

John Kerr M.A., LL.D.
(1830, Dalry, Ayrshire – 1916, Edinburgh)
Trinity College, Cambridge

Formerly Senior Chief Inspector of Schools and Training Colleges in Scotland



John Kerr Jnr. was born in 1830 in Dalry, Ayrshire to John Kerr Snr. (Spirit Merchant) and Jean Hamilton. John Kerr Snr. was born in Rothesay, Bute, in 1792, as one of eight children of Alexander Kerr and Helen Campbell from their marriage in 1777 until 1795, namely, Mary, Charles, James, Archibald [died before 1795], Alexander, Helen, John Snr. (himself) and a second Archibald.

Old Parochial Records (OPRs) show that John Kerr Snr. married Jean Hamilton in Dalry in 1823, but thereafter there are no OPRs of their 3 children's births. [This may have been because of the church's disapproval of John Snr.'s occupation!] However, the approximate years of these births appear in the 1841 Census for Dalry, namely Alexander 1825/26, William 1827/28 and John Jnr, 1830/31. In his memoirs, John Jnr. mentions that his mother died about 18 months after his birth, and that his father married again in 1838 in Dalry. His new bride was a Jane Boyd, born c. 1810 in Dalry, and she bore him 6 more children before his death in c. 1854. The aforementioned Census thus shows Jean as spouse and her two children with John Snr. - Jane born in 1839, and Margaret born in 1840. The 1851 Census shows one more, Janet born in 1849/50. The 1861 Census shows Jane as a widow and one more child, Charles born 1851/52. The other two may have been staying with relatives at the time of these Censuses.

John Jnr. writes in 1903,

It is at once my pleasure and my duty to bear strong testimony to the merits of one whose memory is very dear to me, and who was (can it be believed?) a stepmother. This is a relationship of generally evil savour. Stepmotherly treatment has come to mean the opposite of what is motherly and kind. For this, as for other estimates of character and conduct that

have taken root, it may be presumed that there is more or less substantial reason. The relation of the average woman towards children who are not her own, and, like all children, a source of trouble and anxiety to her, is one from which obviously unpleasantness may readily crop up. Similarly the relation of children to a woman who is not their mother, for whom they have, to begin with, no filial affection, and whose authority over them they are unwilling to recognise, has also in it the seeds of disobedience and strife. The danger of this is very much increased when there is a second family. A woman must be of unusually even balance mentally and morally who can treat her own children and those of another with absolute or even approximate impartiality. To the best of my recollection my stepmother was such a woman. My two elder brothers had the same opinion of her. The youngest of three, I was only eighteen months' old when my mother died. My father remained a widower for five or six years, and there were six children by the second marriage. I remember no circumstance in which my stepmother treated her own children with undue favour, nor did my brothers and I ever think of her children as anything else than full brothers and sisters. It is a strong proof of her motherly kindness that, though my father was in no way a harsh or unsympathetic man, when I wished for any indulgence in the matter of holidays or pocket-money, it was to my stepmother I made my request. It was by her intercession that my father was coaxed into taking me with him to see that great epoch-making event of the nineteenth century, the Eglinton Tournament, unquestionably the most gorgeous pageant of modern times. There were present representatives from almost every country in Europe, and among them Louis Napoleon, afterwards Emperor of the French. I remember distinctly the two or three days of a continuous downpour of rain, the tilting of the knights, the shivering of lances, and the unhorsing of riders.

John Jnr. attended the local school until c. 1845 And he writes

I remained at school till I was between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and had almost closed with proposals for apprenticeship in the office of a civil engineer in Glasgow, when an unexpected occurrence gave what proved to be a permanent direction to my life. The narrative has no savour of romance about it, but is perhaps sufficiently unusual to be worthy of being recorded as a personal experience. At this time, in the early 'forties, the Glasgow and South-Western Railway was being built. The teacher of an adventure school in my native parish was offered a clerkship by one of the contractors, who required his services at once. I was then a well-grown lad, almost as tall as I am now, and the dux of the parish school. The teacher required some one to take charge of the school at once, and asked my father to allow me to do so temporarily, till a permanent teacher could be found. My father consented, and so did I, rather pleased at passing at once from the chrysalis condition to that of the fully developed butterfly; from being a pupil in one school to become the teacher of another before I was fifteen years of age. The school flourished under me. I liked the work, and the attendance steadily increased. The fees were regularly paid, and secured for a lad of my age a very satisfactory income. At my request my father became my banker. This continued for three years, during which, having decided to go to the university, I had kept alive and probably added to the Latin I had got from Mr Duff. I attended Glasgow University for four years, placing a substitute in my school during the college sessions and returning to it in summer and autumn.

So, in the 1851 Census we see that while attending university John Jnr. has 'digs' in the home of his elder brother William, along with William's wife Janet, and their two children, at 50 King Street, Gorbals Glasgow.

Of the following year onwards, he writes,

IN 1852 I was asked to become tutor to the son of Mr Pringle of Whytbank, and for four years spent three delightful summer months at Yair, on the banks of Tweed. Young Mr Pringle, now dead, was a singularly reticent and self-centred lad. During the four years while I was his tutor I knew him perhaps as intimately as any friend he had, but I failed, as all others did, in my attempts to gain a real knowledge of his feelings, motives, and springs of action. He lived in a world of his own, and became less companionable as he grew older. His father and mother were the most kindly, open-hearted, generous couple I have ever met.

I had still the class of Natural Philosophy to take in order to qualify for graduation. Mr and Mrs Pringle suggested that, instead of returning to Glasgow, I should take that class in Edinburgh University, and continue to be tutor to their son at the Academy. To this I agreed.

John Kerr Jnr. thus went to Edinburgh, and, apart from earning a living from tutoring, he decided to enter Divinity Hall with a view to becoming a minister of the Church of Scotland. He soon discovered that the academic preparation for LL.D. was extremely boring, and that he did not really want to be a minister. However, despite his misgivings he obtained his degree.

Thereafter, he writes,

I called on a friend and told him that I had been advised to go to Cambridge, and meant to do so at my own cost if possible. I explained to him by what means I hoped to succeed in this: that I proposed to insure my life, and assign the policy to him as security for any advances he might make to me up to that amount; that all I asked was that he should have sufficient faith in me to believe that I would pay the annual premium punctually, and so secure him against all loss whether success or failure was the result. He agreed at once, and by next post my name was on the Trinity books as an intending entrant. I at first thought of making the above proposal to my father, but fearing that he might dissuade me from taking what might seem to him a rash step, and, having resolved to go, I chose to clench the matter in the way mentioned and to escape the charge of disobedience. In this unexpected way I was lost to the Church of Scotland.

John Jnr. writes further about his life events in the mid and late 1850s

“After graduating from Cambridge I remained for a short time coaching, when I was offered and accepted a classical mastership at the grammar-school of Bury St Edmunds There I spent a most pleasant year, joining the boys like the veriest boy among them in all their games- hockey, fives, football, boxing etc I had been about a year in Bury St Edmunds when I received my appointment as Inspector of Schools, on the strength of my testimonials generally, and of an especially hearty one from the Rev. Doctor Montagu Butler, afterwards headmaster of Harrow, and later master of Trinity College, Cambridge.”

His significant contributions to the development of Scottish Schools and Universities in the 40 years when he was an HMI are clear, not only in his own ‘Scottish Education, School and University’ (1910), but also, for example, in the many references made to his influence in James Scotland’s ‘History of Scottish Education’ (1969). Then again, his two ‘Memories’ books in 1903/04 provide the evidence of his deftness of touch in human relations at the ‘chalk-face’ nationwide while ever embroiled in administrative matters.

However, research to discover available on-line genealogical information and images has provided some insights into his family life after marriage in 1866 and also the ancestral background of his wife Elizabeth Jackson Graham.

Whether John Jnr., was acquainted with his future wife in 1861 is difficult to ascertain, but some common factors suggest that they may have met in Edinburgh. One item they had in common was eventually discovered back in time from Elizabeth’s location and companions in the 1961 Census.

The image below was the ‘trigger’ after study of the couple’s appearances in the 1871/1881/1891/1901 Censuses.

The 'Elizabeth L Grahame' below should be 'Elizabeth J. Graham' as it had already been seen on the image of her marriage to John Kerr Jnr. in 1866 that her mother had been Janet Boyd Harley and her father Thomas Graham (Medical Practitioner) deceased. Also, it is clear that Elizabeth and Agnes were twins, born c. 1847. This birth place in Kent, England was gleaned from later Censuses.

1861 Scotland Census about Janet Boyd Grahame		
Name:	Janet Boyd Grahame [Janet Boyd Harley]	
Age:	21	
Estimated Birth Year:	abt 1840	
Relationship:	Daughter	
Mother's Name:	Agnes Harley	
Gender:	Female	
Where born:	Ayrshire	
Registration Number:	685/1	
Registration district:	St George	
Civil parish:	Edinburgh St Cuthberts	
County:	Midlothian	
Address:	4 Clarendon Street	
Occupation:	Pensioner R M	
ED:	104	
Household schedule number:	4	
Line:	16	
Roll:	CSSCT1861_125	
Household Members:	Name	Age
	Agnes Harley	75
	Janet Boyd Grahame	
	Elizabeth L Grahame	13
	Agnes B Grahame	13
	Jane Sargant	24
	Isabella Martin	21
	Rosina Brach	56

A search for the whereabouts of Janet Boyd Graham in the 1851 Census for England was successful ...she was a widow by 1851!

Parish or Township of	Ecclesiastical District of	Civil Borough of	Name of	Village of			
Alverstoke	Hinckley	Royal Naval Hospital		Naslar			
Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the Institution on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Position in the Institution	Condition	Age of		Rank, Profession or Occupation	Where Born	Whether Blind, Deaf and Dumb
			Males	Females			
Mary Ann Freer	Governess	U	70		Governess	Middlesex, Ealing	
Mary Ann Lock	Servant	U	55		House Servant	Nants Fishfield	
Margaret Vahy	S.	U	70		S.	Middlesex, Epsom	
Mary A. French	S.	U	56		S.	Nants Alverstoke	
James Anderson	Head of Family	Mar	64		Apportion M.D. Medical Inspector of Hospitals and Schools - S. of England to Naslar Hospital	Scotland	
Mary A. Anderson	Wife	Mar	59		Lady	Devon, Plymouth	
Elaine Grest	Servant	U	68		House Servant	Nants Hambledon	
Eliza Adams	S.	U	54		S. S.	S. Hitcham	
Alexander Harley	Head of Family	Mar	65		Commander Royal Navy	Scotland, Ayrshire, Ayr	
Agnes Harley	Wife	Mar	64		Lady	S. S. Kilwinning	
Janet B. Graham	Daughter	U	22		S.	S. S. Dalry	
William Hardon	Son in Law	Mar	58		Landholder	S. Northshire, Ayrshire	
Thomas A. Hodrow	Son in Law	Mar	52		House Proprietor	Warwick, Ayrshire, Ayr	
Arabella Hodrow	Daughter	Mar	20		Lady	Scotland, Ayrshire, Dalry	
Eliza Luther	Servant	U	52		House Servant	Nants Gosport	
Harriet Neil	S.	U	24		S. S.	S. Newchurch	
Alexander M. Kechnie	Head of Family	Mar	68		Superintendent attached to Glasgow Genl. Hospital - Naslar Hospital	Scotland	
Mary M. Kechnie	Wife	Mar	59		Lady	Highland, Str. Martine	
Alexander G. M. Kechnie	Son	U	7		Scholar	S. S.	
William B. M. Kechnie	Son	U	5		Son	Nants Gosport	
Total of Persons...			7	13			

Thus, Elizabeth and her husband John Kerr Jnr. had both suffered the loss of a parent as babes! Other common factors were ... the name 'Boyd' appearing in both their families, as well as them having common roots in Dalry and Kilwinning, Ayrshire. The former suggests that there may have been a blood link between stepmother Jane Boyd, and Janet Boyd (Harley) Graham.

Marriage in 1866

1866. MARRIAGES in the District of *Saint Giles* in the City of *Edinburgh*

No.	When, Where, and How Married.	Signatures of Parties. Rank or Profession, whether Single or Widowed, and Relationship (if any).	Age.	Usual Residence.	Name, Surname, and Rank or Profession of Father. Name, and Maiden Surname of Mother.	If a regular Marriage, Signatures of officiating Minister and Witnesses. If irregular, Date of Completion, Decree of Declarator, or Sheriff's Warrant.	When & Where Registered, and Signature of Registrar.
186	1866 On the 11th day of August at St. John's Episcopal Church Edinburgh	<i>John Kerr</i> <i>Elizabeth Graham</i>	35	St. George Street Edinburgh	<i>John Kerr</i> <i>Margaret Deceased</i> <i>Jane Kerr</i> <i>William Deceased</i>	<i>signed</i> <i>Daniel Standford</i> <i>Charles Fullerton</i> <i>Church off. Ministers</i>	1866 August 11th at Edinburgh
	After Banns according to the Form of the Episcopal Church in Scotland	<i>signed</i> <i>Elizabeth Graham</i> <i>Registrar</i>	19	Edinburgh	<i>Thomas Graham</i> <i>Doctor Deceased</i> <i>Janet Boyd Graham</i> <i>M. Harley</i>	<i>signed</i> <i>James Kerr</i> <i>Wm. Deceased</i> <i>Thos. Deceased</i>	Northumberland Office Registrar J. B.

Not long after his 1866 marriage, John Jnr.'s widowed stepmother Jane (Boyd) Kerr died in 1870.

164	Jane Kerr	1870	F	60	William Boyd	Cardiac Disease	Robert Graham	1870
		November	years		Shoemaker	Some years	Undertaker	November 25 th
		Twentyfourth			(Deceased)	Dropsy		At Dalry
		ghoum st m				6 weeks		
	Widow of John Kerr	New Street			Margaret Boyd	As Cert by		
	Ther. Spirit Merch.	Dalry			M. S. Paton	Archd Blair		Daniel Nisde
					(Deceased)	Surgeon		of Registrar

Meantime, John Kerr Jnr. and Elizabeth Graham had 3 children – the first two in Edinburgh and the third in Aberdeen Where we see the family with servants in the 1871 Census

1871 Census

Name:	John Kerr	
Age:	40	
Estimated Birth Year:	abt 1831	
Relationship:	Head	
Spouse's name :	Elizabeth Jackson Graham Kerr	
Gender:	Male	
Where born:	Dalry, Ayrshire	
Registration Number:	168/2	
Registration district:	Old Machar	
Civil parish:	Old Machar	
Town:	Aberdeen	
County:	Aberdeenshire	
Address:	4 Albyn Terrace	
Occupation:	H M Inspector Of School M Alantch	
ED:	27	
Household schedule number:	46	
Line:	9	
Roll:	CSSCT1871_35	
Household Members:		
	Name	Age
	<u>John Kerr</u>	40
	<u>Elizabeth Jackson Graham Kerr</u>	23
	<u>Effa Allan Kerr</u>	3
	<u>Agnes Hamilton Kerr</u>	2
	<u>Edith Allan Kerr</u>	6
	<u>Isabella Low</u>	14
	<u>Mary McIntosh</u>	28
	<u>Jane Campbell</u>	22

Four additions to the family appear in the 1881 Census now in New Kilpatrick, Dumbarton

Dwelling: Garscadden House

Census Place: New Kilpatrick, Dumbarton, Scotland

Source: FHL Film 0203551 GRO Ref Volume 500 EnumDist 6 Page 7

	Marr	Age	Sex	Birthplace
John KERR	M	50	M	Dalry, Ayr, Scotland
Rel: Head				
Occ: H M Inspector of Schools				
Elizabeth J. KERR	M	33	F	Chatham, Kent, England
Rel: Wife				
Ella A.G. KERR		13	F	Edr, Edinburgh, Scotland
Rel: Daur				
Agnes M.H. KERR		12	F	Edr, Edinburgh, Scotland
Rel: Daur				
Edith A.B. KERR		11	F	Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland
Rel: Daur				
Graham C. KERR		8	M	Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland
Rel: Son				
James A. KERR		7	M	Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland
Rel: Son				
John H. KERR		4	M	Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland
Rel: Son				
Thomas L. KERR		4	M	Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland
Rel: Son				
Sarah StCLAIR	U	28	F	Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland
Rel: Governess				
Occ: Governess				
Hugh WILSON	U	36	M	Ayr, Ayr, Scotland
Rel: Visitor				
Occ: H M Inspector of Schools				
Isabella NISBET	U	56	F	Duns, Berwick, Scotland
Rel: Servant				
Occ: Cook				
Margt McDONALD	U	22	F	Isle Of Gigha, Argyll, Scotland
Rel: Servant				
Occ: Housemaid				
Julia PAXTON	U	22	F	Nairn, Nairn, Scotland
Rel: Servant				
Occ: Nurse				
Robt. WALLACE	U	21	M	Invergowrie, Forfar, Scotland
Rel: Servant				
Occ: Coachman				

And in 1891 they are based in Edinburgh, again! Winifred born in New Kilpatrick and Leslie in Edinburgh in January, 1891. Agnes is not present ... probably married?

1891 Census Scotland

Name:	John Kerr	
Age:	60	
Estimated Birth Year:	abt 1831	
Relationship:	Head	
Spouse's name :	Elizabeth Kerr	
Gender:	Male	
Where born:	Dalry, Ayrshire	
Registration Number:	685/2	
Registration district:	St Andrew	
Civil parish:	Edinburgh South Leith	
County:	Midlothian	
Address:	13 Regent Tce	
Occupation:	H M Inspector of Schools	
ED:	14	
Household schedule number:	56	
Line:	3	
Roll:	CSSCT1891_340	
Household Members:	Name	Age
	John Kerr	60
	Elizabeth Kerr	43
	Ella A G Kerr	23
	Edith A B Kerr	21
	Graham C Kerr	18
	James A Kerr	17
	John H Kerr	14
	Thomas L Kerr	14
	Winifred S Kerr	3
	Leslie M Kerr	3
		MO
	Mary Graham	38
	Margaret Smith	22
	Agnes Robertson	18
	Lizzie Davidson	25

Naturally, the household is much depleted by the 1901 Census
 [For reasons unexplored here.]

1901 Census Scotland

Name:	John Kerr	
Age:	70	
Estimated Birth Year:	abt 1831	
Relationship:	Head	
Spouse's name :	Elizabeth Kerr	
Gender:	Male	
Where born:	Dalry, Ayrshire	
Registration Number:	685/2	
Registration district:	St Andrew	
Civil parish:	Edinburgh South Leith	
County:	Midlothian	
Address:	15, Royal Terrace	
Occupation:	Retired Chief Inspector of Schools	
ED:	15	
Household schedule number:	14	
Line:	1	
Roll:	CSSCT1901_372	
Household Members:		
	Name	Age
	John Kerr	70
	Elizabeth I Kerr	53
	Ella A G Kerr	33
	Winifred S Kerr	13
	Leslie M Kerr	10
	Catherine Martin	25
	Elizabeth Henderson	24
	Isabella Macdonald	24
	Marta Reck	28

Finally, in Edinburgh in 1916, after a long life of exceptional service to the nation,
 John Kerr Jnr. dies of debility of age and heart failure.

Death of John Kerr M.A. LL.D	John Kerr	1816	M. 86	John Kerr	Debility of age	James A. Marshall	1916
	(deceased)	Edinburgh	years	General Merchant	Heart failure	Edinburgh	Edinburgh
	Chief Inspector of Schools	31st Dec 1911		(deceased)			
	M. J. Hamilton	15		John Kerr	debility of age	James A. Marshall	
	M. J. Hamilton	15		(deceased)	Heart failure	Edinburgh	
	M. J. Hamilton	15		(deceased)	Heart failure	Edinburgh	
	M. J. Hamilton	15		(deceased)	Heart failure	Edinburgh	