

George Buist (1750-1797): The Life of a Fife Tenant Farmer of Kettle

By His Fourth Great Grandson, Michael T. Tracy

George Buist, a tenant farmer from Fife, typified the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit in Scottish farming in mid-18th century. By setting aside a farm for the bleaching of linen he, like many others in lowland Scotland made a contribution that would see linen become the country's most important industry until it was eclipsed by cotton in the later years of the century. He also lived through the height of the Scottish Enlightenment when new science was being brought to bear on Scottish agriculture.

Early Years

The future tenant farmer of Kettle Parish, Fife was born in November 1750 at Woodhead, Abdie Parish, Fife. He was baptized on Tuesday, 1 December 1750 at Abdie, Fife to Andrew Buist and Isabel Thomson, the third child of nine.¹ A prominent family of Fife, the Buist family owned large amounts of land in Abdie, Fife.



Fig.1. Woodhead, Abdie Parish, Fife, Birthplace of George Buist 1750, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2010 Michael T. Tracy

By the year of 1770, a 20 year old George Buist is found residing at Orkie, Kettle Parish, Fife. He met and later married Margaret Low on Friday, 7 September 1770 at Kettle Parish. Margaret Low was born in about 1752 and is listed as being from Strathmiglo Parish, Fife. According to the Kettle Parish Register for Marriages it reads: "27th August 1770 were contracted in order to marriage, George Buist in this Parish and Margaret Low in the Parish of Strathmiglo and were married 7th September."²

¹ Baptismal Record of George Buist, 1 December 1750, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0303

² Marriage Record of George Buist, 7 September 1770, Kettle Parish Records, Old Parish Records 435/0030 0326

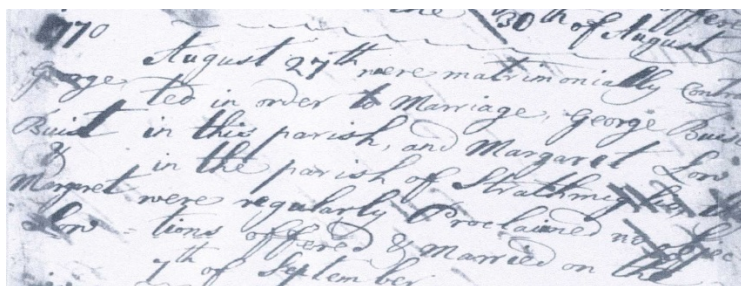


Fig. 2. Marriage Record of George Buist, 7 September 1770, Kettle Parish, Fife, Crown Copyright

George Buist & Company, Kettle Bleachfield, Kettle, Fife

During the 18th century, linen was Scotland's premier leading industry and of great importance. A scheme of bounties was introduced to promote the exporting of Scottish linens to the American colonies. The colonial market for Scottish linens during this period, were in high demand. With advancements in mechanized cotton spinning was introduced Scottish linen output more than doubled. However this was not the case for flax spinning. Buist probably saw this great potential in the linen industry. Like most farmers of the time, Buist was an entrepreneur having started his own bleachfield at Kettle Bleachfield, which was not too far from his farm at Orkie in Kettle Parish, Fife. George Buist & Company a small cloth business was located with 4 miles of Cupar in 1781. According to the *Edinburgh Advertiser Newspaper* dated Tuesday, 27 February 1781 it stated: "Kettle Bleachfield, within 4 miles of Cupar in Fife. George Buist & Company will down Cloth as soon as the season permits, and bleaches at the following prices: all plain linen, yard wide and under, wrought in a 900 reed or under at 2d. per yard; 1000 and 1100, at 2 ½ d.; 1200 at 3d.; 1300 at 3 ½ d."³

³ *Edinburgh Advertiser Newspaper*, 2 March 1781, Page 143



Fig.3. Orkie Farm & Kettle Bleachfield Locations, Kettle Parish, Fife © National Library of Scotland, Map Division 1826-1827 (John Thompson's Atlas of Scotland, 1832)

George Buist also held lands in Abdie Parish, Fife. He was also a tenant farmer in the Grange of Lindores. According to a land deed of the property dated Tuesday, 6 July 1784 George Buist transferred his rights to these lands but did not give up ownership to Peter Hay of Leys.⁴

⁴ Land Deed of George Buist to Peter Hay, 6 July 1784, National Archives of Scotland (SC20/36/14)

Deed of poudmy the ground with all following or
 Compend to follow yon Which affyr natione
 abbein rithen and Dispositione hereby bind and
 oblige me and my heirs &c. to the said Peter Hay or his
 good and sufficient to the said Peter Hay or his
 forsaids from all facts or Deeds done or to be done
 by me or my heirs herof and lastly I have herewith
 up to the said Peter Hay the said heritable bond
 and assignmēt following thereon and Deed of
 poudmy the ground; to be used by him and his
 forsaids all pleases And I consent to the
 Records and Deeds of in the books of Council and
 Session of any others Compend the same to be man
 for the said Peter Hay and if need be that all manner
 of Deeds and Records needfull may pass hereon as
 the Deeds and Deeds to I Confound

My self & Attorn

for the said Peter Hay his private Security if needfull
 that no person should pass hereon I do hereby make
 and Confound

and I and of you only and stally my
 bailist in that part whom I require to pass and
 give and deliver heretables Deeds and Assignmēt of the
 said yearlly annul of the said poudmy Scott or any of
 or assignmēt to the said Peter Hay or his forsaids of on
 the said yearlly annul Scott upliffabill in maner
 mentioned in y^e said heretables bond, I do hereby make
 all way and under the hand in maner mentioned
 in the said bond In witness of the said Peter Hay
 Confound of this and the two preceding years
 written on Deeds passed by Andrew Wilson
 writte in Newburgh. The said Subscribed their
 presents all the year of Newburgh the fourth
 day of may 1784 and fifth of June year
 to pass the said witness George Smith Clerk
 to the said Peter Hay and Lamey and the said Andrew
 Wilson

George Buist

George Smith witness
 Andrew Wilson witness

Fig.4. George Buist Disposition & Assignment to Peter Hay, 6 July 1784, Grange of Lindores, Abdie, Fife
 © National Archives of Scotland (George Buist signature on Bottom of Deed)

Family Matters

As well as farming at Orkie, Kettle Parish, Fife, George and Margaret Buist raised their family. They had four children: Henry, Jean, John and George Buist. Margaret Buist died on Friday, 23 November 1781 at Orkie at about the age of 29.⁵ She was buried on Saturday, 24 November 1781 at the Kettle Parish Churchyard. After her death George Buist erected a table stone in her memory.

⁵ Death Record of Margaret Low Buist, 23 November 1781, Kettle Parish Records, Old Parish Records 435/0050 0078

Being a widower for over two years, George Buist met and later married Christian Ballingall of Rameldry, Kettle Parish, Fife. Such spelling differences were not uncommon. Her father George Ballingall was a well-known tenant farmer of Rameldry for many years. The couple, were married on Friday, 4 June 1784 at Kettle Parish Church. According to the Kettle Parish Register of Marriages it reads: "22 May 1784 were matrimonially contracted in order to marriages, George Buist and Christian Ballingall in this Parish they were regularly proclaimed and no objection offered and married 4th June."⁶

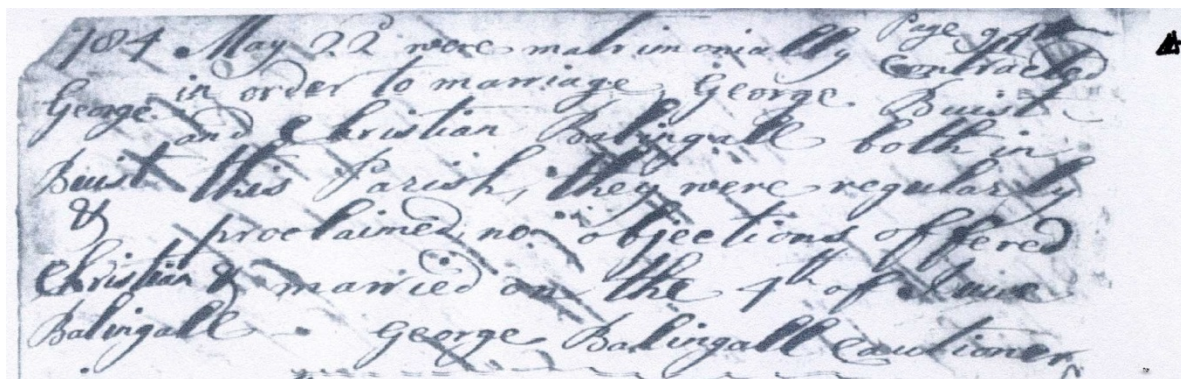


Fig.5. Marriage Record of George Buist, 4 June 1784, Kettle Parish Records © Crown Copyright

George and Christian Buist had eight children who were all born and raised at Orkie. They were: Janet, Katherine, an Unnamed male child (stillborn), Christian, Thomas, Margaret, Robert and James Buist. They were members of the Kettle Parish Church located in Kingskettle. This church which is presently still standing was built in 1636. According to the Kettle Statistical Account of Kettle Parish, Fife, written by the Reverend Peter Barclay in 1791 states: "The Church appears, by a date on it, to have been built in 1636. It has been twice repaired since, and is in good condition."⁷

A good account of agriculture in Kettle Parish is also contained in the 1791 Statistical Account. It states: "The farms in the parish are 32, and the average of servants on each is 5, viz. 3 men and 2 women. Most of the farms have cottages, whence they obtain assistance in hay time and harvest...The fences are ditch and hedge, or stone walls as is most convenient or suitable...The parish produces both more corn and cattle than is sufficient for its own maintenance. Wheat is sown, from the middle of September to the end of November; peas and beans in the beginning of March; oats from the middle of March to the end of April; and barley in the month of May."⁸

Orkie farm was located nearly a quarter of a mile east north east of the village of Freuchie. According to the Ordinance Survey Name Books for Orkie, Kettle Parish it described the location as follows in 1853-1855: "a farm steading with cottages occupied by servants, but no farmhouse...the property of Woods Endowed School, Drumeldrie near Largo."⁹

⁶ Marriage Record of George Buist, 4 June 1784, Kettle Parish Records, Old Parish Records 435/0030 0381

⁷ The Statistical Accounts of Scotland 1791-1845. Statistical Account of Kettle Parish, Fife, 1791. Written by Reverend Peter Barclay. University of Edinburgh, Page 374

⁸ The Statistical Accounts of Scotland 1791-1845. Statistical Account of Kettle Parish, Fife, 1791. Written by Reverend Peter Barclay. University of Edinburgh, Pages 65, 378-380

⁹ Ordinance Survey Name Books, Fife & Kinross Name Books, 1853-1855. Volume 15 (OS1/13/15/63) Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

'Abolishing Church patronage'

In a letter dated Thursday, 18 November 1784 George Buist wrote about the subject of abolishing church patronage in Scotland. According to the *Edinburgh Advertiser Newspaper* dated Friday, 26 November 1784: "At Kettle Kirk, 18 November 1784, in consequence of a circular letter from the Committee of Glasgow for petitioning the Legislature for abolishing patronage in Scotland, and thereupon intimation being made from the letter last Sabbath a considerable number of the Kettle Parish met to consider the letter...It is with pleasure we inform the Committee and the Public, that we agree with the Committee on the abolishment of patronage...When in the settlement of vacancies, all regard is laid aside for the edification of the people, for it is declared to be a right of private property but also merely the providing young men with the annuities for life...Signed by George Buist, President."¹⁰

The Church Patronage Act (1711) was an act to restore the patrons to their ancient rights of presenting minister to the churches vacant in Scotland. The purpose was to allow noble and other patrons to gain control over the Church of Scotland parish churches again. The Act of 1711 remained in force for a considerable length of time, as there were attempts to repeal it, as in 1784.

A Fife Landowner

Until the Abolition of the Scotland Feudal Tenure Act in the year 2000, which went into force in the year 2004, land in Scotland was held through the feudal system. All land theoretically belonged to the Crown, and the Crown passed ownership to its immediate vassals or tenants, who in turn could pass ownership to their vassals or tenants. George Buist was a tenant farmer.

As a tenant farmer, George Buist loaned various individuals and businesses money from time to time. As a security for a loan, property was used. In the sasines for Kettle Parish, Fife during his lifetimes, there are various transactions of this kind as well as records of George Buist acquiring various parcels of land in the parish. The first such land transaction occurred on Thursday, 12 April 1787 when George Buist acquired land in parts of Holekettle and parts of West and South Rumdowan from John Thomson.¹¹

Additionally, there is an early deed showing George Buist as a servant in Orkie paying off a loan of credit to Walter Birrell, baker in Freuchie, Kettle Parish, Fife. According to a Sheriff of Fife Deed dated Saturday, 20 December 1788 George Buist received a Discharge of Inhibition from Walter Birrell a baker in Freuchie. Buist was 38 years of age at this time.¹²

Buist also purchased various other parcels of land in the Parish of Kettle, Fife. On Friday, 4 March 1791 he acquired property adjacent to the Parish of Kettle from William Suttie a weaver in Holekettle.¹³

He purchased the lands called the Haugh and Cowwards in which he refers to these lands in his Trust Disposition dated Tuesday, 6 December 1796. These lands consisted of three acres and were

¹⁰ *Edinburgh Advertiser Newspaper*, Friday, 26 November 1784, Page 350

¹¹ Land Deed of George Buist, Thursday, 12 April 1787, National Archives of Scotland (P.R. 36.305)

¹² Sheriff Court of Fife Deed, Saturday, 20 December 1788, National Archives of Scotland (SC20/36/15)

¹³ Land Deed of George Buist, Friday, 4 March 1791, National Archives of Scotland (P.R. 39.394)

purchased on Monday, 21 November 1774.¹⁴ Additionally there are various other small parcels of land throughout the parish that he also purchased or held as security for various loans made during his lifetime.

With the height of the Scottish Enlightenment and the new science approach to agriculture, Buist lived through what was known as the 'age of improvement.' The 'age of improvement' relied on the best practice or best approach to farming in Scotland. Examples of this approach were: enclosure by stonewalling between farm lands; liming of the fields were begun which in turn made the soil better and improved the grazings of livestock; and finally crop rotation was introduced. All of these improvements made great and lasting improvements to agriculture in Scotland.

Tax Records

In the second half of the 18th century, the central government raised money by taxing various types of property. One such tax in 1797-98 was the Farm Horse Tax. George Buist was listed in this tax for his estate at Grange in Abdie Parish, Fife. On Thursday, 31 July 1794 the tax showed that Buist had one horse and was taxed ten shillings.¹⁵ Even being deceased for seven months Buist was taxed at Grange, Abdie, Fife. Being a large landowner, this in actuality meant that the Trustees of George Buist were taxed on Monday, 28 August 1797 for the deceased property. By this time he had six horses on the estate of Grange and was taxed ten shillings for four of these horses.¹⁶

Another such tax was called the Window Tax which was unpopular in Scotland. This tax was a property tax based on the number of windows in a house. In Scotland the tax was imposed in 1748. A house had to have at least seven windows or a rent of at least five pounds. The earliest Window Tax record that exists for George Buist is at Orkie in Kettle Parish, Fife. This record was recorded on Thursday, 18 August 1785 and showed Orkie as having seven windows and was therefore taxed 4 pounds, 1 shilling and 2 pennies.¹⁷ The earliest Window Tax that exists for the estate of Grange in Abdie Parish, Fife was recorded on Friday, 3 August 1787. The number of windows shown was six and he was taxed 4 pounds, 8 shillings and 4 pennies.¹⁸ The last Window Tax record which records George Buist was on Monday, 29 July 1794 for Orkie, Kettle Parish, Fife. He was taxed 4 pounds, 1 shilling and 2 pennies for seven windows.¹⁹

¹⁴ Trust Disposition & Deed Settlement of George Buist, Tuesday, 6 December 1796, Register of Deeds, Burgh of Falkland, 1738-1798: University of St. Andrews Library (B25/4/1) Pages 408-409

¹⁵ Horse Tax Rolls, 1785-1798. Horse Tax for Fife, Volume 26 (E326/9/26/111) Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

¹⁶ Horse Tax Rolls, 1785-1798. Horse Tax for Fife, Volume 2 (E326/10/2/250) Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

¹⁷ Window Tax, 1748-1798. Window Tax for Fife, Volume 48 (E326/1/48/33) Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

¹⁸ Window Tax, 1748-1798. Window Tax for Fife, Volume 48 (E326/1/48/69) Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

¹⁹ Window Tax, 1748-1798. Window Tax for Fife, Volume 49 (E326/1/49/121) Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

Survey of the Old Menden Duties on Tithes - continued

(Page 8/21)

INHABITANTS NAMES, and Designations.	Frontage Number of Houses.	R A T E S.	DUTY on WINDOWS	DUTY on HOUSES	10 per Cent.													
		Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve	Thirteen	Fourteen to Nineteen	Twenty	Twenty-one	Twenty-two	Twenty-three	Twenty-four & upwards	per 31 Dec. III.			
		Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	Windows	L.	s.	d.	10 th
Kettle																		
David Fleming Forthar	1	7													12	1		2 6
Mr Low Annfield	2								17						15	1		2 7 8
The Wallingall Balmah	3		8												4	1		6
Mr Scremgeour Ramornie	4													25	2	10		5 1 2
John Thomson, Ochiltree	5					11									11			1 2 4
John King Kettle	6				10										8	4		11 2
The Simpson, D.	7	7													12			2 6
John Latta D.	8	7													12			2 6
Ja ^s Wyllyth - Linchile	9		8												4			6
Da Johnston, Eg Lathbrisk	10													44	4	8		8 10 8
George Bruce Orky	11	7													12			2 6
Major Annot	12								16						14			2 6
Mr Barclay, Mint	13							13	33						5	4		1 0
	13	28	16		10	11		13	33					69	11	10	10	13 1 4 11 8

The Passing of George Buist

Buist could have become ill before he decided to have written his Final Trust. However, what is known is that on Tuesday, 6 December 1796 his Final Trust and Disposition was made.²⁰ He named his brother Henry Buist of East Miln, Strathmiglo, Fife and five others as his Trustees and Curators. These included Arthur Buist of Pitcuncarty, John Inglis, John Inglis, Baker in Cupar, his wife's half -brother George Ballingall, tenant in Rameldry and Peter Ballingall, tenant in Collairnie, Dunbog, Fife.

Furthermore, in his Final Trust he gave his wife Christian Ballingall a yearly income of 15 pounds for the rest of her life and instructed that she and the younger children should remain at Orkie for up to three years from the time of his death upon which time, his eldest son and heir Henry Buist shall take over the tenancy of Orkie and all other lands owned by him. However, if his wife Christian Ballingall should remarry then she will forfeit all monies.²¹

The Trust further states for the following older children that his eldest son Henry Buist shall inherit all his lands; that George Buist shall receive 600 pounds sterling plus 10 pounds sterling a year while at college for defraying the expense of completing his college education; his youngest son, James Buist shall receive 600 pounds sterling; his eldest daughter, Jean (Buist) Dun 250 pounds sterling; his daughters Katherine and Margaret Buist each 250 pounds sterling.²² His younger children under the age

²⁰ Trust Disposition & Deed Settlement of George Buist, Tuesday, 6 December 1796, Register of Deeds, Burgh of Falkland, 1738-1798; University of St. Andrews Library (B25/4/1) Pages 407-426

²¹ Trust Disposition & Deed Settlement of George Buist, Tuesday, 6 December 1796, Register of Deeds, Burgh of Falkland, 1738-1798; University of St. Andrews Library (B25/4/1) Pages 407-426

²² Trust Disposition & Deed Settlement of George Buist, Tuesday, 6 December 1796, Register of Deeds, Burgh of Falkland, 1738-1798; University of St. Andrews Library (B25/4/1) Pages 407-426

of 14 namely Janet, Thomas and Robert Buist shall be under the care of their mother Christian Ballingall and shall have as their curators the six Trustees of his Trust.²³

George Buist died on Tuesday, 24 January 1797 at Orkie, Kettle Parish, Fife at the age of 46.²⁴ His cause of death was 'catarrh' which may have indicated chronic bronchitis, bronchiectasis or even pneumonia. 'Catarrh' was effectively a description of a symptom rather than an underlying disease in situations where these could not be readily diagnosed. According to the Kettle Parish burial records it stated: "25 January 1797, George Buist in Orkie, laid beneath the family stone. Died of cararrah."²⁵

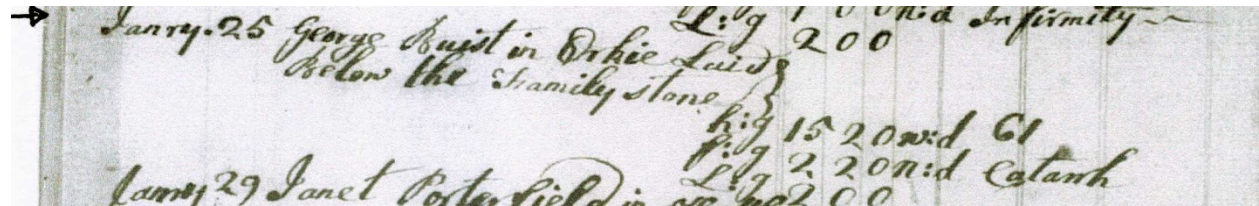


Fig.7. Death Record of George Buist, 24 January 1797, Kettle Parish Records © Crown Copyright

His table stone still stands presently but is now illegible and the exact location remains unknown. The table stone read: "George Buist, feuar, West Brackley, wife Margaret Low 1781, age 30."²⁶

²³ Trust Disposition & Deed Settlement of George Buist, Tuesday, 6 December 1796, Register of Deeds, Burgh of Falkland, 1738-1798; University of St. Andrews Library (B25/4/1) Pages 407-426

²⁴ Death Record of George Buist, Tuesday, 24 January 1797, Kettle Parish Records, Old Parish Records 435/0050 0323

²⁵ Death Record of George Buist, Tuesday, 24 January 1797, Kettle Parish Records, Old Parish Records 435/0050 0323

²⁶ Kettle Old Parish Records Lair Register, West Division, Churchyard West, Old Parish Records 435-5, Fife Family History Society Death Index, 2004

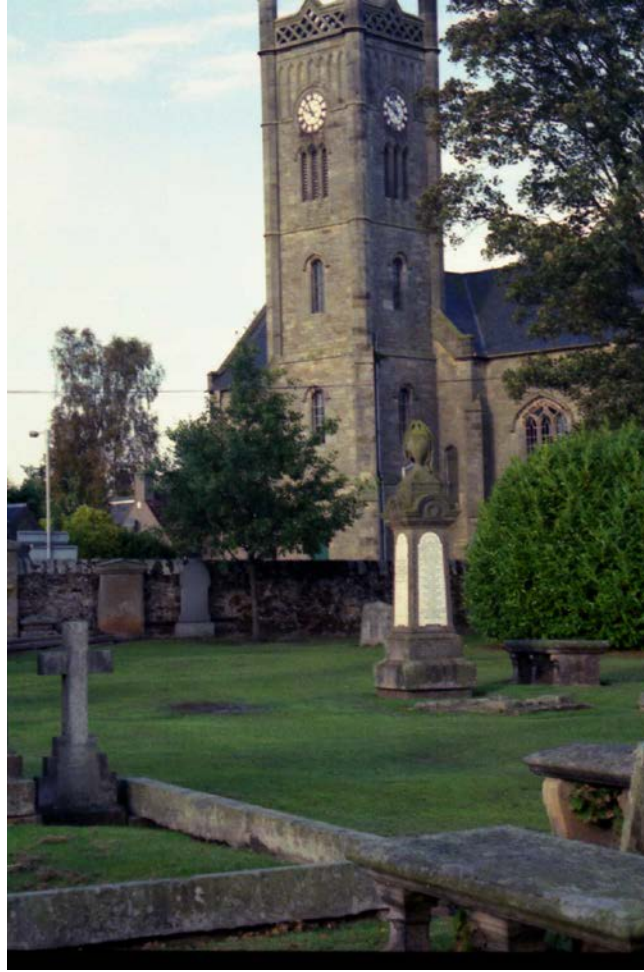


Fig.8. Kettle Parish Churchyard, Kettle, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2010 Michael T. Tracy

His wife Christian Buist left Orkie, Kettle Parish, Fife with her younger children circa 1797-99. Henry Buist eldest son of George Buist held onto Orkie for another ten years after his father's death. On Thursday, 19 March 1807 Henry Buist and his father's Trustees sold the lands of Orkie to the patrons of the Mortification School of Drumeldry.²⁷ Orkie is no longer in existence however some of its former lands are presently owned by a company called Kettle Produce, which is a major supplier of vegetables to United Kingdom supermarkets.

²⁷ Land Deed of the Trustees of George Buist, Thursday, 19 March 1807, National Archives of Scotland (SC20/33/17) Falkland Deeds 1783-1798



Fig.9. Michael T. Tracy at Kettle Produce, on the Former lands of Orkie, Kettle Parish, Fife, October 2003, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2010 Michael T. Tracy

Christian Buist was residing at Kirktonbarns, Forgan Parish, Fife where she raised her younger children. She died on Thursday, 2 October 1834 at Kirktonbarns at the age of 77.²⁸ She was buried at Forgan Churchyard, Forgan Parish, Fife. Her gravestone still stands presently and reads: "George Buist, farmer, Orkie, widow Christian Banangall, October 1834." Such spelling differences were not uncommon.



Fig.10. Grave of Christian Ballingall Buist, Forgan Churchyard, Forgan Parish, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2010 Michael T. Tracy

On Tuesday, 9 December 1834 there was a public auction for some of Christian Buist's personal estate items at Kirktonbarns. These items included furniture, bed and table linen, wearing apparel and various books. The auction yielded 29 pounds, 5 shillings and 6 pence to the family and auctioneer.²⁹ On Thursday, 19 February 1835 James Buist inherited his mother's estate where he lived with his sisters Katherine and Margaret Buist for many years.

²⁸ Inventory of Christian Buist, 19 February 1835, Cupar Sheriff Court, National Records of Scotland (SC20/50/8)

²⁹ Inventory of Christian Buist, 19 February 1835, Cupar Sheriff Court, National Records of Scotland (SC20/50/8)

The Life and Times of George Buist spanned 46 years. George Buist was not only a tenant farmer of Abdie and Kettle Parishes in Fife but also was an extraordinary entrepreneur for his time, establishing a bleachfield at Kettle Bleachfield. He was a family man and helped raise 12 children spanning two marriages while at Orkie. He was a supporter of abolishing church patronage in Scotland as evidence of his letter of Thursday, 18 November 1781. A Fife tenant farmer and land owner, George Buist acquired many lands in the Parish of Kettle, Fife and had he lived longer most likely would have acquired more. Fife can be very proud of one of its own, George Buist, a tenant farmer and land owner of Abdie and Kettle Parishes. He is warmly commemorated here in grateful esteem and recognition by his fourth great grandson, Michael T. Tracy.

Viva enim mortuorum in memoria vivorum est posita (The life of the dead is retained in the memory of the living)

Acknowledgements

With special thanks and appreciation to Dr. Norman Reid, Former Head of Special Collections Division and Mr. Steven Martin, Deputy Reader Services Manager, Special Collections Division, University of St. Andrews, who kindly helped me with researching the Trust Disposition & Deed Settlement of my fourth great grandfather, George Buist; Dr. Iain Macintyre whose help with this publication and review of it is gratefully acknowledged and finally to my wife, Carol S. Tracy who graciously held my hand and offered her assistance in being my travel companion, helped in researching the many documents and photographed all of these family places in Fife, Scotland. It is to these people that this work is acknowledged and dedicated to.

Copyright 2014 Michael T. Tracy