Heriot, besides his being married to Helen Swinton? He was probably born about 1520. This would be approximately the same age as the founder's grandfather, who had his first child George Heriot in 1540. Robert was a sheriff of Roxburgh. He was an educated man as he was almost always referred to as Mr. Robert Heriot. His father's name was John and he was a cousin of Henry Sinclair.

Henry Sinclair, son of Oliver Sinclair, was Bishop of Ross. In 1541, he was appointed Abbott of Kilwinning. In 1561, he was appointed to the Privy Council of Mary Queen of Scots. Since he was a cousin to Robert Heriot, Robert Heriot's father John must have been married to a Sinclair or a Livingston (as Henry Sinclair's father Oliver Sinclair was married to Isabel Livingston). I also suspect that Robert's father John also had a brother James Heriot, who was the Canon of Ross until his death in 1522. *Heriots of Trabroun* again erroneously places this James Heriot as a son of James Heriot, Laird of Trabroun, and his wife ? Congleton. (again using the justification that it was often common to give the same name to more than one child). Thus, this James Heriot, Canon of Ross, would be a cousin of James Heriot, the Laird, rather than a brother as reported in *Heriots of Trabroun*.

This is important as it is well documented that James Heriot, Canon of Ross, was the benefactor of his nephew, George Buchanan, whose education in Paris he funded until his death in 1522. Thus, George Buchanan's mother, Agnes Heriot, wife of Thomas Buchanan, would not be the daughter of the Laird, but rather the sister of Robert Heriot's father John. Several biographies of the famous George Buchanan, indicate that his mother, Agnes Heriot, was "of the same family" as George Heriot, the jeweller – another fact that has often been stated, but never proven.

So what else do we know about Robert Heriot's father John? We know that he died before 1550 and we know that the Foulis family and the above Heriots were all associated with the area of Ravelston, the focus of James Foulis's journal.



George Buchanan (1506-1582),  
Greyfriars' Kirkyard

I believe that besides Robert, he had at least the following children:

George Heriot, grandfather of the founder. I have already shown that the Foulis book says that George Heriot, the founder, and Robert Heriot were of the same family, and

it appears that Robert Heriot was a generation before George Heriot's father, making him of the same generation as George Heriot's grandfather. The Banantyne, Foulis, and these Heriot families had very strong ties to Ravelston, and subsequent descendents of George Heriot were located in neighbouring Corstorphine. As a matter of fact, George Heriot is referred to in one instance in *Heriots of Trabroun* as George Heriot of Ravelston.

Alexander Heriot, referred to in *Heriots of Trabroun* as being Alexander Heriot, son of John Heriot of Ravelson, in 1565. Witnesses were James Heriot, Jr. of Trabroun and Andrew Heriot showing ties to the Heriots of Trabroun.

John Heriot (born about 1530): he had at least three sons, and possibly a fourth – Gawen Heriot (b: abt 1557), Andrew Heriot of Ravelston (b: abt 1559) who married Agnes Fairlie, Alexander Heriot (b: abt 1562), and possibly James Heriot (b: abt 1563). Most of these family members were maltmen and had ties to the family of jewellers.

Gilbert and Allane - 13 June 1532: Dame Isabell Livingston, Lady Rosling, James L. her brother, and Mr. Henry Sinclair as procrator for Mr. Robert Hereot and Gilbert H. brothers to umquhile Allane H. on one part; and William Flemyng of Boghall, and Marion Flemyng, relict of Allane Hereote, with consent of Robert Striveling now her spouse on the other.

Other supporting information for the above:

All of these are prominent Heriot names within George Heriot's family, as well as the Laird's family. The names John, Robert, and Alexander are more prominent in the jewellers' line. James seems to be more prominent in the lines of the Laird.

Robert Heriot and Helen Swinton named a daughter Agnes (after his aunt Agnes who married Thomas Buchanan).

Agnes Heriot and Thomas Buchanan named their sons Thomas Buchanan, Alexander Buchanan, Robert Buchanan, Patrick Buchanan, and George Buchanan (the latter probably named after George Heriot).

Robert Fairlie, who died in 1589, a descendent of the above John Heriot, was an apprentice to George Heriot, goldsmith on 13 April 1586.

John Heriot, son of Gawen Heriot, maltman, also a son of above John Heriot, was a goldsmith, 31 January 1610.

Alexander Heriot, son to the late Matthew Heriot of Ravelston, was apprenticed to John Heriot, tailor, 29 August 1598. This is the John Heriot, tailor, who is mentioned in George Heriot's (the founder's) will, whereby he established the trust for George Heriot's School. Again, shows the close ties to Ravelston.

The article *Social Life in Scotland 1884*, talks about Thomas Foulis, goldsmith, and states that George Heriot, a relative of Foulis, was in 1597 appointed goldsmith to the

queen. This Thomas Foulis is the brother of James Foulis who married Agnes Heriot, great-niece of George Heriot, the founder.

The Heriots who appear in the Glasgow district in the sixteenth century were probably connected with Henry Sinclair, Dean of Glasgow, who was of the Rosslyn family. This has been confirmed via land dealings between the Sinclairs and Robert Heriot, brother of the founder's grandfather.

So, through this analysis, we now have a good indication as to the family of the founder's great-grandfather – but we still have not conclusively tied him to the Heriots of Trabroun. So let's take a look at what else we know.

It appears that John Heriot, father of the founder's great-grandfather was a contemporary of James Heriot, son of James Heriot and ? Congleton, who married Alison Hamilton. Thus, his father would most likely have been a contemporary of James Heriot (married to the eldest daughter of Richard Congleton). The latter James became Laird from his father Simon Heriot. *Heriots of Trabroun* does not say much about Simon. We have learned more from NAS records. Evidently Simon Heriot had brothers, John and William, and sons, George and William, in addition to the eventual heir James.

The most likely candidate for John Heriot's father would be Simon Heriot's son, George Heriot. After all, he did sign the deed in 1477 for the Cathedral of Ross of which his grandson, James Heriot, later became Canon. He would also have had strong ties to the Sinclairs, as Henry Sinclair was the Bishop of Ross.

Since Simon had at least three sons, with James, the heir, being the first, then it's very likely that George could be the third son of Trabroun as depicted on his Coat of Arms.

One of the executors of James Heriot's (Canon of Ross) will in 1522, was Sir John Heriot - his uncle?

I hope this article corrects many of the errors that have prevented Heriot researchers from expanding this family and will shed new light on the ancestry of the Heriots, Buchanans, and Craigs. It may not be 100% correct, but I believe the evidence supports the conclusions. I would like to acknowledge Mr. Allan R. M. Murray of Edinburgh, a graduate of Heriot's School, whose research on the founder has been an inspiration to me.

## **HERRIOTT DNA PROJECT**

The Herriott Heritage Association has recently embarked on a Surname DNA Project to try and tie all Herriott Surnames, regardless of spelling, to their Scottish roots. Presently we have participants from the United States (Herriott, Harriott, Harriot, and Heriot), England (Herriott), Scotland (Herriot), Ireland (Herriott), and Australia (Herriott). So far we have confirmed that many of these lines have roots originating in Scotland and could possibly have common ancestry around 1400-1500. We would

really like to expand our testing to include more Scottish participants. If you are interested, please contact our Herriott Surname Project co-ordinator:

James Heriot, MD, 1403 Calcutta Drive, Gulf Breeze, Florida 32563-3440, USA

---

### **A Schoolmaster Ayton, Berwickshire**

That Mr. John White was elected Schoolmaster of the Parish of Ayton on the fifteenth day of September Seventeen Hundred and Eighty six; That he was married to Mary Gibson on the thirty first Day of December Seventeen hundred and Eighty Eight, That he has now three children alive VIZ John born on the twenty first day of June one thousand Seven hundred and Ninety One, Isabella born on the thirteenth day of November Seventeen hundred and Ninety four and Catharine born on the fifteenth day of July Seventeen hundred and Ninety Eight is attested at Chirnside the twenty Eighth day of July Eighteen hundred and ten years by

Mr. White born 23 Augt. 1758

John White (signature)

Mrs. White born 25 Sept. 1770

Geo. McLean Proses (signature)

That Mr. John White died on the Second of March Eighteen hundred and twenty Nine Years is attested by

Thomas Dickson.

That the aforesaid vacancy was supplied on the

By the Election of Mr. John Trotter to be Schoolmaster of Ayton is attested.

Mr. Trotter having been translated to Musselburgh, he was succeeded by Mr. James Fortune, who was elected Schoolmaster January the Eight, Eighteen hundred and thirty six.

Source: National Archives of Scotland, Reference: CH2/386/18/11

*Contributed by Russell Cockburn*

---

### **John Watson's School, Edinburgh**

Thanks to some enthusiastic volunteers, this out-of-print, detailed and enjoyable history by Isobel C. Wallis is now available in CD format, price £12 (plus p&p, if ordered by post). It's available in the shop of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Belford Road, Edinburgh (the building the School occupied latterly), or by post from the John Watson Club's Secretary, Mary Margaret Gordon, 28 Craigmount View, Edinburgh EH12 8BT. Proceeds go to the John Watson Foundationers' Trust.

[www.johnwatsonfpclub.org.uk](http://www.johnwatsonfpclub.org.uk)