

## A PRIDE OF PANNERS

William McEwan set up his surgery and living quarters in Walford House at the end of what is now Ormiston Place then known as Doctor's Wynd. That surgery bore little resemblance to its modern equivalent. Patients simply presented themselves at the published surgery times, rang the big brass door bell at Walford House and were admitted by his Highland born housekeeper Jane Stewart to the waiting room. From there they were eventually summoned by the doctor simply calling "Next." Allegedly there was never any problem in deciding who that was.

William McEwan came to Prestonpans when there was a great deal of deprivation in the town and from the outset he became involved in alleviating that situation, often at great financial cost to himself.

### **Cleaner Air for Prestonpans and Regatta Patron**

By 1893 McEwan had been elected to the Town Council and two years later in 1895 was elevated to the position of Town Provost which office he retained for nearly a decade until 1904. A long while before impure industrial emissions were considered a legal nuisance, as Town Provost he was instrumental in achieving a better standard of air quality within the town.

Parish Minister the Rev. George Stuart Smith wrote to the Town Council expressing concern on behalf of his parishioners regarding excessive smoke and other pollutant emissions from the various industries operating throughout Prestonpans. There was then absolutely no statutory control over what today would certainly be considered illegal production methods leading to air pollution. Provost McEwan would certainly have been well aware of the medical conditions likely to be made worse through breathing such unclean air. Accordingly he constituted two Council committees each of which were detailed to visit all the production units throughout Prestonpans in order that the overall situation should be investigated. Ultimately, where fault was found the industrial owners were asked to implement improvement measures. Although pollution was not at the time a criminal offence thanks to Dr McEwan there was a discernable improvement in air quality. In many cases it was not at all difficult. Some industrial owners already possessed air filter equipment but simply had never used it prior to the Town Council's initiative.

His election as a councillor also coincided with the ongoing controversy regarding the need for a Town Hall in

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Prestonpans. Dr. McEwan perceived a real need for such a centre and, in his new position as a councillor, ably assisted by others such as Lady Susan Grant-Suttie, he was able to overturn the negative decision of 1892. Prestonpans Town Hall was formally opened some years later in 1899 by Lord Haldane, the sitting Member of Parliament for East Lothian.

William McEwan made extensive use of the Town Hall as a venue for his many welfare projects, which usually contained some religious element. It seems he and his wife never did abandon the religious input of their formative years. He was also joint patron of the annual Prestonpans Regatta.

### **Prestonpans Library Opened**

Another early and important project initiated by Dr. McEwan was the provision of a public library for the burgh. Libraries today are taken for granted but during the early 20th century were scarce outwith major conurbations. The Provost was already an active member of the School Board and considered a library to be an integral part of all educational processes. It was opened in 1904 whereupon he was appointed as its first Chairman.

During 1910, the doctor was also instrumental in forming the Men's Club which regularly met in the Town Hall during the winter months. Its members in addition to the almost mandatory religious instruction were encouraged to engage in debates covering diverse subjects as yet another extension of Dr. McEwan's interest in education. Most of the men were miners and were also instructed in the general principles of First Aid which as a doctor he considered an absolute necessity given the unsafe conditions associated then with working underground.

The Men's Club only lasted until 1914 when at the outbreak of the Great War most of its members enlisted in the armed forces. However, ably assisted by the local newsagent Dr. McEwan replaced the now defunct club with a similar gathering for boys of the burgh which became known as The Lad's Club. In addition to being something of a winter months' Bible Class and general social gathering, the club arranged an annual outing for the boys to some location outside the town such as North Berwick. Similar classes for Girls were also offered during the summer months. And somehow, at the weekends, he still found time to attend women's meetings at the old Cuthill Mission Hall.

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His work over the years as a general medical practitioner gave rise to many stories concerning the individual experiences of residents of old Prestonpans. One who knew him well and worked beside him in public service said: "He was sympathetic with real illness but had little toleration for those who made much of their maladies." However he gained the overall respect of his patients, though not always prompt payment for his services. Many were too poor to pay, but that never detracted from the doctor's willingness to help. Initially in his horse drawn carriage and later in one of the first motor cars seen in the town, he was regularly seen on his rounds visiting those too infirm to attend his Walford House surgery.

For over forty years, the doctor was an Elder of Grange Church and a good friend of its late 19th Century Minister Patrick Mackay. When the latter was serving abroad in India during 1901 Dr. McEwan travelled to Tranent to deliver Mrs. Mackay's baby and, in the absence of its father, also registered the birth.

### **Dr William McEwan and Sons**

Mrs. Agnes McEwan died on 26 June 1925 at the age of 65 but William McEwan worked on for quite a few more years before he formally retired from practice in 1934 at 75. For some time he had been assisted in the practice by his two sons Doctor Willie and Doctor George, both of whom would continue as general practitioners in the village through the advent of the National Health Service and beyond. Dr. George McEwan emigrated to Kenya in the fifties and unfortunately died there soon afterwards, but his brother remained in practice at Prestonpans until retiring to Longniddry. From the time his sons were co-opted as assistants Dr. McEwan became affectionately known as Old Doctor McEwan.

In 1934 the Doctor returned to live in Edinburgh though he did not completely sever his links with Prestonpans. In Edinburgh he energetically pursued involvement with various Christian bodies including the Scottish Evangelistic Council, the Y.M.C.A. Fellowship and especially the Religious Tract Society of Scotland, of which he had been Chairman of the Board of Directors since 1933. He lived in formal retirement for some ten years until 9th July 1943 when he died suddenly at his Edinburgh home aged eighty five.

Dr William McEwan did indeed become a legend in his lifetime. In a mini-biography published in the September 1943

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issue of *Monthly Visitor* a contemporary Andrew Stewart described his late friend as ‘a man of great force of character, sterling honesty, fearless courage and a born leader who, for over half a century was probably the most influential figure in Prestonpans.’

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*And grateful thanks for the assistance provided by Priscilla Miles, granddaughter of Dr. McEwan, and members of the Prestonpans Local History Society, especially Annette Gilroy.*

## 9 JOHN MUIR

John Muir was born on 21 April 1838 in the town of Dunbar on the east coast of Scotland. His native country is naturally deeply proud to be associated with his name but it was his adopted homeland of the United States of America which has made John Muir an international hero and honoured in Scotland.

At the age of eleven John Muir's formal childhood schooling ended when he travelled with his family to farm at Fountain Lake, Wisconsin. Muir worked there on the family farm until the age of 21 when he left to pursue further studies and subsequently travel across the USA and Canada.

He arrived in California on 28 March 1868 aged 30. And it was there that he found his life's work. Extensive travelling had revealed to him the grandeur and wonder of the natural landscape, a grandeur he communicated brilliantly to others through his writings during this time. By 1876 Muir was actively involved in the fight to conserve the beauty of the wilderness country, not only in California but throughout the American west. It was largely through John Muir's efforts that Yosemite was established as a National Park in 1890. He continued to campaign successfully for the preservation of many other areas



*John Muir*

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of outstanding natural beauty both as an individual, as a writer and as President of the Sierra Club which he co-founded in 1892 until his death from pneumonia on Christmas Eve 1914.

On his visit to Europe in 1893, Muir spent much of his time visiting his childhood haunts as well as undertaking expeditions further afield to the Scottish Highlands. He also found time to visit with a family friend who had moved to Prestonpans though he does not record his impressions of the locality which, at that time, was heavily polluted with industrial waste and emissions notwithstanding the best efforts of Dr William McEwan as Town Provost.

In 1976 the John Muir Country Park on the East Lothian coast was opened near Dunbar, and in 1981 the former home of the Muir family was opened as a museum. 1983 saw the establishment of the John Muir Trust in Scotland which, for thirty years, has worked successfully to preserve large areas of wild land in Scotland. And since the establishment of the John Muir Award in 1997 it has also encouraged many hundreds of young people to become involved in conserving their environment.

An East Lothian study on coastal access for leisure purposes resulted in the establishment of the John Muir Way, which weaves its way mainly along the coast from Musselburgh just outside Edinburgh to John Muir's birthplace in Dunbar. And that Way includes the shores of Prestonpans on the Forth and the baronial foreshore opposite the Prestoungrange Gothenburg.

Those who walk the John Muir Way through Prestonpans are bound to ask themselves what this inspiring individual who gloried in untouched beauty in his adopted homeland but also in Scotland made of the ancient industrial landscape used and often abused by its residents over one thousand of years or more. Human presence was everywhere: in the coal bings which now he would be delighted to see form grassy slopes close to the sea; at the old infilled harbour of Morison's Haven; and in the jumbled collection of buildings which hug the shore, their varied architecture a testament to generations who lived and worked on the land and sea and yes even below that sea itself.

John Muir Way's myriad walkers who pause at the mural opposite the Prestoungrange Gothenburg at the junction of Redburn Road and High Street will see John Muir himself seated there, in the landscape of his much loved Yosemite, overlooking the shoreline of the country which gave him birth, as painted by Kate Hunter in memory of such a great man.

## 10 JAMES SCHAW AND MARY MURRAY

Although their involvement with Prestonpans began one hundred years apart these two extraordinary benefactors shared remarkable similarities as providers of residential education in Prestonpans, a town with which neither had any recorded previous connection.

In 1780 most of the old Preston Estate including Preston House, which had been in Lord Grange's ownership in the first half of the century, was purchased by Dr. James Schaw. He has no personal recorded history prior to that acquisition nor does he appear in any formal Scottish biographical records other than in abbreviated form relating to his endowment of the Prestonpans School. A family named Schaw living at Saltoun, East Lothian may have been related but there is no other possible East Lothian connection prior to his appearance at Prestonpans that year. And relatively soon afterwards in 1784 Dr. James Schaw died at Preston House bequeathing a legacy which provided handsomely for some of the young males of Prestonpans and the surrounding area.

Dr. Schaw bequeathed the majority of the Barony and Lands of Preston, together with the proceeds thereof, to create a trust for old Preston House "to be fitted up for the maintenance and education of boys of poor but respectable parents." He also left a small legacy to his daughter, Mrs. Sawyer, with the proviso that should she die without issue her inheritance would also revert to his Prestonpans Trust which it duly did.

### **Schaw's Hospital for Boys**

There had always been a school of sorts in Prestonpans ever since the high profile establishment set up by John Davidson during the 17th century where Alexander Hume 'The Grammarian' taught Greek, Hebrew and Latin. In contrast Schaw's Hospital as it was to become known had a more fundamental educational purpose.

Not unexpectedly Dr Schaw attached many conditions to his legacy. Boys could only be admitted to the school between the ages of four and seven and remain there until they attained the age of fourteen. They were on admission to be absolutely free from the King's evil and from all contagious distempers.

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Preference was to be accorded to those with the surnames Schaw, MacNeill, Cunningham and Stewart. There was never any reason given for the preferential treatment accorded to the latter three surnames.

Schaw's Hospital opened as a school in Preston House during February 1789 initially run by a master, a housekeeper and two maid servants. There is no known reason for the five year delay in opening the establishment but initially and for many subsequent years there were only fifteen students enrolled at the school. The students were taught English, writing and arithmetic and also received some instruction in how to knit stockings and mend their clothes and shoes.

No fewer than 19 Trustees were appointed to supervise and administer these 15 boys and in keeping with the practice of the time they included the Parish Ministers of both Prestonpans and Tranent. On completion of their education those Trustees were empowered to "bind the boys as apprentices or otherwise let them out to businesses as they judge best." A Matron was later appointed with responsibility for the fundamental schoolhouse administration.

Preston House was eventually extended and adapted to successfully accommodate twenty four pupils. The Trustees, through prudent investments, had greatly enhanced the original bequest and decided to use the funds to create larger accommodation so more pupils could benefit. A new site was chosen just to the north of Preston House and in 1832 a new building designed in the old English Jacobean style by William Burn was completed at a cost of £3 000. The students together with their headmaster Mr. McBride moved to their new home and Preston House was abandoned.

Old Registers held within the Scottish Archives in Edinburgh do list names of many pupils who benefited from a Schaw education but those lists are thought to be incomplete. It cannot therefore be absolutely certain how many boys passed through the school. Some boys are known to have benefited greatly from their early education and many emigrated to America and elsewhere. William Jelly became a distinguished doctor of medicine in San Francisco and George Goldie a gymnastics instructor at Princeton University in the USA whilst John Chisholm became an eminent dental surgeon in Edinburgh. The first pupil with the surname Shaw – without the 'c' – was not admitted to the school until 1804 and he later became Chief Accountant of the old Eastern Bank.



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The school was brought to an end by the Endowed Hospitals Act of 1881. Schaw's funds were appropriated and the establishment ceased to operate coincidentally in the same year as the high profile opening of Prestonpans Public School by Lady Susan Grant-Suttie. Despite the closure of Schaw's school a financial legacy remained which provided an annual award well into the 20th century for the best pupil attending secondary school in Prestonpans.

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Mary Murray died at the age of 86 at her High Street home in Dysart, Fife on 26 November 1861. She was born in Edinburgh the daughter of wine merchant William Murray and his wife Margaret. Neither Mary or her parents have any traceable connection with Prestonpans. Her exact place of birth and parentage are unclear but her Will made provision for girls that was strikingly similar to that made by James Schaw a century earlier in respect of boys. Her bequest was to found "an hospital for the training of female children of poor but respectable parents as domestic servants".

On her death, the Estate was worth some £20 000 but she, perhaps unusually, expressed a primary condition that the sum should be allowed to accumulate for a period of twenty one years under the care of named Trustees – John Dundas, William Wilson, Samuel Davidson and Alexander Montgomery Bell. By 1882, Mary Murray's legacy had increased to £36 000. By then unfortunately the original trustees had passed away but alternative trustees – the Keeper of the Signet and his Deputy together with their Commissioners – had assumed administration of the Mary Murray Trust.

In 1882 those new trustees proceeded to take a twenty five years lease of the old and empty Schaw's Hospital building to implement the directions of Miss Murray in setting up her proposed school for girls. Like Schaw a century previously Miss Murray's Will contained copious conditions, provisos and strict rules to be absolutely observed by her trustees.

### **The Murray Institute for Girls**

Children with the surname Murray, if their claims in all other respects appeared to her trustees to be equal, were to be given preference of admission to the school. Children were to be accepted between the ages of six and eight and remain there

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until age fourteen, at which time they were to be found a place in domestic service. Whereas Schaw's directions had allowed some discretion regarding employment subsequent to the boys' formal education all pupils of the Mary Murray Institute were invariably to be placed in domestic service.

To equip them for such employment the girls were to be instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, sewing, spinning, knitting 'and such other plain, useful acquirements as my said Trustees shall think best calculated for them'. However, the most important requirement was that all the pupils were to be taught the principles of religion, honesty and truth. Reading of the Scriptures together with prayers were to be a morning and evening necessity.

No male teacher or chaplain was ever to be admitted or employed in the school, the whole establishment to be controlled by a 'proper mistress' or matron appointed at the discretion of the trustees. Miss Isabella Meikle, previously of Donaldson's School in Edinburgh, was appointed Matron and apparently remained in that position throughout her working life as indeed did many of the later teachers.

Miss Murray empowered the trustees to determine rules for actual management and general administration of the school. It was decided that the establishment would be run by eight directors all of whom were appointed from the Office of the Signet. They were the Keeper of the Signet, his Deputy and six of his Commissioners. These men formulated specific rules which effectively guaranteed the smooth running of the school.

Unlike the delay in setting up Schaw's school the Mary Murray Institute opened in 1882 with an initial intake of twenty six students including two from Dysart in Fife, where the Magistrates and Town Council had been invited annually to nominate two girls for admission to the institution. This was not a prescribed requirement of the Will so the Dysart invitation must supposedly have been a gesture of good will by the administrators.

There was never any breath of scandal associated with the Murray Institute and a report dated 1901 revealed that by that year many girls had completed their education and been placed successfully in domestic service. During 1901 the yearly roll of students had increased to sixty eight and Miss Meikle was confirmed as still in charge. Another teacher, Miss Thomson, had already recorded sixteen years service giving an indication of stability within the teaching and administrative staff.

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Miss Murray's concern for the pupils obviously extended beyond the years of their formal education. If a student had remained with her first employer until the age of twenty then "provided she had at all times conducted herself with decorum (she) would receive a present not exceeding £10 from Miss Murray's Trust either on the occasion of her marriage or attaining the age of forty". In practice because of the excellent management of funds by the Trustees every girl who successfully concluded her formal education was given a present of £10 on leaving the Institute. It was further provided that any former pupil attaining the age of sixty, and having no home of her own, could return to live in the Institute where she would be given work in accordance with her age and strength, subject to the woman having throughout her life, conducted herself with "proper propriety".

Extensive changes in the provision of formal education during the first half of the 20th century saw the gradual demise of the Murray Institute. The old Schaw School building survived for many years as a venue for other purposes.

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## 11 SIR WALTER SCOTT

Sir Walter Scott has achieved world-wide renown for his poetry and his historical novels. He was born on 15th August 1771 and is primarily associated with the Border country where his estate at Abbotsford has become a place of pilgrimage for his many devotees. But Walter Scott also had very strong associations with the East of Scotland including our small coastal village of Prestonpans.

After an attack of polio left the young Walter with a damaged leg his parents sent him away from the unhealthy atmosphere of Edinburgh to his grandfather's Sandyknowe Farm at Smailholm in Roxburghshire. And it was at Sandyknowe that he first developed his lifelong enthusiasm for the old tales and ballads of his native Scotland.

By the age of eight he had returned to Edinburgh but efforts to restore mobility to his damaged leg continued and he was sent to Prestonpans just 10 miles from Edinburgh where it was hoped that the sea water would assist his lameness. His visit is commemorated by a plaque in the High Street at the location



*Sir Walter Scott*