

Lessels Snippets during Visit to Edinburgh June 2006

The main purpose of my visit was a last look around the old school, but I managed to persuade my sister Rosemary to take me on a little 'trawl' to various historic Edinburgh sites.

Foremost among these was the birthplace of Margaret Josephine Lessels – my great grandmother – at 36 Danube Street.



This is still an elegant curved street, with the original Aberdeen granite setts forming the cobbled roadway, and wide stone-flagged pavements, near Stockbridge about $\frac{2}{3}$ mile from Princes Street, in the 'New' Town.

It is a favoured area currently, having overcome a period just after the second world war, when it housed a notorious brothel. A flat here now costs over £300,000. In the next street, the Georgian terraced houses in Ann Street sell for over £925,000

Rosemary stands by the gate to the basement flat at number 36



I went to Bedford Street – birthplace of Mary Ann Lessels in 1860 – but it had been completely rebuilt in about the 1970s (it had become very rundown apparently)



Buccleuch Street is near the Edinburgh University, but No. 42 is now part of a pub.



There are 4 or 5 stories of flats here, and it is also not far from the Meadows, where people walk, picnic and play with Frisbees or on the swings and slides with their children

On another day I persuaded my daughter Heather to drive me to Fife, where we visited the local studies library adjacent to the museum and Central Library, and near to the railway station in Kirkcaldy, just at the start of Abbotshall Road.

They had lots of records there, on film and fiche, but we didn't have too much time and I know from bitter experience how longwinded that can be, so we settled for the Monumental Inscriptions in West Fife by J F & S Mitchell. This big book showed all the gravestones' inscriptions and allowed us to look up in Abbotshall churchyard a Lessels grave. Just a few minutes away by car, we drove in to the church and went straight to it from the map in the book.

The inscription on the stone was recorded as being on both sides, and on top – viz: 1810 JL♥MC on one side, JL♥CG on *top* of the stone, and on the other side John Lessels, Priestlies who died 13 Apr 1804 aged 72 years; also his wife Christian Gray who died 12 Jul 1826 aged 90 years and IL♥MW [this should be JL]



As you can see this is a bit battered, and leaning at quite an angle with the reverse side in heavy shade, but my daughter's expertise as a qualified photographer was able to use the flash, even in the bright sunshine, to reveal the other side – with a bit of difficulty!



Heather reveals the text in heavy shade, clearly showing the inscription on the curved top of the stone



The church itself was an interesting shape, and although locked, one could look through the clear glass windows to each side of the front door to see the typical semi-circular pews facing the pulpit. There were also some good stained glass windows.



In the library I also looked at an old book – the Watch Committee minutes from 1819 to 1828. They watched over the graves, and purchased two guns to do so. Apparently in these days there was a lot of grave robbing about – Burke and Hare were famously ‘at it’ in Edinburgh. John Lessels was shown as representing Raith several times in this period, and Mr Lessels Snr and Mr Lessels Jnr in 1819. There were 5 divisions in the area covered plus 4 – 6 others named as West Bridge, Bankhead, Chapel, Balwerie and Bannochee. They collected money which was used to pay for ammunition and repairs to the guns, and to various people for coals, damages etc and to Thos Hillock and Mr Cranon for meetings.

They didn’t have any old maps, but looking at the current area, the Raith estate is still largely there with Raith Lake with the Dronnachy burn flowing into it, and the Tiel Burn flowing out towards the sea. Raith Tower and Balbarton are shown, with just a small area swallowed up to housing. Just a short distance away is Torbain Lodge and Farm, as also is Balwearie and Balwearie High School. There is also Starks Park, the home of Raith Rovers, the Scottish football team. Kirkcaldy is known as the ‘Lang Toun’ and it certainly stretches quite some way from North to South along the coastline. Kinghorn is just 2 – 3 miles further south but it may have been the registration district for christenings.

All told it was a useful few hours spent, and with lovely views across the river Forth towards Edinburgh on the way home.

