

William Buist (1691-): A Fife Tenant Farmer of Denmill and Lochmill, Abdie Parish, Fife By His Descendant, Michael T. Tracy – Sixth Great Grandson of William Buist

William Buist was born at a time when Scotland was an independent nation. By the time he was 16 years of age he would see Scotland unified with England by the Act of Union of 1707. 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. Buist would farm like his father before him at his ancestral birthplace of Berriehoill now Berryhill. He would eventually become a tenant farmer of the estates of Denmill and Lochmill, Abdie Parish, Fife. There he would raise his family, carry out his life's work and there he would die.

Early Life

William Buist was born in November of 1691 at Abdie Parish, Fife, the second son of William Buist of Berriehoill. He was baptized on Thursday, 22 November 1691 at Abdie Parish, Fife.¹

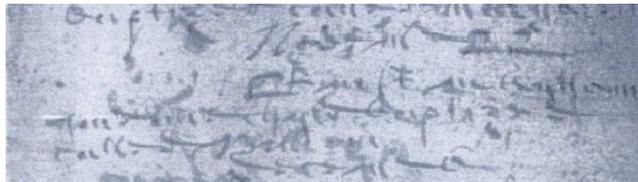


Fig.1. Baptismal Record of William Buist, 22 November 1691, Abdie Parish Records, Crown Copyright

The time of his early youth was known as the “dark years” or “hungry years” in Scotland. For several years in succession the harvests failed with the crops often blighted by easterly ‘haars’ or mists, by sunless, drenching summers, by storms, and by early bitter frosts and deep snow in the autumn.² This was the era of the Little Ice Age in Britain. Sheep and cattle died in their thousands, the prices of everyday commodities increased, and in rural districts there were deaths from famine, disease and deprivation.³ This was the background in which William Buist grew up. It was an era in which, despite the dominance of the church, superstition remained widespread in Scotland. Concerned with the misty springs, sunless summers, disastrous autumns, and pitiless winters, many thought that the weather and subsequent crop failures were the judgment of God.⁴

The parliament of England agreed in 1706 to join with Scotland, and the Scottish parliament agreed the next year. Known as the Acts of Union and taking effect on Sunday, 1 May 1707, these acts joined England and Scotland into a single, United Kingdom named “Great Britain.” As previously mentioned most Scots did not favour this union with England and Robert Burns summarized popular sentiment in Scotland with the couplet: “We’re bought and sold for English Gold, Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation.” Yet this was to become a partnership that would bring economic regeneration to Scotland in the later 18th century.

¹ Baptismal Record of William Buist, 22 November 1691, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0171

² Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.146

³ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.146

⁴ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.149

Family Life

William Buist met and married Janet (Jean) Broune on Monday, 11 April 1712 at Torryburn Parish, Fife.⁵

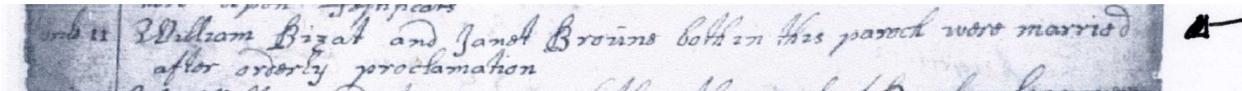


Fig.2. Marriage Record of William Buist, 11 April 1712, Torryburn Parish Records, Crown Copyright

Torryburn Parish Church was first constructed in 1616 with an addition to the church constructed in 1696. The original church was not completely demolished as the northern aisle (which had been added in 1696) was retained and is still present.⁶



*Fig.3. Torryburn Parish Church, Torryburn Parish, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2010
Michael T. Tracy*

⁵ Marriage Record of William Buist, 11 April 1712, Torryburn Parish Records, Old Parish Records 458/0020 0417

⁶ Scottish Churches.org. Assessed at <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/siteID/2612/Torryburn> Parish Church

The couple resided in Torryburn Parish, Fife after their marriage and the birth of their first child, Agnes Buist (1713) but relocated back to Abdie Parish, Fife by 1714. They had seven children:

Agnes baptized on Tuesday, 13 June 1713;⁷

Michael baptized on Wednesday, 16 May 1714;⁸

Michael baptized on Wednesday, 1 July 1716;⁹

John baptized on Wednesday, 1 May 1720¹⁰ and died on Friday, 13 November 1733;¹¹

Janet baptized on Wednesday, 30 September 1722¹² and died on Tuesday, 6 June 1730;¹³

Jean baptized on Friday, 7 July 1724¹⁴ and died on Monday, 17 January 1803;¹⁵

Andrew baptized on Saturday, 28 June 1727¹⁶ and died on Thursday, 2 February 1815.¹⁷

Denmill and Lochmill, Abdie Parish, Fife

After residing in Torryburn Parish circa 1712-1714, the Buist family relocated firstly to Denmill, Abdie Parish, Fife. Denmill is located "about a mile west north west of the village of Lindores."¹⁸ Here two of their children were born. William Buist was a tenant farmer at Demill circa 1714-1719. The lands of Denmill, which included the greater portion of the parish of Abdie, were granted by King James II to James Balfour, son of Sir John Balfour of Balgarvie, one of whose descendants was killed in 1513 in the service of James IV at the battle of Flodden.¹⁹ The mills on this estate are called King's Mills in the charter.²⁰

By 1720 the Buist family are residing at Lochmill, Abdie Parish, Fife. Here their remaining four children were born and raised. Lochmill is "about 2 3/8 miles west by south of the village of Lindores and the current thrashing mill was formerly a corn mill, hence the name."²¹

⁷ Baptismal Record of Agnes Buist, 13 June 1713, Torryburn Parish Records, Old Parish Records 458/0020 0065

⁸ Baptismal Record of Michael Buist, 16 May 1714, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0228

⁹ Baptismal Record of Michael Buist, 1 July 1716, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0234

¹⁰ Baptismal Record of John Buist, 1 May 1720, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0237

¹¹ Death Record of John Buist, 13 November 1733, Collessie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 416/0010 0069

¹² Baptismal Record of Janet Buist, 30 September 1722, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0244

¹³ Death Record of Janet Buist, 6 June 1730, Fife Family History Society, Pre-1855 Death Index, 2004

¹⁴ Baptismal Record of Jean Buist, 7 July 1724, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0247

¹⁵ Death Record of Jean Buist Hoy, 17 January 1803, Leslie Parish Records, Fife Family History Society, Pre-1855 Death Index, 2004

¹⁶ Baptismal Record of Andrew Buist, 28 June 1727, Abdie Parish Records, Old Parish Records 400/0010 0253

¹⁷ Death Record of Andrew Buist, 2 February 1815, Markinch Parish Records, Old Parish Records 447/0040 0094

¹⁸ Ordinance Survey Name Books, Fife Ordinance Survey Name Books, 1853-1855, Volume 49 (OS1/13/49/29)

¹⁹ Fife Blogspot. Assessed at: <http://fife-scotland.blogspot.com/2007/12/Abdie-fife-scotland.html>

²⁰ The New Statistical Account of Scotland. Volume IX. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1846 p.50

²¹ Ordinance Survey Name Books, Fife Ordinance Survey Name Books, 1853-1855. Volume 49 (OS1/13/49/54)



Lochmill

*Fig.4. Lochmill Steadings, Lochmill, Abdie Parish, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2010
Michael T. Tracy*

The old farmhouse itself is up a driveway off a narrow road, with the farm buildings at the bottom of the hill. The dated doorway leads to the upper part of the left side of the steadings. The dovecote would have been common on a farm such as Lochmill in the 18th century. Sometimes they were whole buildings dedicated to the doves with little nesting compartments all around the walls. These were used as a year round source of food and in addition the eggs would be collected by a farm hand climbing ladders.



Fig.5. Lochmill Dovecote, Lochmill, Abdie Parish, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2010 Michael T. Tracy

The custom of walking the boundaries of one's lands was called "The Riding of The Marches." Riding the Marches was a traditional way of walking the boundaries of the lands to protect and maintain one's lands. This practice was done during the time of William Buist. Eventually this practice would include whole villages and towns including the surrounding countryside. It is still practiced as an annual festival in many parts of lowland Scotland into the 21st century.

Life in the 18th 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.²²

The staple foods 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.²³

²² Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.8

²³ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.8

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 wollen shirt, which had been spun by his wife, family and servants, and woven by the village 'wabster.'²⁴ 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.²⁵

The early 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 spirit of the Church was still prevailed. As the Church taught that God was constantly punishing his children on earth for their eternal good, parents and children worked out their domestic salvation with fear and trembling.²⁶

There was also very little money at peoples disposal during these times and even the gentry were miserably poor. Many of the nobles and lairds were constantly at their wit's end to obtain the means to pay their way, and were obliged to live sparingly.²⁷ There was little coin in circulation in the country and only banks in the city of Edinburgh. The chief means of raising funds was through the country '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.²⁸ Few lairds were free of debt. Many a laird who had tried in vain to save money for a 'tocher' [dowry] for his daughters was forced at their marriage to mortgage his property, and lived with the load of wadset upon his mind and land.²⁹

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.³⁰ Too many of the landowners had those possessions which were traditionally ascribed to the Fifeshire lairds: 'a pickle land, a mickle debt, a doocot and a lawsuit.'³¹ (Pickle and mickle both mean a small amount)

The 18th Century Scottish funeral

The cost of a funeral was quite expensive in those times. As soon as the breath was out of the body the preparations were made: the winding sheet of wool, the woolen stocking for the corpse's feet; the lyke-wake or watching by dead of night and day by watchers who received their frequent refreshment; the body laid out on view for all who wished to see the corpse in the room, with chairs and other furniture covered with white linen.³² The funeral procession would proceed to the cemetery while the kirk bell, hanging on a tree, was jerked into fitful tolling by the beadle and the ladies (who in the beginning of the century were clad in their gayest and brightest dresses) walked to the kirkyard gate, while only the male

²⁴ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.17

²⁵ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.18

²⁶ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.24

²⁷ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.29

²⁸ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.30

²⁹ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.30

³⁰ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.30

³¹ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.30

³² Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.53

mourners stood by the grave.³³ Although we do not know the date of William Buist's death it is likely that his funeral was along these lines.

A tribute

William Buist was a tenant farmer of the estates of Denmill and Lochmill, Abdie Parish, Fife, and here William and Janet Buist raised their seven children. William Buist lived through many interesting times in Scottish history. As a tribute to my forebear I have tried to paint a picture of his life and times in Fife. He is warmly commemorated here in grateful esteem and recognition by his sixth great grandson, Michael T. Tracy.

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

Acknowledgements

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³³ Graham, Henry Grey. *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901 p.54