

ROBERT KEAY (1766-1839) AND NEPHEWS, SILVERSMITHS

by Charles Dewar Waterston

Set a genealogical hare running and it may lead through unfamiliar territory to a result of wider interest than expected. An example of such a surprise arose for me from a simple family question - which remains unanswered!

My grandmother's maiden name was Margaret Dewar and her grandfather James Dewar married her grandmother Anne Kea or Keay in 1808¹. Anne was born in 1777, the youngest and ninth child of Andrew Kea and Agnes Brodie in the township of Nether Kincairney in the Perthshire parish of Caputh². Having failed to trace any descendent of her brothers or sisters in the usual sources, I fell back on family tradition. My grandmother believed that Robert Keay Senior, the well-known Perth silversmith, had been related. Could that be proved? A simple question which set this hare running.

Robert Keay was born in 1766, the sixth and youngest child of David Kea or Keay and Elizabeth Scott.³ David Kea became a freeman of the Wright's Incorporation of Perth in 1755 by virtue of marrying a daughter of Robert Scott who had been admitted a freeman of that Incorporation in 1714.⁴ David had died before his son Robert's indenture as apprentice to Robert Dickson was minuted on 15th July 1780. Robert was admitted Freeman of the Perth Incorporation of Hammermen on 13th June 1791, his essay having been a plain gold ring, and was admitted a Burgess of the city on the same day.⁵ As a master silversmith he signed the indenture of his first apprentice on 30th August 1791 and over a score more were to follow. Robert Keay is well known to cognoscenti of Scottish Silver as a leading Perth goldsmith, silversmith and jeweller.⁶ He was in business at 29 George Street, a house built by his father David Kea, wright, and his father's partner David MacLaren, plasterer.

Robert Keay married Elizabeth Young, daughter of William Young, supervisor of Excise in 1796.⁷ The union was childless and, as is well known, Keay's partner and successor was his nephew Robert Keay junior. My study of Robert Keay senior's relationships, however, revealed the less well known fact that among his many apprentices four others, David Manson, William Forrester, Joseph Forrester and James Menzies were also his nephews.

David Manson (1783 - 1821)

Robert's sister Elizabeth was the oldest member of the family and married a Perth merchant John Manson in 1780.⁸ Her elder son David Manson was born in 1783.⁹ David's indenture to his Uncle Robert Keay was signed on 30th October and recorded in the Minutes of the Perth Hammermen on 6th November 1798.¹⁰ Mr H. Steuart Fotheringham has informed me that David Manson was admitted to the Hammermen's Incorporation of Dundee on 24th May 1806 and between 1809 and 1818 had a shop

there in Crichton Street using the maker's mark DM.¹¹ He does not appear in the Dundee Directories after 1818 when he apparently went to Jamaica where he died in 1821.¹²

Robert Keay Jnr. (1800 - 1856)

An older brother of the senior Robert Keay was David who was born at Perth in 1763.¹³ David became a coppersmith and moved to London where he married Mary Box in 1795.¹⁴ Their son Robert was born in London c. 1800.¹⁵ Young Robert was apprenticed to his Uncle Robert Keay in 1816 and admitted a freeman goldsmith and jeweller of the Burgh by the Hammermen Incorporation of Perth in 1825, his essay being a gold set pin.¹⁶ In the same year he entered partnership with his uncle as Robert and Robert Keay adopting a variety of punches reading R & R Keay. The business continued at 29 George Street but by 1837 also occupied 31 George Street. Following the elder Robert Keay's death in 1839 Robert jnr. continued the business until his own death in 1856. "The family business therefore lasted 65 years and their output was prolific covering all manner of ecclesiastical and domestic wares."¹⁷

In the year after he entered into partnership with his uncle, Robert jnr. married Felicity Walker¹⁸ and had a family of one boy and three girls. The boy was named David and in 1859 was admitted a freeman of the Incorporation of Hammermen of Perth by right of his father. He was a lawyer by profession and did not practice as a silversmith although did attend meetings of the Incorporation.¹⁹

Robert Keay jnr. was a bailie of the city of Perth at the time of the visit of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in September 1842 and is portrayed in silhouette with other city dignitaries before the triumphal arch erected at the extremity of Princes Street for the occasion.²⁰ It was Bailie Keay who made the keys of the city which were presented to Queen Victoria on that occasion and which now form part of the silver collection of the Perth Museum and Art Gallery. He also had shipping interests as a partner in Messrs Keay, McKenzie & Co of Perth.²¹ Like many of his contemporaries he speculated heavily in railway shares. He died at the age of fifty-six after six months illness on 6th June 1856.²² Legal complications followed and the estate was sequestered.²³

William Forrester (1801 - 1854)

Jean or Janet Young, born in Dundee in 1785, was an elder sister of the senior Robert Keay's wife Elizabeth.²⁴ In 1800 she married David Forrester, glover in Perth, and had three children prior to his death at the age of forty-seven in 1811.²⁵ David Forrester's younger brother Patrick was a silversmith and by 1809 was established in business in Hull where his son Joseph James was born.²⁶ The widowed Jean Forrester's elder son William chose to follow his two uncles in the silversmith's craft. He began his apprenticeship in 1817 with his uncle Robert Keay which allowed him to stay at home in Perth.²⁷ In the indenture the support of Henry Hepburn, builder in Perth, another uncle of William Forrester, is minuted.²⁸ Having completed his apprenticeship, he

moved to London and in 1825 bought a first floor flat and attics at 54 Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell where he carried on his business.²⁹ Early letters from William Forrester to Keay show how hazardous was his own trade and how his well-established Uncle Patrick took a kindly interest in his affairs. On 18th December 1825 he wrote:

My Uncle in Hull has sent me a small order and when I buy some gold tomorrow to go on with it I will be almost without a sovereign.³⁰

On 29th May 1827 he wrote:

I have had my uncle from Hull living with me for 3 weeks past, he left on Saturday. He is quite well but looks much older than when I last saw him. He had not been in London for 33 years and was much surprised at the many changes that had taken place. I have seen more of the sights to be seen in London since he came than ever I did. When here he laid out £1000 for plate but bought very little jewellery.³¹

William kept his head above water until there was a fire at his premises and, probably as a consequence, he was declared bankrupt in 1829.³² It is clear from the surviving papers that he was given financial help, probably both before and after the fire, by his aunt Mrs Henry Hepburn and his cousin Robert Keay jnr.³³ His business revived, he married and moved to Marylebone Street, Piccadilly where, the 1841 census describes him as jeweller and the 1851 census lists his five surviving children. In 1853 he moved to 11 Rupert Street, Haymarket where he went into partnership with Richard Morgan, his private address then being 9 Hobury Street, Chelsea. He appears to have died in 1854 after which his widow Charlotte Anne Forrester joined Richard Morgan in partnership until she retired in 1860.³⁴ They were small workers, their trade being in goods such as silver-mounted whips, fly-whisks, hunting horns etc.

Joseph Forrester (1805 - c.1860?)

Joseph was William Forrester's younger brother.³⁵ His indenture to his uncle Robert Keay was supported as Cautioner by Thomas Hills, Stationer, Perth, and minuted in 1820.³⁶ It is doubtful if Joseph served out his apprenticeship with his uncle for by 1825 he was with his brother William in London. William wrote to Robert Keay:

Joseph is much steadier than he was. He is entirely out of work and he is not likely to get it - however I will try and employ him some way or another and have him under my own eye - of course I have to supply him with the means of living ... Joseph is such a simpleton ...³⁷

Less than a month later William wrote again to his uncle:

I have taken Joseph in, he can chase very well and has been very steady for this short time. I mean to keep him very short of money... I shall become his banker. I shall give him as much as he can get any where else but will always keep a balance in my own hands giving him only enough for to pay his lodgings, washing &c and an allowance for pocket money.³⁸

Joseph, however, had a drink problem and, if William would not give him money to

slake his thirst, he would get it elsewhere. He appears to have done so by theft. I knew from later correspondence in the Perth Archive that he had been a convict in Hobart. I therefore wrote to the Archives Office of Tasmania to enquire what they knew of Joseph Forrester. The generosity and detail of their response amazed me and gave a graphic picture of his life between 1829 and 1845.

Joseph was convicted of housebreaking in London on 15th January 1829 and transported for life, sailing on the *Thames* on 21st November 1829 for Hobart. The official document describes him as "Silversmith, Jeweller, Watch case maker", five foot nine and a half inches in height, with dark brown hair, grey eyed and having the little finger of the right hand broken.³⁶ On arrival he was assigned to a Mr J C Underwood³⁶ but by 1832 he had been assigned to David Barclay. Barclay (c.1804-1884) was born in Montrose and trained in London before emigrating to Hobart in 1830 where he was in business as a clockmaker, woodcarver and jeweller.⁴¹ Joseph's conduct record between 1832 and 1840 is regrettable but colourful.⁴² He was punished for being drunk and disorderly in various Hobart hostels - "The Spotted Cow", "Help me thro' the World", "George & Dragon" and "The Albion", also for disorderly conduct - fighting, inciting insubordination, using threatening language and absence from church attendance. Bread and water or a night in the cells was usual but in 1833 more serious offences led him to labouring in a road gang during which he lost his hammer and received three months imprisonment with hard labour.

Joseph had reached the nadir of his career after which things improved, perhaps through the influence of the girl who was later to become his wife. He obtained his ticket of leave in 1839 and from 1840 to 1846 worked in Hobart on his own account. After obtaining official permission, he married 26 year old Mary Ann Sadler at Trinity Church, Hobart Town on 3rd April 1841.⁴³ The couple lived in 14 Collins Street, Hobart. Sadly their baby son Joseph William, who had been born on 2nd January 1842, died of a chest infection six months later on the 31st July.⁴⁴ Joseph had received his conditional pardon a month before his baby son's death.⁴⁵ He wrote to Robert Keay jnr. in 1843 telling him of his conditional discharge and that he had left his employers to take over the shop and premises at 14 Collins Street where he then lived.⁴⁶ That his pardon was likely must have been known for some time before this and his family in Britain did what it could to assist him to set up for himself by sending money and equipment. His discharge was extended in 1845 and, on 11th November 1845, he received permission to leave for any country except Europe.

The nature of the response from the Archives Office of Tasmania made me think it unlikely that so much work had been done simply to answer my enquiry! On asking further they confirmed that another researcher had been interested in Joseph Forrester and that they would forward any letter I wrote to him and, if he so wished, he would contact me direct. Thus I was privileged to hear from, and later to meet, Mr J B Hawkins, author of the magisterial two volume work *Nineteenth Century Australian Silver*, whose research had led him to Hobart but not to Perth, Scotland.⁴⁷

In a brilliant piece of detection, Hawkins was able to conclude that silver and gold pieces which had been made in different parts of Australia at different times, and which were stamped with various makers' marks, bore such striking stylistic similarities that they must have been produced by the same hand. He thus traced the work of Joseph Forrester from Hobart with Barclay from 1832 - March 1833 and March 1835 - 1840 and in Hobart on his own account 1840-1846 during which his work bore the marks of David Barclay. Then in Port Phillip, Victoria on his own account 1846-, in Collins Street, Melbourne with Charles Brentani 1848-, in 100 Bourke Street, Melbourne on his own account 1850-1856. Hawkins book catalogues and illustrates many of Joseph's pieces some of which are now prized exhibits in the museums of Australia.

Joseph visited England in 1855, probably to see to family business following his brother William's death. He wrote to Robert Keay jnr from London having been advised by his sister Christian, Mrs David Stuart, not to visit Perth. He had asked her to send him "some small remittance" but had been refused and told that he would receive money neither from Mr Stuart nor Mrs William Forrester. Undeterred by this coolness he wrote:

I am as well and strong as ever I was and, when I settle my business in London, I am going back to Melbourne to sell off all there and come back either to Scotland or London for good.⁴⁸

Robert Keay's reply must have been as discouraging as his sister's because in a later undated letter to Keay Joseph wrote:

I duly received yours of 22nd June when you state you were surprised at my returning to England. The reason is simple, after so many years absence, that I would naturally have a wish to see my native place again and the Friends of my youth. I certainly will not visit Perth. I will take my Sister's advice & your advice. I was not aware of the gossiping tendencies it would create and would be extremely sorry to do any thing that would be painful to any of my relations in any manner.⁴⁹

It was a saddened Joseph that embarked on the *Queen of the Seas* to return to Melbourne. He appears to have sold up his business in Melbourne on his return. Hawkins cites evidence that he worked for William Edwards in Melbourne until the mid 1860s but, as yet, we do not know whether or when he died there.

James Menzies (1811 - 1842)

Maria or Marian Young, the youngest sister of Elizabeth Young wife of Robert Keay snr., married in 1810 Charles Menzies, Stocking Maker later landwaiter of the Customs, in Perth.⁵⁰ They had a family of four boys and three girls, their eldest child being James born in 1811.⁵¹ Charles Menzies died before James was indentured. James was apprenticed to his uncle Robert Keay senr. and his cousin Robert Keay jnr. as masters supported by James Mouat, Wood Merchant in Perth as Cautionery, in 1827.⁵² He was apparently still in Perth and in touch with Robert Keay jnr. twelve years later because he wrote a receipt to Keay for a loan of £30 dated Perth 1st January 1839.

I am grateful to Mr Steuart Fotheringham for pointing out that in 1839 "Ja. Menzies Perth, brought twelve dessert spoons for assay to the Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh and appears to have become a fully qualified master Goldsmith and silversmith in or about that time.⁵³ In the following year Robert Keay asked William Forrester if he could give employment to their mutual cousin James Menzies. Forrester's reply is revealing both as to his own circumstances and the regard in which Menzies was held by Keay and is worth quoting *in extenso*:

About James Menzies I am now very busy and what can he do? Ist can he chase at all & can he set stones (I do not mean very small) Brooches &c. It is not the amt. of his wages but if there is a dissolution of Parliament this summer I am afraid I should be obliged to send him back again and as for other shops perhaps there never were more men out of work than there are at present so there is not much chance for him in that. I think you said I might put perfect confidence in him and certainly I am in much want of such a person about me who could melt, cut out & so forth & if he comes here he must make himself as useful as he can to me. I must have no disliking one job and liking another. I mention this as I see it in my shop every day and suffer from it and mind I can only have him as a workman I can neither give him board nor lodging. I will begin with him at 20/- a week and I most sincerely hope to be able to raise it soon. I tell you this hoping that you will take the trouble to let him know it that there may be no disappointment after he comes here. & if trade keeps pretty good I have no doubt I could find him plenty to do, and if there is a fall off(1) that I cannot employ him, or for that or any other reason on my side, he shall not be left to wander about London but shall be sent back to Scotland at my expense. Please let me know what you think by return if you can and, if you think he will do, let him come as soon as he likes; if at all the sooner the better.⁵⁴

Apparently James Menzies did go to London for the next we hear of him is his undated letter to Keay from 33 Devonshire Street, Queens Square, London with an order for £4 in part discharge of his debt of £30.⁵⁵ Whether this represented a month's wages from William Forrester or savings from other employment we do not know. It is believed, however, that James Menzies died in 1842.⁵⁶ His widowed mother died in 1843 and her furniture sold by roup at her home in Canal Street, Perth.⁵⁷

Acknowledgements and Notes

My interest in Robert Keay's nephews has been genealogical and I am indebted to Mr H. Steuart Fotheringham and Mr John B. Hawkins for generously sharing their expertise on Scottish and Australian Gold and Silverware as appropriate. I am indebted to the staff of The Archives Office of Tasmania, The Edinburgh City Library Service, The Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh, The National Library of Scotland, Hull Museum, The A K Bell Library and The Perth Museum and Art Gallery, for their unfailing help and courtesy.

¹ OPR, Perthshire, Caputh 337/2, 8th November 1808.

² OPR, Perthshire, Caputh 337/2, 18th May 1777 "Andrew Kea in Nether Kincairney had a child baptized called Anne".

³ OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/5 p.237A. Born 13th January and baptized 2nd February 1766

⁴ OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/18, p.171. Marriage of David Kea and Elizabeth Scott 16th June 1753. Admission of David Kea to the Wrights' Incorporation of Perth, Minute of 16th June

1753, *Minute Book of the Wright Calling from 1734 to 1756*, Perth Museum and Art Gallery and Minute of 25th June 1714 *Minute Book of the Wrights' Incorporation of Perth 1530-1808* Perth Museum and Art Gallery 1995, 683. He does not appear to have served his apprenticeship in Perth but apparently had come to the Fair City as a wright from elsewhere. He might therefore have been a brother of Ann Keay's father - or he might not! There is no proof either way.

- ⁶ *Minutes of the Hammermen of Perth 1779-1820*, NLS MS19241; Perth Archives MS24, the Keay Papers, Bundle 1 and Perth Archives PE 21-25 p.4 No.7.
- ⁷ R. H. Rodger and F. Slattery, *Perth Silver: A Guide to Perth Silver and Silversmith*, Perth Museum and Art Gallery, 2001, 50pp.
- ⁸ OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/21, 6th December 1796
- ⁹ OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/5 records that Elizabeth Kea was born 3rd July 1754 daughter of David Kea, Wright and Bathia Scott his spouse, and baptized 7th July by Mr David Black, Minister. She married John Manson on 29th December 1780 OPR, Perthshire, Perth 387/19
- ¹⁰ OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/8, Born 8th November 1783, Baptized 9th November 1783.
- ¹¹ NLS MS 19241
- ¹² Ed. I Pickford, *Jackson's Silver & Gold Marks of England, Scotland & Ireland*, Antique Collectors' Club 1989, p.601, marks pictured p.600.
- ¹³ Mitchell, *Monumental Inscriptions of North Perthshire Perth*, Greyfriars, Block F, p.595.
- ¹⁴ OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/5 records that David Key (sic) was born on 12th May 1763, the son of David Key (sic) and Elizabeth Scott, and baptized on 15th May by Mr David Black, Minister.
- ¹⁵ The marriage took place on 16th April 1795 and is registered at Stepney, Spitalfields Christ Church [IGI]
- ¹⁶ Census Perth 1851 Kinnoull No.5, p.4, 17 Spence's Land.
- ¹⁷ The Minutes of the Hammermen Incorporation of Perth record his indenture on 5th February 1816, NLS MS 19241, and his admission on 27th July 1825, NLS MS 19242. Also Perth City Archives MS24, Robert Keay, Bundle 140 Certificate of Admission.
- ¹⁸ J Mundy, *A History of Perth Silver 1950*, Perth Museum and Art Gallery
- ¹⁹ OPR Perthshire, Tibbermore 395/6, Marriage of Robert Keay jun. to Felicie (sic) Walker, proclaimed June 11th, married 13th June 1826.
- ²⁰ I Pickford, *op.cit.* 1989, p.615
- ²¹ Image preserved in Perth Museum and Art Gallery.
- ²² Papers relating to the ships *Rose* and *Eagle*, owned by Keay, McKenzie & Co. are to be found in Perth Burgh Records B59 Part 2, p.594, 37 6/1, Perth Archives.
- ²³ Mitchell, *Monumental Inscriptions of North Perthshire*, Perth, Greyfriars Block G, No.73
- ²⁴ Perth Archives, Keay Papers, Bundle 140
- ²⁵ OPR Dundee 282/7, Born Jean, daughter of William Young, Supervisor of Excise and Margaret Briggs, 3rd May 1785.
- ²⁶ Jean Young Married David Forrester in Perth on 22nd November 1800, OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/21 David Forrester was born on 11th January 1764 and died on 5th July 1811 [Mitchell *North Perthshire Monumental Inscriptions*, Greyfriars Block A, 114.
- ²⁷ The indenture of Patrick Forrester (1772-1846) to the Perth silversmith James Corfute was signed on 22nd December 1787 and minuted on 8th January 1788 (NLS MS 19241). I am indebted to Mr A G Credland for details of Patrick's career in Hull. From 1817 his shop was at 17 Market Street where he traded as a gold and silversmith, jeweller, optician and watchmaker. His son Joseph James, later known as Baron de Forrester (1809-1861), was a merchant and shipper. He went to Oporto in 1831 to join his uncle James Forrester, partner

- in Offley, Forrester & Webber, wine shippers (DNB, 20, 1889, p.8).
- ⁷² William Forrester was born and baptized on 29th November 1801, OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/13.
- ⁷³ Minute dated 16th September 1817, Minutes of the Hammermen of Perth, NLS MS 19241
- ⁷⁴ Perth Archive, Keay papers, Bundle 2, letter dated 14th December 1825.
- ⁷⁵ Perth Archive, Keay Papers, Bundle 2, W Forrester to R Keay 14th December 1825.
- ⁷⁶ Perth Archive, Keay Papers Bundle 2, W Forrester to R Keay jnr, 29th May 1827.
- ⁷⁷ *Bankrupt Directory 1820-1843*, 17th April 1829.
- ⁷⁸ Perth Archive MS 24 Bundle 2, William Forrester to Robert Keay 11th March 1831 and R. Keay's Private Ledger, entry for 5th October 1841.
- ⁷⁹ J.Culme, *The Directory of Gold & Silversmiths, Jewellers & Allied Trades, 1838-1914*, From the London Assay Office Registers, published by the Antique Collectors' Club, 1987, vol.1, p.161
- ⁸⁰ Joseph Forrester was born on 12th April 1805 and baptized on 22nd April 1805, OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/14.
- ⁸¹ Minute of 14th February 1820, *Minutes of the Hammermen Incorporation of Perth 1820-1871*, NLS MS 9242
- ⁸² William Forrester to R Keay 14th December 1825. Perth Archive MS 24 Bundle 2.
- ⁸³ William Forrester to R Keay 6th January 1826. Perth Archive MS 24 Bundle 2.
- ⁸⁴ Tasmania Archives CON 23/1
- ⁸⁵ Tasmania Archives *Appropriation List* CON 27/4
- ⁸⁶ P. Mercer "David Barclay Craftsman of Hobart Town 1830-1884", *The Australian Antique Collector Jan-June 1982*, pp.49-53
- ⁸⁷ Tasmania Archives, *Conduct Record* CON 31/13, p.127.
- ⁸⁸ Tasmania Archives CON 52/1 page 58 and RGD 37/2 number 1059.
- ⁸⁹ Tasmania Archives RGD 33/1 number 634, RGD 35/1 number 1108.
- ⁹⁰ Tasmania Archives, Conditional Pardon number 541, 18th June 1842
- ⁹¹ Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay Jnr, 10th September 1843. Perth Archive, Keay Papers, Bundle 144.
- ⁹² J.B.Hawkins, *Nineteenth Century Australian Silver*, 2 vols, Antique Collectors' Club, 1990.
- ⁹³ Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay jnr, from 23 Gloster [sic] Grove, Hereford Square, Old Brompton, London, 5th June 1855. Perth Archive MS 24, Bundle 131.
- ⁹⁴ Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay jnr, undated Perth Archive, MS 24, Bundle 131.
- ⁹⁵ The marriage took place at Perth on 9th June 1810, OPR Perthshire, Perth 287/22.
- ⁹⁶ Born 29th May 1811 and baptized 5th June 1811, OPR Perthshire, Perth 387/15.
- ⁹⁷ Minuted 9th April 1827, Minutes of the Hammermen of Perth 1820-1827 NLS MS 19242.
- ⁹⁸ Entry, Wednesday 15th May, Duty Book for 1839, Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh. 1. Pickford, *Jackson's Silver & Gold Marks of England, Scotland & Ireland*, Antique Collectors' Club 1989, p.615 records him as a Perth Goldsmith whose first known work was in 1839.
- ⁹⁹ William Forrester to Robert Keay jnr, 20th February 1840. Perth Archive, MS, 24, Bundle 36.
- ¹⁰⁰ James Menzies to Robert Keay jnr, undated. Perth Archive MS 24, Bundle 33.
- ¹⁰¹ R H Rodger and F Slattery *op. cit.* 2001, p.47
- ¹⁰² Perth Archive MS 24 Bundle 33 contains a number of documents relating to Maria Menzies' death such as the undertaker's account dated 1st July 1843 and the Roup Roll of the sale at Canal Street which took place on the 18th August 1843.