

**William Buist (1664-1730): A Fife Tenant Farmer of Berryhill, Abdie Parish, Fife  
By His Descendant, Michael T. Tracy – Seventh Great Grandson of William Buist**

The Buist family had origins in the ancient city of Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland. William Buist was the last of three generations of the family to be born and raised there. King Malcolm III established Dunfermline as a new seat for royal power in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century and initiated changes that eventually made the township the *de facto* capital of Scotland for much of the period until the assassination of James I in 1437.<sup>1</sup> Dunfermline is known for its ancient Romanesque Benedictine Abbey which was founded in 1128 by King David I of Scotland. The monastic establishment was based on an earlier foundation dating back to the reign of King Malcolm III or “Malcolm Canmore,” r.1058-1093 and his queen Margaret.<sup>2</sup> Sometime before 1687, William Buist left Dunfermline and relocated to Abdie Parish, Fife where he would raise a family and farm the lands of Berryhill. He would live to see Scotland united with England by the Act of Union of 1707 and would live to the age of 65.

**Early life**

William Buist was baptised on Thursday, 1 May 1664 at Dunfermline Parish, Fife, the sixth son of James Buist and Margaret Hardie.<sup>3</sup>

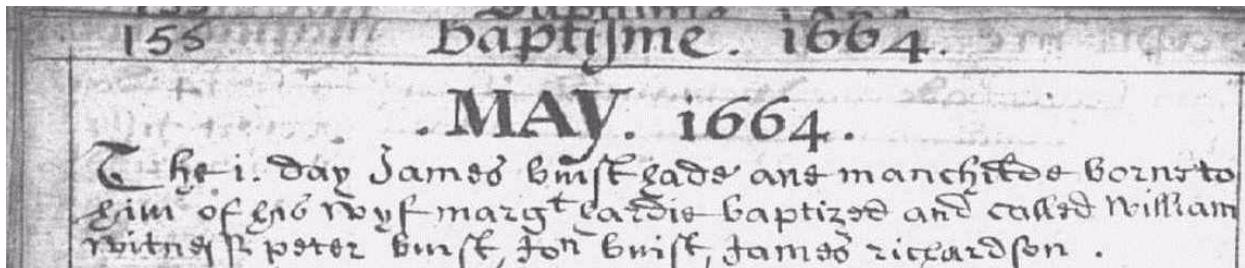


Fig.1. Baptismal Record of William Buist, 1 May 1664, Dunfermline Parish Records, Crown Copyright

He was baptised in Dunfermline Abbey as were all of his siblings. Dunfermline Abbey is considered today as one of Scotland’s most important historical sites with a history extending back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The centerpiece of Dunfermline and once its proud capital, the Abbey Church was the burial site of Scottish monarchs including King Robert the Bruce. Only the nave survives from the original structure and continued to be used as the local parish church in William Buist’s time.

<sup>1</sup> Lamont-Brown. Fife in History and Legend, pp. 178-80

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia.org. Assessed at: [www.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunfermline\\_Abbey](http://www.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunfermline_Abbey)

<sup>3</sup> Baptismal Record of William Buist, 1 May 1664, Dunfermline Parish Records, Old Parish Records 424/0030 0159



*Fig.2. Dunfermline Abbey Nave, West Door, Dunfermline, Fife, 18 November 2014, Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Iain Macintyre © 2014 Dr. Iain Macintyre*

Dunfermline Parish is described in the Statistical Account of the 1790s as “extensive of an irregular form; at an average it may be reckoned 8 miles in length from S. to N. and 5 in breadth from E. to W... the greater part of the town is situated on a hill or rising ground... It is pleasantly situated and the prospect it commands remarkably various, beautiful and extensive.”<sup>4</sup>

Early evidence suggests that the Buist family resided in what was known then as “Toun End” [Town End], Dunfermline’s eastern boundary. Toun End refers to the locality of East Port.<sup>5</sup> Toun End is mentioned in the poems of the leading Scots poet Robert Henryson, circa 1490-1500.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dunfermline, County of Fife, Statistical Account of 1791-99, Volume 13, pp. 428-29

<sup>5</sup> Henderson, Ebenezer. The Annals of Dunferline. Glasgow: John Tweed. 1879 p. 341

<sup>6</sup> Henderson, Ebenezer. The Annals of Dunferline. Glasgow: John Tweed. 1879 p. 341



Fig.3. View of Dunfermline in 1693 – ‘The Prospect of ye Town & Abby of Dunfermling’ – John Slezer’s Engravings of Scotland, National Library of Scotland, <http://maps.nls.uk/view/911169232>

The Annals of Dunfermline also record reference to Toun End: “King’s Birthday and Bonfires. 29 May 1670. The Solemntie of the King’s day being to be keped, and falling on the nixt Sabbath, being the Lord’s Day, appoints only two fyrs to be put on the at the toun end [Burgh Records, 23 May 1670].”<sup>7</sup>

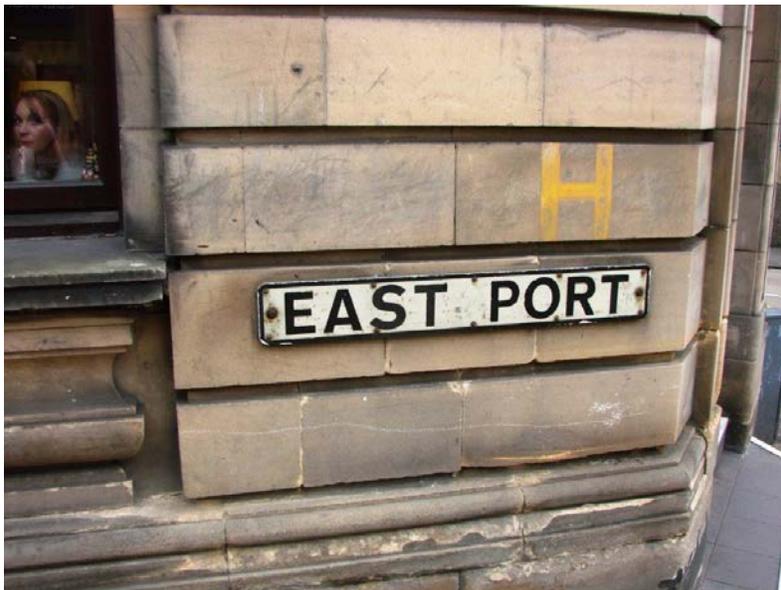


Fig.4. East Port, Dunfermline, Fife, 18 November 2014, Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Iain Macintyre © 2014 Dr. Iain Macintyre

<sup>7</sup> Henderson, Ebenezer. The Annals of Dunferline. Glasgow: John Tweed. 1879 p. 341

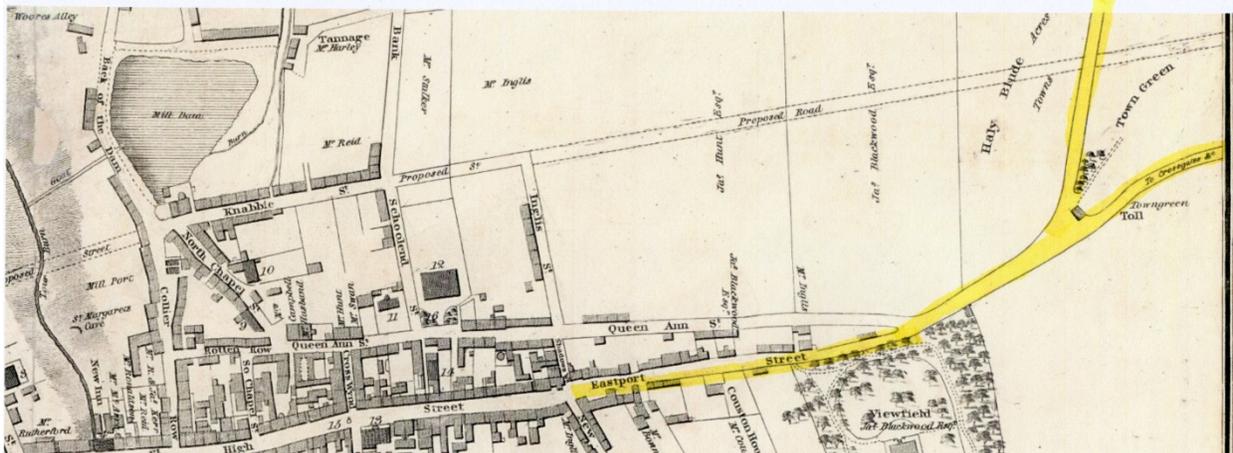


Fig.5. Dunfermline in 1823. Plan of the Town of Dunfermline from actual survey showing highlighted Eastport and Town End, National Library of Scotland, <http://maps.nls.uk/view/74400023>

The Buist family is recorded in the 1694 Hearth Tax for Dunfermline listing William's father, James Buist (1617- ) as residing on what is described in the old records as "Kinnadies Land" and subsequently taxed one shilling.<sup>8</sup> The Hearth Tax was introduced as early as 1662 and was a property tax during medieval and early modern periods, levied on each hearth or family. The tax was calculated based on the number of fireplaces a family had. One shilling was to be paid for each fireplace in the household and was payable at Michaelmas (29 September) and on Lady Day (25 March).

### **Marriage and Family life**

Sometime before 1687, William Buist left Dunfermline and relocated to Abdie Parish, Fife. It seems probable that he married while in Abdie Parish, Fife sometime 1687-1689. Due to the lack of record keeping or loss of the marriage records of Abdie Parish, it is not known when William Buist married, nor whom he married. The couple had at least five children who were all born in Abdie Parish, Fife: Henrie (Henry) baptised on Tuesday, 28 February 1690;<sup>9</sup> William baptised on Thursday, 22 November 1691;<sup>10</sup> Unnamed male Buist baptised on Wednesday, 13 February 1692;<sup>11</sup> Allexander [sic] baptised on Tuesday, 14 February 1696;<sup>12</sup> and Margaret baptised on Wednesday, 18 February 1699.<sup>13</sup>

### **Tenant of Berryhill, Abdie Parish, Fife**

From before 1687 until after 1706, William Buist was the tenant of Berryhill in the Parish of Abdie, Fife. Originally known as Berriehoill and owned by the Benedictine Abbey of Lindores at Newburgh, until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, together with other nearby holdings such as Ormiston, Hattonhill and Lumquhat, it was one of the constituent units of the monks' grange. In 1690 Berryhill was the property of Alexander Spens later called Spence whose wife Katherine Arnot, a member of a long established local Fife family with whom the Buists were linked over the years through blood and marriage.

<sup>8</sup> Researching the Past. Dunfermline Heritage Community Projects, Dunfermline Carnegie Library, p.26

<sup>9</sup> Baptismal Record of Henrie Buist, 28 February 1690, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0167

<sup>10</sup> Baptismal Record of William Buist, 22 November 1691, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0171

<sup>11</sup> Baptismal Record of Unnamed male Buist, 13 February 1692, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0174

<sup>12</sup> Baptismal Record of Allexander Buist, 14 February 1696, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0185

<sup>13</sup> Baptismal Record of Margaret Buist, 18 February 1699, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0191



*Fig.6. Berryhill, Abdie Parish, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003 Michael T. Tracy*

William Buist was the first in the Buist family to become associated with the property as a tenant farmer as did succeeding generations of the family. Future Buist family members would eventually come to own the land well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Corroborating documents presently housed at the University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department show William Buist as a tenant of Berryhill.<sup>14</sup> In the Hay family of Leys papers there exists a Disposition Deed by John Tod and William Watt dated Tuesday, 6 November 1691 and Wednesday, 30 January 1692 signed by William Buist as a tenant in Beriholl (Berryhill).<sup>15</sup>



*Fig.7. William Buist Signature as a Witness to Disposition Deed of John Tod and William Watt, 6 November 1691 and 30 January 1692, Photograph Courtesy of University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department (Call Number ms36220/363) Used by Permission © University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department, St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland*

<sup>14</sup> Disposition Deed of John Tod & William Watt, 6 November 1691 & 30 January 1692, University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department Call Number 36220/363

<sup>15</sup> Disposition Deed of John Tod & William Watt, 6 November 1691 & 30 January 1692, University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department Call Number 36220/363

Additionally, in the Cheape family papers in a Bond Deed by Henry Cheape to Elizabeth Balfour dated Tuesday, 5 August 1692, William Buist is again shown as a witness to the land transaction as: "Witness William Buist, tenant in Beriholl," and duly signed by him.<sup>16</sup>

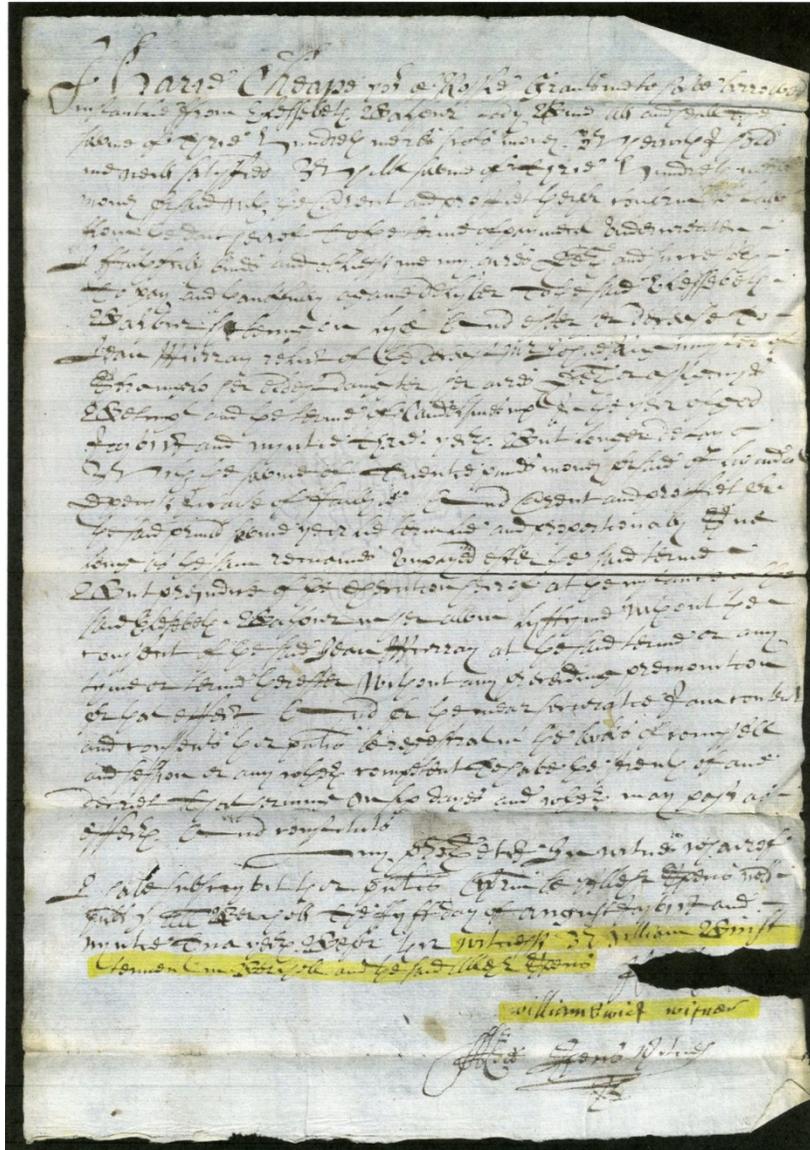


Fig.8. William Buist Signature as a Witness to Bond Deed of Henry Cheape, 5 August 1692, Photograph Courtesy of University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department (Call Number ms36929 11 458) Used by Permission © University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department, St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland

<sup>16</sup> Bond Deed of Henry Cheape to Elizabeth Balfour, 5 August 1692, University of St. Andrews, Special Collections Department, Call Number ms36929 11 458

## **Abdie Parish, Fife**

Abdie Parish is in the District of Cupar, County of Fife, 2 ¼ miles from Newburgh, and includes the villages of Lindores and Grange of Lindores.<sup>17</sup> The ancient name of the parish was Lindores, a place of great antiquity. The Church of Abdie was considered to have belonged to the Abbey of Lindores. Presently the old church, which is now in ruins, can be traced to the beginning of the fifteenth century. It was here that William Buist and his wife worshipped and where all of his children were subsequently baptised. The old church played a significant role in the lives of the Buist family for many generations.



*Fig.9. Lindores Abbey Gate, Abdie Parish, Fife, 2003, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003 Michael T. Tracy*

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<sup>17</sup> Lewis, Samuel A. A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland. 1846 p. 1



*Fig.10. Lindores Abbey, Abdie Parish, Fife, 2003, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003  
Michael T. Tracy*

### **Life in the Eighteenth Century**

People rose early in these old days in both town and country, for there was little incentive to sit up late at night when for many Scots there were few books to read apart from the Bible. Reading was made the more difficult after sunset as the only illumination was by the dim glow of tallow candles.<sup>18</sup> Newspapers of the era, were a luxury of the wealthy. Usually the minister of the parish received a paper once per week and ‘working men clubbed together for the purchase of a paper, which was handed from one to another, until it had been pursued by a dozen or more readers.’<sup>19</sup>

The staple foods of the Scots of that era were oats, the classical Scots cereal, used to make porridge or gruel; barley too was available; kale was the ubiquitous vegetable grown in Scottish homes and farms; root vegetables such as turnips and potatoes arrived later; the other stock vegetables were leek and cabbage which could be supplemented by wild plants such as nettle and sorrel; dairy products like butter and cheese; for those who had means fish, shellfish, beef, mutton and game could be obtained and varieties of wild berries were available in summer.<sup>20</sup>

With incomes small and tastes simple, the gentry dressed in a plain, homely and coarse way. At home or even to kirk or market, a gentleman went about in homespun clothing and home-made woolen shirt, which had been spun by his wife, family and servants, and woven by the village ‘wabster.’<sup>21</sup> The ladies made their own clothing by the spinning wheel. Every Scots lady had that essential part of the national costume, the plaid, wrapped loosely about the head and body, made either of silk or of wool with a silken lining of bright green or scarlet, while the common people wore their gaudy-coloured plaids of coarse worsted.<sup>22</sup>

Up to the year of 1820, some old men continued to wear and go to church with the broad blue bonnet, which was universal, in the second half of the preceding century.<sup>23</sup> Henry Buist (1771-1865) a great-great grandson of William Buist ‘remembered when the most respectable farmers in the county wore the broad blue bonnet, and it was only on the Sabbath that the most aspiring of them exchanged it for the beaver hat.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 8

<sup>19</sup> Laing, Alexander. *Lindores Abbey and its Burgh of Newburgh*. Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1876 p. 401

<sup>20</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 8

<sup>21</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 17

<sup>22</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 18

<sup>23</sup> Laing, Alexander. *Lindores Abbey and its Burgh of Newburgh*. Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1876 p. 395

<sup>24</sup> St. Andrews University Special Collections Ref UYUY/M/Biog/BuistH

The later years of William Buist's life, was an age of austerity and probation. In most homes during this period life took on a grave and somber aspect, as the rigid doctrines of the Church of Scotland still prevailed. As the Church taught that God punished his children on earth for their eternal good, parents and children worked out their domestic salvation with fear and trembling.<sup>25</sup> Mild forms of superstitions and customs thus sprang up as a result of the strict theology of the Church. Laing cites one example of a superstition that was prevalent in Newburgh "if a boy and girl are brought to the church for baptisms at the same time, the boy must be baptised first, the belief being, that the girl would otherwise have the unfeminine appendage of a beard."<sup>26</sup> He quotes another such superstition and custom of the era namely "the custom of taking a bit of shortbread, or other kind of cake, along with, and sometimes pinned up in the dress of a child conveyed to the church for baptism, still prevails in Newburgh... The survival of the custom is calculated to inspire kindly feelings."<sup>27</sup>

Scots of all classes were impoverished during these times and even the gentry were miserably poor. Many of the nobles and lairds were constantly at their wits end to obtain the means to pay their way, and were obliged to live sparingly.<sup>28</sup> There was little coin in circulation in the country and the only banks were in the city of Edinburgh.<sup>29</sup> The chief means of raising funds was through the country's 'writers,' [lawyers] who found money which was lent on wadset, the land mortgaged becoming the possession of the lender if the debt was not paid by a certain date.<sup>30</sup> Few lairds were free of debt. Many a laird who had tried in vain to save money for a 'torcher' [dowry] for his daughters was forced at their marriage to mortgage his property, and lived with a load of wadset upon his mind and land.<sup>31</sup>

Since there was little currency in circulation, bonds and bills were negotiable as substitutes for currency. These bonds could be bought by persons who disliked the issuer or liked his lands, and could use the bond to force him to part with his acres to meet his liabilities.<sup>32</sup> Too many of the landowners had those possessions which were traditionally ascribed to the Fifeshire lairds: 'a pickle lands, a mickle debt, a doocot and a lawsuit.'<sup>33</sup> (Pickle and mickle both mean a small amount)

### **Act of Union 1707**

During William Buist's youth and well into his middle aged years, Scotland was an independent nation from England. There had centuries of hostility between Scotland and England, with warfare even in the seventeenth century under a shared Stuart king. The incentive in 1707 for a union between the two countries was largely economic for the Scots and political for the English. Thusly, the Act of Union of 1707 unified both kingdoms and created an island realm. While this Act united the Scottish and English parliaments, the two peoples retained their national characteristics, their legal and educational systems and their established churches.

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<sup>25</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 24

<sup>26</sup> Laing, Alexander. *Lindores Abbey and its Burgh of Newburgh*. Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1876 p. 382

<sup>27</sup> Laing, Alexander. *Lindores Abbey and its Burgh of Newburgh*. Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1876 p. 382

<sup>28</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 29

<sup>29</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 30

<sup>30</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 30

<sup>31</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 30

<sup>32</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 30

<sup>33</sup> Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p. 30

## **Death of William Buist**

The Fie tenant farmer of Berryhill, Abdie Parish continued to farm his lands well into what would have been considered at the time his old age. William Buist died in circa 1730 at the age of 65 most likely at Berryhill. It is not known when his wife died.

William Buist was the last of this family to be born and raised in Dunfermline, Fife. His relocation to become a tenant farmer at Berryhill reflected a population movement from town to county which would be reversed in later centuries. William Buist survived through the "Killing Times," the religious conflict of the 1680s. He endured an era of abject poverty in Scotland, through the failed harvests and famines of the last decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He lived through the disastrous economic consequences of the Darien Scheme. Yet he would also see the establishment of Scotland as an independent nation once more and lived to see the beginnings of the new prosperity in Scotland and the start of the Scottish Enlightenment. He is warmly commemorated here in grateful esteem and recognition by his seventh great grandson, Michael T. Tracy.

*Memoratus in aeternum (Forever Remembered)*

## **Acknowledgement**

With special thanks and appreciation to Gabriel Sewell, Head of Special Collections of the University of St. Andrews and Rachel Hart, Deputy Head of Special Collections and Muniments Archivist of Special Collections of the University of St. Andrews for their help and efforts in locating the deeds of the Papers of the Hay and Cheape Families showing my seventh great grandfather as a witness to these various land deeds thus verifying him as a tenant farmer of Berryhill in the later half of the Eighteenth Century. Also to Dr. Iain Macintyre whose help with this publication is gratefully acknowledged along with his photographs of Dunfermline. This work is dedicated to the Memory of my seventh great grandfather, William Buist.

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