

# FOREWORD

*BY JIM McEWAN*

I first became aware of the Mutter family in July 1963 when I began my apprenticeship as a cooper at Bowmore Distillery. As you can imagine being a local lad, winning the coveted job remains as one of the many highlights I have experienced in my 52 years in the world of whisky distillation.

The Mutter family were well remembered at Bowmore for their skills as farmers, engineers, entrepreneurs, sea faring men and, just as important, was their dedication to the community of Bowmore who must have been delighted that the owners of the distillery had chosen to live among them. Often I would listen to old timers' tales as they sat around the huge peat fires; their eyes would sparkle and the cheeks flush and the stories flowed like the water in the lade, and the Mutters were often mentioned in the story telling. As a young apprentice this was a magical time and this amazing book has given me that same feeling again after all these years.

As you travel through the pages you will meet the Mutter family and learn of their lives, successes and failures, their passion and love for Islay and indeed Scotland. The details of their business transactions are incredible, likewise was their ability to constantly improve the design and workings of whatever piece of machinery they felt could be improved; for example they created the first shell and tube condenser and this system is still used in 90% of the distilleries of Scotland today.

However, the part of this wonderful heartwarming sincere story that really got me was the love that this family had for each other and still has today. I know of this as I have had the great pleasure of their company and, yes, we shared some fine whisky together and I hope will continue to do so until our particular chapter comes to an end.

I thank the family so much for allowing me to be a small part of this amazing story. Many people will be inspired and uplifted by the family's honesty and respect for each other and all who came their way.

Yours aye,

*Jim McEwan*

The Cask Whisperer Limited

## Note about Jim McEwan:

*Jim McEwan's humble beginning at Bowmore Distillery in 1963 was the start of a 52 year career that landed him atop the whisky industry. Stepping his way up through the ranks to become Cellar Master, Chief Blender, and ultimately Distillery Manager (1984 - 1996), Jim then shared his passion for both his drink and his island at tastings and events around the world as Global Ambassador for Bowmore from 1996 to 2001. He left to help resurrect Bruichladdich, the much-loved Victorian era distillery across Loch Indaal from Bowmore that had fallen by the wayside.*

*Recipient of multiple awards throughout his career, Jim McEwan has reached the peak of the industry and has been called one of its biggest revolutionaries. He retired in 2015 and launched the consultancy firm, The Cask Whisperer, "offering advice," he says, "on all things whisky". Jim was inducted into the Whisky Magazine Hall of Fame in 2014, and was recently featured in the television series, "Addicted to Pleasure".*

*Reminiscing, McEwan recalls with fond memories the camaraderie in the maltbarns at Bowmore late into the night when the peat fires were stoked 24 hours a day and management had long left: "Us young bucks would help the guys of the night shift turning the malt on the malting floors, barrow in the coal to stoke the fires beneath the giant pot stills, and sometimes stay all night if the stories were being told and Gaelic songs were being sung. The distillery was the real deal for us."*

# PROLOGUE



If you have visited the Island of Islay (pronounced ‘EYE-lah’) in the Inner Hebrides on the southwest coast of Scotland, you may have toured the Bowmore Distillery. There, you may have noticed that one of the six large washback vats is labelled ‘MUTTER 1837–1891’.

For fifty-four golden years, under the leadership of five Mutters over two generations, the Bowmore Distillery was known as W. & J. Mutter’s Bowmore Islay Whisky. Twin brothers William and James Mutter launched the family dynasty together along with their uncle John Mitchell. They were followed by James Mutter’s three sons, James (Mitchell), George and William.

There are *five* main James Mutters in this tale; three in one generation. The first James Mutter is the Dalkeith gentleman farmer, who sired the twins central to this story. His firstborn twin, he named James, the second, William. In turn, James (twin) Mutter fathered two sons whom he named James: the first, James (Moir) Mutter was born out of wedlock in 1833; the second, born in 1845 was named James (Mitchell) Mutter. In 1841, William (twin) Mutter also named his firstborn son James (Rankine) Mutter.

Confusing? I will try to help. Where context doesn’t make it clear in the narrative that follows which James I am referring to, I will use these monikers for clarification:

**James (senior) Mutter:** Dalkeith hereditary farm-holder and father of twins James and William.

**James (twin) Mutter,** born 1805: James and his younger twin William started the distillery business.

**James (Moir) Mutter,** born 1833: Firstborn son of James (twin) Mutter in unmarried union with Helen Moir; I refer to him here as James (Moir) Mutter RN (Royal Navy). This James is my great-grandfather.

**James (Rankine) Mutter**, born 1841: Son of James' twin brother William and Jane (Rankine) Mutter. His middle name is not known, but I have used 'Rankine' as that was his mother's family name.

**James (Mitchell) Mutter**, born 1845: Son of James (twin) Mutter and wife Agnes Cruickshanks Mutter. His middle name was a tribute to his late paternal grandmother Ann Mitchell Mutter and her brother, the twins' uncle and long time business partner, John Mitchell. James (Mitchell) Mutter and his brothers were the second generation to run the family business.

To further complicate matters, at one point, a ship is christened the *James Mutter* (we'll keep that one in italics).

Fortunately for today's readers, the Mutters chronicled their personal and business lives through correspondence with each other and their families. Seventeen handwritten letters, found in the belongings of James (Mitchell) Mutter and kept in the family for more than a century, provide the basis for this dramatised history. They provide a glimpse into pivotal moments in the lives and businesses of the Mutter family, and are a living record of the Industrial Revolution as it transformed Scotland during those dynamic, innovative years.

Now, pour yourself a generous dram of golden Bowmore, settle into a comfortable chair, and I will tell you the story of the Mutters and their firm, W. & J. Mutter's Bowmore Islay Whisky.

*Roy James Mutter*

(Great-great-grandson of James Mutter, founding partner of W. & J. Mutter's Bowmore Islay Whisky)



# 1805-1820: A TALE OF TWO SONS

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL YEARS

**T**wo centuries ago momentous events were taking place in Scotland and Great Britain. In 1801 the British Parliament passed an Act of Union creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and hoisted the first Union Jack. The Treaty of Amiens brought a temporary peace between Britain and France in 1802 before Nelson fought and beat the French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar in 1805.

On September 16<sup>th</sup> 1805, the joyful wail of a newborn was heard coming from the upper chambers of a farmhouse called Mansfield. **William Mutter**, grandfather of this new baby, retained the hereditary feu (lease) of the land and buildings at Mansfield House, which was situated nicely within the estate of the Marquess of Lothian in the small market town of Dalkeith, just seven miles southeast of Edinburgh. He managed the farm along with his son **James Mutter**.

James Mutter welcomed his newborn son by name, 'James'. A few minutes later another cry was heard, and the midwife came out with news that the second baby was also a son. James (senior) was elated to hear that his wife Ann's third pregnancy was finally fruitful, and doubly so! Grandfather William was pleased that his son chose the name William for the second son. Both grandfather and father were members of the Anti-Burgher Church and disagreed with the Scottish Church's

naming convention, so the reversal of the generational names was intentional and appreciated.

Within a few days, Ann, James (senior), and their newborn sons returned to their own family home, Newfarm, about two miles north of Mansfield. Here the boys lived a playful, happy life within the greater boundaries of the **Duke of Buccleuch's** estate. Unfortunately their mother was haunted by the memories of the two children she had lost prior to the twins' birth. With a new pregnancy two years later, her unease grew. Her fears were eventually realized and she died in childbirth, along with her infant daughter.

Left with motherless twins, James (senior) quickly acknowledged that he could not do without some help to look after the rambunctious boys. His 31 year old sister Mary was more than suitable for the role. Aunt **Mary (Mutter) Wylde** was widowed after the death of her husband Tom, and together she and her daughter **Elizabeth**, joined James and the twins at Newfarm.

In addition to the main house, Newfarm housed a number of irregularly built garden cottages. Normally such cottages would house farm labourers, but at Newfarm the cottages were mostly occupied by labourers employed at the neighbouring brick works.



THE SOUTHERN ENVIRONS OF EDINBURGH,  
 (LEFT) A SIMPLIFIED VERSION. (RIGHT) ROBERT KIRKWOOD: 1813 From The National Library of Scotland

Newfarm was just over a mile northeast of Dalkeith, on the eastern side of the road from Inveresk. It was a reasonably ambitious distance for the two young boys to walk on market days; however it was a lovely destination. High Street was filled with the shops of grocers and bakers, widening northeastwardly where it terminated at the gateway leading to Dalkeith House, the principal seat of the Duke of Buccleuch. Surrounding the Duke's estate was Dalkeith Park, a picturesque oak wood of nearly 1000 acres. In addition to lovely treed avenues, miles of walking and riding paths traversed through the woods and gardens at Dalkeith Park. Aunt Wylde would rest the children near the junction of the North Esk and South Esk Rivers; a quiet spot for them to play when her trip to town finished.

Famous as a market town since the Middle Ages, Dalkeith was Scotland's greatest market for her staple grain, oats. On market day, at an early hour, carts piled high with produce would begin rumbling in from the south-eastern counties. Sometimes numbering in the hundreds, these carts came from Musselburgh, Prestonpans, Cockenzie and Port Seaton, each jostling for a spot along both sides the length of High Street prior to the 12 o'clock market opening. At noon the



LANGSIDE FARM  
HOUSE

church bell announced the start of the grain market, and half an hour later its clanging signified the start of wheat sales. The entire proceedings never stretched beyond two hours; all dealing was completed in ready money and conducted with the utmost animation and good will.

In 1809, when the twin boys were nearly four years old, their father decided to move the family to the adjacent farm, Langside. With 177 arable acres, Langside offered a better farming enterprise with larger and more numerous fields, as well as a larger, two-storey home. He sent a letter to the Duke of Buccleuch seeking permission to feu (lease) Langside.

The Duke's estates were managed with generous liberality, and the farm houses, steadings (farm buildings), and cottages constructed in the most substantial and commodious manner. In relations between landlord and tenant, the Duke of Buccleuch was reputed to be considerate and just.

However, the Duke particularly disliked changes among his tenantry. Many of his farms had been feu'd to the same families for generations, and it was always his anxious wish that the line of succession be prolonged. His usual practice when a lease expired was to offer a renewal of it at a fair valuation; thus, having a reasonable security

#### FARM STATUS

Social distinctions were most pronounced in areas where farms were large, like the grain-growing districts of the Lothians. The key farm labourer was the hind, a skilled hand at every aspect of agricultural production. John Douglas was the hind on Langside Farm, and along with his wife Ann and their large family, was able to supply much of the work required. Their cottage was just over the main road on the Langside Head Park. Having a guaranteed supply of adequate labour for permanent and temporary needs relieved James (senior) Mutter of one of the problems of farming. Some benefit fell to the hind, too. He escaped the pitfalls of unsteady employment and income since he had a tied house and received about two-thirds of his income in kind.



AUNT MARY WYLDE  
Credit: Gail (Mutter)  
Hassell

that the tenant's occupancy would be permanent, the farmer had some inducement to carry out improvements.

The Duke of Buccleuch eventually accepted the Mutter family's request and they took up residency at Langside. Twins James and William grew up under the watchful eye of Aunt Mary, playing on the farm or in the park surrounding Dalkeith House. When they were of age to attend school James and William would walk the mile to the grammar school in Dalkeith.

In 1818, as the boys approached thirteen years of age, they were faced with making career decisions that would affect their whole

lives. Being the older by a matter of minutes, James would take over the operation of Langside Farm when the time came. William was thus destined to make his way off the farm and lead an urban way of life.

**John Mitchell**, their late mother's brother, impressed upon William that the distilling trade would be a positive path for him to follow. Uncle John had a close friend, Mr. John P. Mitchell (no relation), who brewed ale in Edinburgh. William was offered and accepted the chance to apprentice under this associate. And so, with his father's blessing, at the age of thirteen, William left for his apprenticeship in nearby Edinburgh and the twins were separated for the first time.

LETTER 1: AN APPLICATION BY JAMES MUTTER SR. TO THE DUKE OF BUCCLEUCH TO FEU LANGSIDE FARM, WRITTEN BY JAMES MUTTER, NEWFARM, 22 MAY 1809.

RIGHT: TRANSCRIPTION OF THE LETTER.

Sir,

I hereby make offer to His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch for a ninteen years Lease of the Lands of Longside, Longside head, and Newfarm you showed me upon a plan. The sum of three pounds ten shillings --- per acre. As I know nothing of the accomodation with respect to Housing upon Longside I shall trust to his Grace to make it suitable for the farm, I would wish particularly a large broad Barn And as I think it would be of incalculable advantage to have some Turnip ground upon the farm, if his Grace would let me have the parks next the Dog kennel I would give Six pounds per acre for them rather than want them.

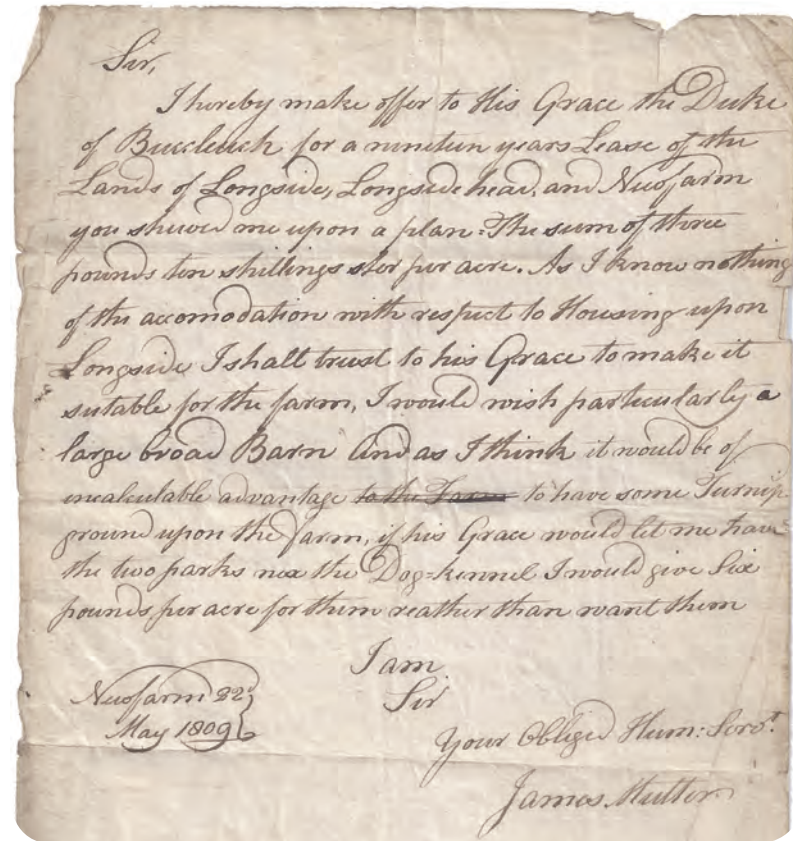
I am

Sir

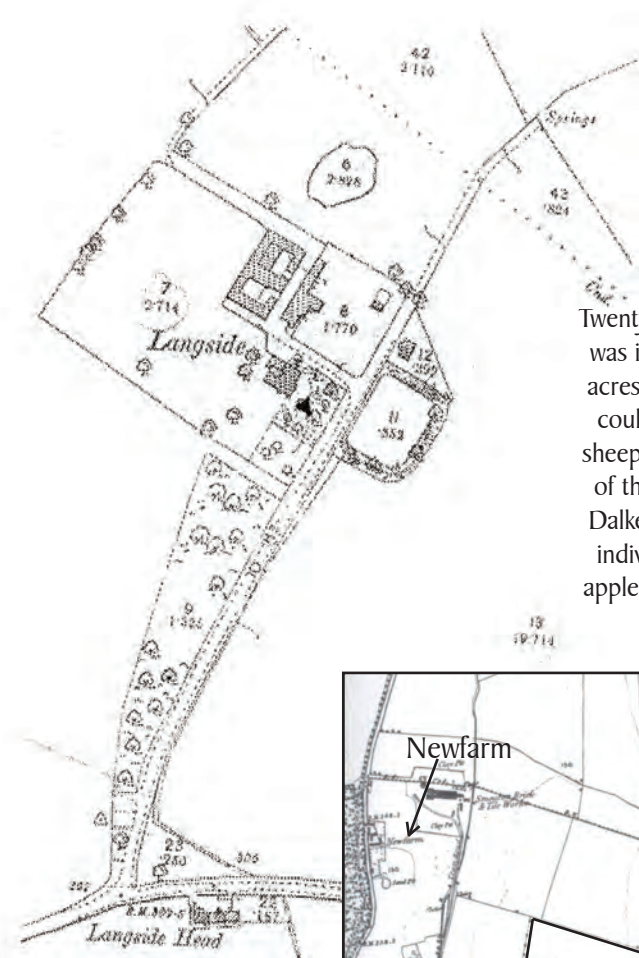
Your Obliged Hum: Svrvt

James Mutter

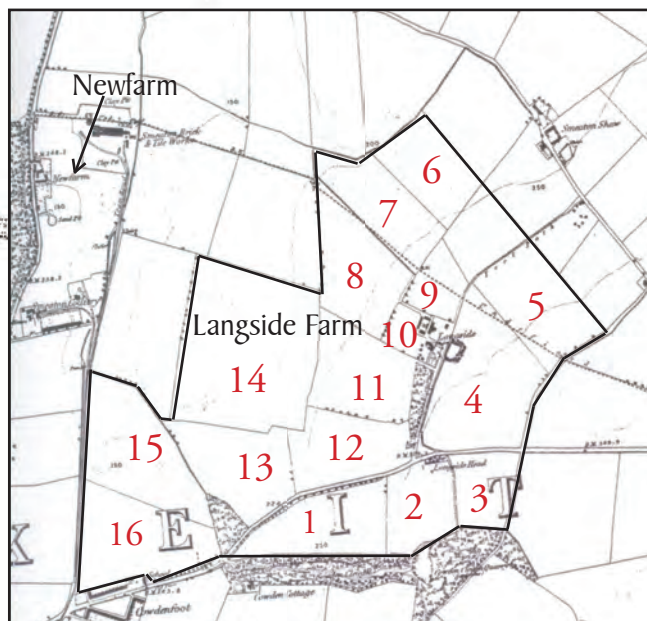
Newfarm 22  
May 1809







Twenty-six per cent of Langside Farm was in oats. Grass acreage of 35.3 acres plus 45.5 acres of faugh land could support approximately 200 sheep. It was a fine farm, with wheat of the highest quality to sell at the Dalkeith market, potatoes to sell to individual customers, and Tayside apples for customers in the Dalkeith and Edinburgh areas.



LANGSIDE FARM  
REFER TO TABLE FOR FIELD  
DESCRIPTIONS. Credit:  
National  
Library of Scotland

TABLE 1 FIELDS WITH AREA, LEASES AND TOTAL ANNUAL COSTS

Crops	Acreage % of Total	
Oats	46.7	26
Turnips	16.3	9
Potatoes	12.6	7
Wheat	11.4	6
Peas	8.9	5
Grass	35.3	21
Faugh	45.5	26
Total Area	176.7 Acres	100%

TABLE 2

ACREAGES OF LANGSIDE FIELDS WITH TOTAL ANNUAL COSTS

Lease per acre per year: £3/10

Field	Size	Annual Crops
1. Upper Thorny Wards	6.5	£22.75 oats
2. Brown Herriots	17.1	£59.85 faugh*
3. Cleagh Park	25.7	£89.95 faugh
4. Langside Head Park	8.9	£31.15 peas
5. Quarry Park	7.1	£24.85 oats
6. Langside Park	2.8	£9.80 wheat
7. East Smeaton Shaw	8.6	£30.10 wheat
8. Nither Old Walls	12.6	£44.10 potatoes
9. North Smeaton Shaw	5.5	£19.25 grass
10. 24 Rigs Park	13.4	£46.90 oats
11. Faugh Park	2.7	£9.45 faugh
12. Birks Park	19.7	£68.95 grass
13. East Thorny Wards	19.7	£68.95 oats
14. West Thorny Wards	10.1	£35.35 grass

Lease per acre per year: £6/00

15. Kennel Park	10.8	£64.80 turnips
16. Thornie Crooks	5.5	£33.30 turnips

Totals 176.7 £659.50

\*The faughs or inferior arable land, received no manure at all, but were ploughed every four or five years, after lying as long in natural grass.

## TRAGEDY ON THE COW BRIDGE

The twins' father James (senior) would not live to see his boys prosper. On his way home one day in 1820, he stopped at the Cow Bridge over the South Esk River. It was his custom to loosen his garters prior to ascending the gentle hill leading to his farm home. But this time, James didn't make it up the hill. He must have fallen backwards over the parapet onto the rocks below. He was 56 years old when he died.

D. M. Moir, when recounting tales around Dalkeith, identified the exact spot on the bridge.

'But-wo!-wo!' cried he to his horse, coming across its side with his whip- 'we maun be canny; for this brig has a sharp turn (it was the Cow Brig, ye know), and many a one, both horse and man, have got their necks broken by not being wary enough of that corner.'

A close cousin on their father's side, **George Watson**, was now the eldest male family member living nearby. He rode seven miles to Edinburgh to deliver the tragic news to William. William immediately sought permission to leave the distillery and hurried home for the sad proceedings. At the age of fifteen, James and William were still six years away from their inheritance. They remained under the charge of their father's younger brother William until they reached the age of majority. James continued at Langside and William at his apprenticeship in Edinburgh.



JAMES (SENIOR) MUTTER'S WATCH, FOUND AT THE COW BRIDGE, DALKEITH, 1820.  
From James Richard Mutter

## LAUNCHING INTO CAREERS

William (twin) Mutter emerged from his training a quiet, intelligent young man who had set his sights on becoming an entrepreneur in the whisky business. When William had completed his training at the age of 20, he chose to spend his first all-important post-apprenticeship year working for a whisky firm in nearby Leith. His Edinburgh master saw him off and wished him well on his new venture.

Meanwhile James had become a good farmer, winning the best prices for his grains, lamb and fruit. The economics of running a large farm were complicated and James managed it well.

### GRANDFATHER MUTTER DIES AT 89

In 1810, at the age of 89, the twins' paternal grandfather died. William Mutter had been living at Langside farm, after moving from Mansfield due to ill health. Remembered as a cheerful lively old Christian, he was beloved and respected by all who knew him. He had been a Dissenter throughout his life and an Antiburgher in his religious views. William left the Established Church of Scotland and helped form the General Associate (Antiburgher) Synod. William's son James (senior) Mutter, was also a member of the Synod, and in 1814 was made a ruling elder for the Antiburgher Church in Back Street, Dalkeith. He would not permit any hymns to be sung or used in church. The family also did not follow the Scottish Church's recording of births, marriages or deaths.

## THE MITCHELL INHERITANCE

In 1814, the twins' maternal grandfather, James Mitchell, died. His eldest daughter, the twins' mother, Ann, predeceased her father in 1807 during childbirth. Ann had one sister, Catherine (William Douglas), and a brother, John, who was the Mutter boys' favourite uncle. At the time of their grandfather Mitchell's passing, the Mutter twins were ten years old.

A note dated 14 July 1815, states that the late Mr. James Mitchell's estate, totalling £1,037 14s 4½d (over £55,000 today), was divided into only two portions; the recipients being Catherine Douglas and the Mutter twins, with no mention of John. Even though their father left his funds to his two daughters, the estate was eventually split among the families of all three children, Ann, Catherine and John, using a lottery system. First choice went to Catherine, second to John and third to Ann's boys, the Mutter twins.

Each one of the boys would receive £500 when they came of age on their 21st birthday.

James (twin) won 'The Park & Wood' (Coalview Park in Gilmerton, a small village on the way to Edinburgh), worth £200. According to the agreement, James also purchased the house in Common Close, Dalkeith, from John Mitchell for £200, leaving his share of insurance to his uncle. The twins became Portioners (landlords), owners of a small feu.

*We the subscribers agree that lots shall be cast for the Division of the late Mr James Mitchell's property to be put in three lots as per Jas Baird & Robert Fishers opinions and Mr Mutter & Mr Smiths as under, also that whatever lot falls to Mr J. Mitchell that either Mr Douglas or Mr Mutter will take it of his hand at the valued prices.*

*X John Mitchell    X James Mutter  
X William Douglas*

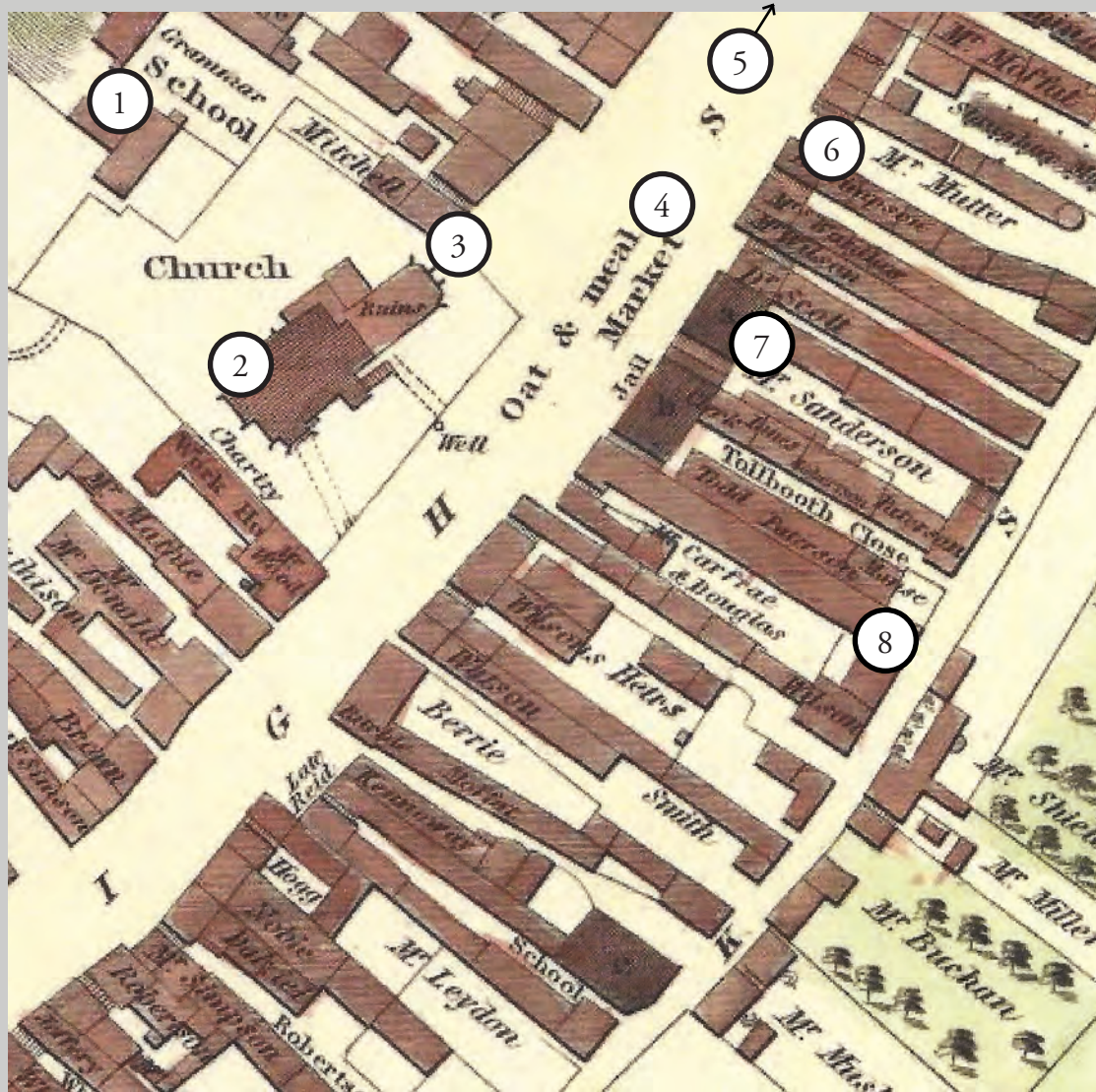
*Lot First - Wishart Property      £240 10*

*Do Second - Smith's house, the house in the  
Common Close and the share of  
the Hercules Insurance  
£246 - -*

*Do Third - the Park & Wood  
(Coalview Park)      £200 - -*

LETTER 2: AGREEMENT BETWEEN MEMBERS OF JAMES MITCHELL  
FAMILY DALKEITH. 2ND SEPTEMBER 1816.

COMMON CLOSE ON HIGH STREET DALKEITH (MAP: JOHN WOOD, CARTOGRAPHER ; 1812-1871)



1. Dalkeith Grammar School, reputed to be one of the finest in the country. This is where the Mutter twins went to school, and where young sons of some of the aristocracy are said to have received the rudiments of their education.

2. Parish Church

3. Aunt Catherine (Mitchell) Douglas's inheritance; the 'Wishart Property'

4. Oat & Meal Market, held weekly.

5. To the River South Esk. To attend the grammar school, the Mutter boys had to walk the mile or so from Langside farm, crossing the river at the Cow Bridge.

6. The Mutters' Common Close faced onto High Street, about five doors down from the Parish Church (2) and directly adjacent to the bustling Oat & Meal Market (4). The market was held once a week

7. The Cross Keys Inn was Dalkeith's main venue for festive occasions, and was the site of the boys' coming-of-age party in 1826.

8. The General Associate (Antiburgher) Synod Church building was on Back Street, parallel to High Street. The seating capacity was 436. It and was used in part as a school for young ladies under the direction of Mary and Margaret Mutter, aunts of the twins.

MUTTER FAMILY AND HISTORICAL EVENTS IN THE PERIOD 1805 – 1820

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Detail from an 1805 poster commemorating the battle.



Henry Bell's River Clyde steamer Comet (1812), which achieved average speeds of over 6 knots.

**1805 Twin boys, James and William Mutter are born in Dalkeith.**

*1805 At the Battle of Trafalgar, a British fleet under Horatio Nelson destroys the combined fleets of France and Spain; Nelson is killed in action.*

1807 Britain abolishes the slave trade in Jamaica and in British ships.

**1807 The twins lose their mother and baby sister in childbirth.**

1810 Napoleon annexes the Netherlands.

1811 British troops led by Lord Wellington defeat the French at Fuentes de Onoro and Albuera in Portugal

1812 US planned invasion of Canada is frustrated by defeats at Detroit and Queenstown Heights.

*1812 First steamboat to appear in Europe is Henry Bell's Comet, launched on the Clyde River, Glasgow.*

1814 Cape of Good Hope becomes a British colony.

1815 The Waterloo Campaign; Napoleon beats the Prussians at Ligny, but is decisively defeated by Wellington's army at Waterloo.

**1818 William (twin) Mutter, at thirteen, becomes apprenticed as an Ale Brewer in Edinburgh.**

1820 Andre Ampere (Fr) develops his law of electromagnetism.

**1820 James Mutter (gentleman farmer) dies in a tragic accident, leaving his twin 15-year-old sons, James and William orphans.**

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CLANDESTINE DISTILLERIES

Shortly after Scotland's fiscal union with England in 1707, the English system of levying a tax charge based on 'spirit-per-100-gallons-of-wash' was introduced. Whisky production in Scotland was effectively driven underground to evade the high levels of taxation. Clandestine stills were cleverly hidden in nooks and crannies of the heather-clad hills. Smugglers organised signaling systems from one hilltop to another, using them whenever excise officers were seen to arrive in the vicinity. For well over a hundred years, distillers for whom the excise laws were alien in both language and intent, fought a series of bloody skirmishes with excise men or gaugers (as they were then known).

Smuggling became standard practice for some 150 years with no moral stigma attached to it. Ministers of the Kirk made storage space available under the pulpit, and the illicit spirit was, on occasion, transported by coffin; any effective means to escape the watchful eyes of the gaugers.

By the 1820s as many as 14,000 illicit stills were being confiscated every year. More than half the whisky consumed in Scotland was being swallowed painlessly and without contributing a penny in duty.

The Excise Act of 1823 was passed with a view to encouraging distillers to 'go legal'. The Act sanctioned distilleries in return for a licence of £10, and a set payment per gallon of proof spirit. The new rate was established based on an estimated yield of 11 gallons of spirit per 100 gallons; 1,060 gravity of wash. The legitimate distiller being thus rehabilitated, government coffers soon profited.

These enactments had the desired effect; legitimate Scottish distillers again flourished and were able to offer a superior whisky to the London market at a lower price than the spirit coming from the London dealers. Smuggling whisky was dying out and illicit distillation decreased. The number of registered distilleries tripled, many selecting the same sites and water sources of their smuggling days to keep up the high standards of their product. Legal whisky had entered the market place.



A firkin cask contained nine imperial gallons (41 litres).