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## Jessie Thain (1821-1889) and her family

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### Introduction

Jessie Thain was born into a prominent Dundee family which was well-known for supporting the cause of evangelical religion. Among the wide circle of the Thains' close friends were Robert Murray McCheyne<sup>1</sup> and his sister Eliza. The first definitive biography about McCheyne was written by one of his ministerial colleagues, Andrew A. Bonar of Collace.<sup>2</sup> His *Memoir and Remains* contains correspondence between McCheyne and the Thains – Mrs. Thain and two of her sons.<sup>3</sup> The concluding poem in the section of that book entitled *Songs of Zion* was composed to commemorate the death of one of Jessie's brothers.<sup>4</sup>

Jessie herself is mentioned in passing in one of McCheyne's letters to Mrs. Thain,<sup>5</sup> and more extensively in a biography of McCheyne

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation about the spelling conventions in this paper and references, see R. J. Dickie, "Robert Murray McCheyne – was he twice engaged to be married?", *SRSJHJ*, Vol. 7 (2017), p. 193, footnote 1.

<sup>2</sup> A. A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Minister of St. Peter's Church, Dundee* (2 vols., Dundee, W. Middleton, 1844). For ease of reference, an online one-volume version is quoted in this paper ([https://archive.org/details/memoirremainsofr00mche\\_0](https://archive.org/details/memoirremainsofr00mche_0)). All references to websites in this paper are correct at the time of writing (November 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Bonar, pp. 175-178 ("To Mrs. Thain, Heathpark. During the continuance of the same illness and To the same. Before going forth on the mission to Israel"), 268-269 ("To J. T. A young boy anxious about his soul"), 269-270 ("To A. T. On the death of his brother, the little boy to whom the preceding letter was written").

<sup>4</sup> Bonar, pp. 589-590, "On J. T., a believing boy, who died Feb. 1842".

<sup>5</sup> Bonar, p. 177.

written by Alexander Smellie in 1913,<sup>6</sup> seventy years after McCheyne's early death at the age of twenty-nine. Smellie believed she was a fiancée of McCheyne, a view repeated frequently since then, *inter alia* by Murdoch Campbell who issued the *Diary of Jessie Thain* in 1955.<sup>7</sup> A paper in the present volume of the *Historical Journal* examines and refutes this belief.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless the diary is a work which is of interest in its own right in view of the spiritual exercises it records and much interest attaches to Jessie Thain on account of that. Murdoch Campbell wrote of his belief – a belief based entirely on his personal speculation – that Jessie Thain died shortly after her final diary entry, an unfinished sentence written on 12th August 1847:

This lovely but frail flower, on which so many adverse influences had left their mark, was cut down in the morning of her days. She pined for a while under a wasting sickness till the Lord took her away to the land where sorrow is unknown.<sup>9</sup>

And he concluded the biographical sketch with the following:

We know but little of Miss Thain's last days. Her Diary ends abruptly with an unfinished sentence which is permeated with sorrow of heart. But the previous sentence, which she did finish, contains the prayer: "Gracious God, be pleased to say, From this day I will bless you." Then the curtain falls, as if she had silently passed within the veil to enjoy eternal communion with the Lord and His loved one [a seeming reference to McCheyne].<sup>10</sup>

In 2005 Rev. Douglas Somerset drew together a considerable amount of information about the interesting family, published as "The

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<sup>6</sup> A. Smellie, *Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (London, National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, 1913), pp. 195-202 (<https://archive.org/details/robertmurraymcch00smel>).

<sup>7</sup> M. Campbell (ed.), *Diary of Jessie Thain (The Friend of Robert Murray McCheyne)* (1st edition, Dingwall, 1955; 4th edition, 1967). References in the present paper are from the 3rd edition (Dingwall, 1961) (henceforth referenced as *Diary*).

<sup>8</sup> Dickie, "Robert Murray McCheyne – was he twice engaged to be married?". Two other recent authors have also refuted this view of Jessie Thain by simple negation after close research of available material: D. Robertson, *Awakening. The Life and Ministry of Robert Murray McCheyne* (Bletchley, Authentic Media, 2004), p. 98; L. J. van Valen (translated by L. R. Nicolson), *Constrained by his Love: A New Biography on Robert Murray McCheyne* (Fearn, Christian Focus Publications, 2002), pp. 250, 251. This book was originally published in Dutch as *Gedreven door Zijn liefde: het leven van Robert Murray MacCheyne* (Houten, Den Hertog, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> *Diary*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Diary*, p. 12.

Thains of Blairgowrie”.<sup>11</sup> He noted, *inter alia*, that Jessie “was, however, still alive, at the time of the census in 1851”.

The aims of the current paper are to enlarge upon Somerset’s work in order to give a more comprehensive view of the family and their circle of friends, paying particular attention to the life of the enigmatic Jessie Thain. As her friendship with Robert Murray McCheyne has been extensively discussed elsewhere in this volume of the *SRSHJ*, this topic will not be covered further in the present paper. Similarly, as many details regarding the Thains are covered in Somerset’s article, the present paper will not dwell extensively on his previously established facts which are readily available in print and online.

The material available for reconstructing the life story of the Thain family consists of primary sources in the form of public records, contemporary publications, and Jessie Thain’s diary, together with secondary sources comprising incidental allusions in books and newspapers.

## PART 1. THE FOREBEARS OF JESSIE THAIN

The family name Thain is somewhat uncommon in the Dundee area but it is clear that the family was prominent in the city’s history as many male members featured in the list of burgesses from 1550 onwards.<sup>12</sup> The relative infrequency of the surname makes it comparatively easy to trace the family from the early eighteenth century to the twentieth century through Old Parish Records (OPRs) and Statutory Records.<sup>13</sup> As Jessie Thain was born into a notable élite Dundee dynasty, it is worth recording firstly some details about the background of the family as many of these facts have not appeared in print previously.

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<sup>11</sup> D. W. B. Somerset, “The Thains of Blairgowrie”, *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 110 (2005), pp. 142-149 ([archive.fpchurch.org.uk/magazines/fpm/2005/FPM-May-2005.pdf](http://archive.fpchurch.org.uk/magazines/fpm/2005/FPM-May-2005.pdf)).

<sup>12</sup> Burgesses were inhabitants of a town or burgh who were accorded the full rights of citizenship. *The Locket* [locked] *Book of Dundee* (Dundee City Archives) records the names of burgesses from 1513. The name Thain (with variant spellings Thane and Thayne) features on fifteen occasions from 1550 to 1818, and includes the father of Jessie Thain. The occupations listed are (alphabetically) baker, furrier, maltman, merchant and weaver. An extract from the *Locket Book* (also spelled *Lockit Book*) appears on the website of the Friends of Dundee City Archive (FCDA): the Thain entries are at [www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/LockitT.pdf](http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/LockitT.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> For information about official records, see Dickie, “Robert Murray McCheyne – was he twice engaged to be married?”, p. 195, footnote 12.

The first extant record which can be definitively related to Jessie Thain's family history is the baptismal register entry of her paternal great-grandfather, Alexander Thain. He was born to William and Elizabeth Thain (née Cuthbert) in 1724 in the parish of Auchterhouse in Angus, at the foot of the Sidlaw Hills, about 8 miles (12 km) north-west of the centre of Dundee. Along with the child of another couple who lived at nearby Greenburn,<sup>14</sup> Alexander Thain was baptised at Bonitoun at the conclusion of a service on Friday 15th May 1724.<sup>15</sup> Bonitoun was a farm "toun",<sup>16</sup> now known as Bonnyton<sup>17</sup> and lies a little to the north of Auchterhouse village.

Alexander Thain became a baker in Overgate, Dundee<sup>18</sup> and it would appear he enjoyed considerable success as he was appointed the Dundee bakers' Deacon to the Nine Incorporated Trades of the burgh in 1774.<sup>19</sup> He married Eupham (also known as Euphemia) Watson in Dundee on 10th December 1754.<sup>20</sup> They had ten children, all born in Dundee, the sixth of whom was also called Alexander: he was the paternal grandfather of Jessie Thain and I refer to him as Alexander (junior) to distinguish him from his father.

Alexander Thain (junior), Jessie's grandfather, was born on 23rd July 1763 and baptised four days later on 27th July.<sup>21</sup> The baptismal register records that he was named after, "The Rev Mr A Ferriar [*sic*],

<sup>14</sup> Near present-day Auchterhouse Park.

<sup>15</sup> OPR Births 273/00 0020 0041 Auchterhouse: "After Lecture Alexander Thain lawfull Son to William Thain and Elizabeth Cuthbert his Spous at Bonitoun was Baptized before these witnesses John Thain and Isabel Thain in Bonitoun." The minister's name is not recorded; the minister of Auchterhouse at that time was Patrick Johnstone (*circa* 1675-1740), who was ordained in 1702 and remained minister of the parish until his death; see H. Scott (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae (FES)* (2nd edn., 8 vols, Edinburgh, 1915-1950), Vol. 5, p. 310.

<sup>16</sup> An area of arable land on an estate, with associated common grazing rights, occupied by a number of farmers as co-tenants living in clusters of houses and usually farmed in whole or in part on a run-rig system, common throughout Scotland in the first half of the eighteenth century. As the agricultural revolution spread over the Lowlands these holdings were gradually enclosed, rearranged and reallocated as single units corresponding to the modern farm to which the name "toun" was transferred. (Dictionary of the Scottish Language – [www.dsl.ac.uk](http://www.dsl.ac.uk)).

<sup>17</sup> Ordnance Survey grid reference NO332385.

<sup>18</sup> *Dundee Register 1783*, p. 28 (reprinted Dundee, Tay Valley Family History Society, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Documents relating to the Nine Incorporated Trades of Dundee (from 1756 to 1826) are available on their website, [www.ninetradesofdundee.co.uk](http://www.ninetradesofdundee.co.uk). Entries for Alexander Thain as Baker Deacon exist from 1774 to 1790.

<sup>20</sup> OPR Marriages 282/00 0120 0120 Dundee.

<sup>21</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0050 0227 Dundee.



*Fig. 1. The Thains' house at Park Place. The middle window on the ground floor replaces the entrance door, from which steps led to the ground level.*

[Photo: courtesy of K. Walker]

minister, Dundee”, who had been called to Dundee on 4th August 1762 but was not translated and admitted until 3rd August 1763, one week after the baptism.<sup>22</sup> Alexander (junior) is described as a merchant in Dundee in 1795, and on the death certificate of John Thain (Jessie’s father) he is described as “Linen cloth Merchant (deceased)”.<sup>23</sup>

Alexander (junior) married Elisabeth Ramsay in Dundee on 11th January 1793.<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth was the daughter of Christian and John Ramsay, a maltman or brewer in the burgh.<sup>25</sup> From incidental information on her baptismal record it is seen that the wider Ramsay

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Ferrier (1728-1764) was minister of the South Church, Dundee, from 1763 until his death the following year. He had previously been minister of the Presbyterian congregation in Alnwick (Northumberland) (1755-1758) and of Oxnam (1758-1763) (*FES*, Vol. 5, p. 322).

<sup>23</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0080 0072 Dundee; OPR Deaths 389/32 Rattray.

<sup>24</sup> OPR Marriages 282/00 0130 0239 Dundee. Her name is alternatively spelled Elizabeth in some documents.

<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Ramsay was born on 14th March 1767 and baptised four days later on 18th March. OPR Births 282/00 0050 0342 Dundee.

family included two sea captains, and she was also related by marriage to a baillie<sup>26</sup> of Dundee, all of which indicates the high social status of the Ramsay family. Alexander Thain (junior) must have prospered as a merchant as the Dundee census of 1801 shows the family and servants living in a mansion (fig. 1) in the “Royalty” district of the town at the Westlands of Dundee:<sup>27</sup> the grounds extended from the entrance at Park Place (also known as Park Lane) to Mill Wynd.<sup>28</sup>

Alexander (junior) and Elisabeth Thain had five children, all born in Dundee – four boys (two of whom died in infancy) and one girl.<sup>29</sup> Their second child was John Thain, father of Jessie Thain. John was born on 17th July 1795 and was baptised on 23rd July; he was named after his wife’s paternal grandfather, John Ramsay.<sup>30</sup> Alexander Thain (junior) died in June 1802 at the age of thirty-eight,<sup>31</sup> leaving three young children, ranging in age from two to eight years. John Thain was six when his father died and there are no further details about him until 1818. The subsequent domestic arrangements of the surviving Thain household cannot be elucidated. There is no evidence that Elisabeth Thain remarried (and there is no record of her death)<sup>32</sup> but it is evident that they continued to reside at Park Place and in turn this house became the residence of John Thain for several decades.

John Thain became a merchant in his own right and in 1818, aged 23, he was listed in the *Dundee Directory* as a commission merchant, agent and insurance broker based in Murraygate. By then he already owned two ships outright, the *Abeona* and the *Thistle*, recently constructed brigs

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<sup>26</sup> A municipal officer or magistrate, corresponding to the Old Scots and Modern English alderman, next in rank to the Provost ([www.dsl.ac.uk](http://www.dsl.ac.uk)).

<sup>27</sup> Census 1801. This is a bald enumeration; an extract relating to the Thains is available on the FDCA website ([www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/1801CensusT.pdf](http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/1801CensusT.pdf)).

<sup>28</sup> Then also known as Mill Vennel and subsequently as Small’s Wynd (personal communication: K. Walker, 2016). The houses and streets were demolished for inner city redevelopment in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The Thains’ house now forms part of Dundee Dental Hospital.

<sup>29</sup> In birth order: Christian (18th September 1793-19th December 1872), John (17th November 1795-14th June 1866), James (6th March 1797-29th January 1798), James (5th September 1798-2nd November 1873) and Thomas (7th March 1800-2nd April 1800).

<sup>30</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0080 0072 Dundee.

<sup>31</sup> He was buried in the Howff on 12th June 1802: OPR Deaths 282/00 0250 007 Dundee; [www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/HowffT02.pdf](http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/HowffT02.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> No Scottish death registration exists for her, either within the Old Parish Records or the subsequent Statutory Records dating from 1855. It is unlikely that she predeceased her husband as the family continued to reside in Park Place and there is no record to suggest that she remarried.

of 106 tons and 90 tons respectively. Also at that time he was also the treasurer of the Dundee Orphan Institution and a subscriber (financial supporter) to Dundee Infirmary.<sup>33</sup> It is clear that he was highly regarded as he had attained the status of both a Trades Councillor and a Shoremaster in 1820,<sup>34</sup> at the age of 25.

In the following year (1821) John and his brother James engaged in further entrepreneurial activities, buying a large house named *Edengrove* and grounds on the north side of Hawkhill, close to its junction with Perth Road: they renamed it *Thain's Park*.<sup>35</sup> The reason for purchase is not clear – there is no confirmation that either brother resided there and so it may have been bought to let or as a speculative purchase. By 1824 John Thain had added to his impressive list of commitments and was listed as a Merchant Councillor, a member of the “Weekly Committee” of Dundee Infirmary,<sup>36</sup> and an “Ordinary Director” of the Dundee Bank for Savings,<sup>37</sup> as well as being the outright owner of at least five ships involved in overseas trade.<sup>38</sup> John Thain went on to become one of the foremost shipowners in Dundee, both owning ships outright and having shares in many vessels, with a mix of British coastal vessels, ships involved in “foreign” trade (principally the Baltic ports and the Americas) and whalers.<sup>39</sup> Records in the Local History Centre of

<sup>33</sup> A. Abbot, *The Dundee Directory for 1818* (Dundee, A. Colville and Co., 1818), pp. 53, 60, 66, 156, 166, 180. A brig was a two-masted square-rigged ship, typically having an additional lower fore-and-aft sail on the gaff (spar to which the head of a fore-and-aft sail is bent) and a boom to the mainmast (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

<sup>34</sup> H. Robertson, *Mariners of Dundee: Their city, their river, their fraternity* (n.p., PDQ Print Services, 2006), p. 103. The duties of a shoremaster included keeping the accounts for the harbour ([www.fdca.org.uk/Shoremasters\\_1753to1800.html](http://www.fdca.org.uk/Shoremasters_1753to1800.html)).

<sup>35</sup> Recorded in a sasine of 1821 (personal communication: K. Walker, 2016). A sasine is the act or procedure of giving possession of feudal property; until 1845 this was by the symbolical delivery of earth and stones or similar appropriate objects on the property itself, and by the later registration of the deed of conveyance in the local Register of Sasines ([www.dsl.ac.uk](http://www.dsl.ac.uk)). The land lay between present-day Gowrie Street and Tait's Lane; the *Dundee Post Office Directory* for 1845 lists a feuar at “Thain's Park, Tait's Lane, Hawkhill”.

<sup>36</sup> Details of the “Weekly Committee” are recorded in Dickie, “Robert Murray McCheyne – was he twice engaged to be married?”, p. 198, footnote 21.

<sup>37</sup> *Dundee Register and Directory 1824-5*, pp. 25, 29, 36.

<sup>38</sup> *Register of Dundee Ships*, Dundee City Library (copies of documents held in Dundee City Archives).

<sup>39</sup> G. Jackson, K. Kinnear, *The Trade and Shipping of Dundee, 1780-1850* (Dundee, Abertay Historical Society Publication No. 31, 1991), pp. 53, 56, 62, 67. John Thain owned ships outright and was also a part owner of a number of whaling ships; later he became a trustee of the Dundee, Perth & London Shipping Company, nowadays known as the DP&L Group (<http://dpandl.co.uk/history>).

Dundee Central Library indicate that he was part-owner or outright owner of approximately forty-five ships during his lifetime.

## PART 2. THE LIFE OF JESSIE THAIN

On 28th August 1820, at the age of twenty-four, John Thain married Janet Davidson in Dundee.<sup>40</sup> His wife was then aged seventeen, the youngest child of Janet Sword and a renowned Dundee minister, the Rev. David Davidson, DD.<sup>41</sup> The following year the Thains' first child was born on 31st July 1821 – Janet Davidson Thain (known as Jessie), named after her mother and maternal grandmother. She was baptised three weeks later on 20th August (fig. 2).<sup>42</sup> No documents exist to fill in the

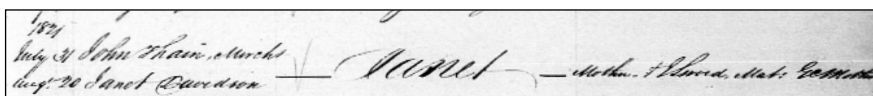


Fig. 2. Birth and baptismal register entry of Janet (Jessie) Thain.

[Crown copyright, National Records of Scotland]

details of Jessie's childhood years. However, it is fair to surmise that her childhood was privileged, given the high socio-economic status of the family – far removed from the poverty and squalor so prevalent elsewhere in Dundee.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> OPR marriages 282/00 0210 0015 Dundee.

<sup>41</sup> David Davidson was born in Foulis-Wester in 1750. He was educated at the University of St. Andrews, licensed by the Presbytery of Dunblane on 17th August 1773, ordained assistant at Monzie (near Crieff, Perthshire) on 2nd January 1776, and translated to Kippen (West Stirlingshire) on 2nd May 1776. He was called to the South Church, Dundee, on 27th March 1782, and translated and admitted to the charge on 18th July 1782. He was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity (DD) at Marischal College, Aberdeen, in 1810. He remained there until he died on 22nd December 1825. Dr. Davidson was reputed the most popular preacher in Dundee of his time (*FES*, Vol. 5, p. 322).

<sup>42</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0150 0115 Dundee.

<sup>43</sup> Van Valen, p. 168.



**(1) The Thain family and childhood deaths**

John and Janet Thain had six further children after Jessie's birth:

- Alexander Davidson Thain (28th July 1823-21st October 1863)<sup>44</sup>
- Elizabeth Thain (10th April 1825-30th September 1828)<sup>45</sup>
- David Davidson Thain (6th March 1829-3rd November 1859)<sup>46</sup>
- John Thain (known as Johnnie) (16th May 1830-28th February 1842)<sup>47</sup>
- James Thain (25th October 1832-31st January 1837)<sup>48</sup>
- Herbert William Thain (1st April 1835-26th September 1893)<sup>49</sup>

By the time Jessie reached her majority, three of her siblings had died. Jessie was seven years old when her sole sister Elizabeth died in 1828 at the age of three from "water in the head" (hydrocephalus).<sup>50</sup> Nine years later in January 1837, when Jessie was fifteen, her four-year-old brother James died of "consumption of bowels" (intestinal tuberculosis)<sup>51</sup> and in February 1842, when Jessie was twenty, Johnnie died of "disease of the mesenteric [*sic*] glands" (intestinal tuberculosis with mesenteric lymph node involvement) aged eleven.<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth, James, and Johnnie were buried in the Howff Cemetery in the centre of Dundee.<sup>53</sup> As well as grief caused in the Thain family by these deaths, Johnnie's death greatly affected McCheyne: they had conversed and corresponded on spiritual matters, and McCheyne visited Johnnie the day he died. He believed that Johnnie was converted<sup>54</sup> and wrote a moving commemorative poem, "On J. T., a believing boy, Who died Feb. 1842".<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0150 0173 Dundee; Statutory Deaths 282/02 0978 Dundee. He was Free Church Minister of New Machar, Aberdeenshire (now called Newmachar). He died of "inflammation of lungs & typhoid fever" and was buried in the Western Cemetery, Dundee, along with his wife, their daughter, and their son and his wife ([www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)).

<sup>45</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0150 0272 Dundee; OPR Deaths 282/00 0250 0319 Dundee.

<sup>46</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0160 0201 Dundee.

<sup>47</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0160 0281 Dundee; OPR Deaths 282/00 0270 0287 Dundee.

<sup>48</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0170 0108 Dundee; OPR Deaths 282/00 0270 0090 Dundee.

<sup>49</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0170 0263 Dundee; Statutory Deaths 310/00 0146 Monifieth.

<sup>50</sup> OPR Deaths 282/00 0250 0319 Dundee.

<sup>51</sup> OPR Deaths 282/00 0270 0090 Dundee.

<sup>52</sup> OPR Deaths 282/00 0270 0287 Dundee.

<sup>53</sup> [www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/HowffT02.pdf](http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/HowffT02.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> Bonar, pp. 269-70.

<sup>55</sup> Van Valen, pp. 351-355; Bonar, pp. 589-90. Van Valen reproduces part of a handwritten letter from Johnnie (p. 353).

In an age when infant and childhood mortality was high,<sup>56</sup> it is not particularly surprising that childhood deaths occurred in the Thain household. On account of these three deaths and Jessie's episodes of ill-health in the 1840s, Campbell described the Thains as "a delicate family".<sup>57</sup> This must be challenged on the basis that hydrocephalus was then an untreatable condition and intestinal tuberculosis (along with other forms of the disease) was not only widespread but also at that time untreatable and a not uncommon cause of death in the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Further, from a medical point of view, none of those conditions indicates that the sufferer was in any way "delicate".

## **(2) The religious life of Jessie Thain and her family**

The Thain family was renowned for its support of evangelical religion and was closely associated with the circle of evangelical ministers in the Dundee and Blairgowrie area. Furthermore, they also associated closely with prominent evangelical ministers from other areas of the country.

The Thain family belonged to St. John's parish of the Church of Scotland during Jessie's childhood. In order to understand Dundee's parish system in the nineteenth century it is necessary to delve into the city's history. The High Church of St. Mary was built at the end of the twelfth century adjacent to Dundee Castle. The building was ruined by the troops of Edward I at the end of the thirteenth century and was not restored till 1588. In the course of the seventeenth century, with a burgeoning population, the Town Council sought refuge in the common expedient of increasing the number of clergy without adding to the parochial organisation, or even to the church buildings. Eventually there were five charges in the St. Mary's building, each with its own minister and Kirk Session.

St. John's parish, previously known as the Fourth Charge, was disjoined from St. Mary's Church on 3rd December 1834. The minister

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<sup>56</sup> Deaths of children under ten accounted for more than half the deaths in Glasgow in the early nineteenth century, and even as late as 1861 some 42% of all deaths in the city were in this age group. Mortality was much less (2%) in higher social classes, however. W. W. Knox, *A History of the Scottish People: Health in Scotland, 1840-1940*, Chap. 3, section 2.2 – [www.scran.ac.uk/scotland/pdf/SP2\\_3Health.pdf](http://www.scran.ac.uk/scotland/pdf/SP2_3Health.pdf), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Diary*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Data are not available for the first half of the nineteenth century, but in Scotland in the 1860s, tuberculosis accounted for 361 deaths per 100,000 population each year. Knox, *A History of the Scottish People: Health in Scotland, 1840-1940*, Chap. 3, section 2.2 – [www.scran.ac.uk/scotland/pdf/SP2\\_3Health.pdf](http://www.scran.ac.uk/scotland/pdf/SP2_3Health.pdf).

of the Fourth Charge from 1809 was Alexander Peters, who died on 23rd June 1836. On 20th February 1834 Peters' assistant, John Roxburgh, had been ordained to the charge and he went on to become minister of the new St. John's Church in December that year.<sup>59</sup> Because of rapid population growth in the city, a new charge named St. Peter's was detached from St. John's parish and opened as a Chapel of Ease<sup>60</sup> less than two years later in 1836, with Robert Murray McCheyne as its first minister.<sup>61</sup>

John Thain had ably assisted Dr. Roxburgh in the movement which resulted in the erection of St. Peter's Church.<sup>62</sup> Despite the close friendship between the Thains and McCheyne, the family remained at St. John's under Roxburgh's ministry (at the times they resided in Dundee) until McCheyne died; thereafter they worshipped in St. Peter's Free Church and John Thain became an elder and trustee of the congregation.<sup>63</sup>

Due to the Thains owning houses simultaneously in both Dundee and Blairgowrie, the family was also closely associated with the church in the latter burgh and was heavily involved with the movement which led to the formation of the Free Church of Scotland in May 1843. At the Disruption, John Thain provided stores of canvas sailcloth from his business in Dundee and timber from Heath Park, his Blairgowrie estate, to erect a serviceable temporary meeting-place in Blairgowrie for the nascent Free Church congregation. His status in Blairgowrie Free Church was such that he was honoured to lay the foundation stone of the "New Free Schoolhouse".<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *FES*, Vol. 5, pp. 313, 328, 329. John Roxburgh joined the Free Church at the Disruption of May 1843, and became minister of Free St. John's, Dundee, from then until 1847, when he was translated to Free St. John's, Glasgow. The building for Free St. John's was located in Mill Lane, virtually adjacent to the rear of the Thains' house in Park Place, and had seating for 1,004 persons (Ordnance Survey large scale Scottish town plans, 1847-1895. Town Plan of Dundee (centre part), LIV 9.8. Surveyed: 1857, Scale: 1:500 (<http://maps.nls.uk/view/74415358>)).

<sup>60</sup> Chapels of Ease were initially created in the late eighteenth century to provide additional places of worship for the growing population. The Church of Scotland passed an Act in 1834 (The Chapels Act) which gave chapels the same standing as the old parishes, with Kirk Sessions of their own and the right for ministers of the Chapels to sit in Church Courts.

<sup>61</sup> *FES*, Vol. 5, pp. 340-341.

<sup>62</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 19th June 1866, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Van Valen, p. 250. Edward Caird was one of McCheyne's elders. *Brechin Advertiser*, 19th June 1866, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Perthshire Courier*, 25th April 1844, p. 3.

It appears that Jessie Thain was converted in her teenage years, one of several members of the family who were blessed through their association with McCheyne.<sup>65</sup> Her mother wrote to McCheyne in 1839, when Jessie was sixteen, intimating her wish to be useful in the Lord's cause: "She has been anxious to have a class in your Sabbath school, which Mr. Caird superintends. She feels that she is able to do very little, but should like much if she could be of any use in this way, while we are in town, which will be for some time yet."<sup>66</sup>

At that point McCheyne was due to leave as a member of a delegation with Professor Alexander Black (Aberdeen), Dr. Alexander Keith (St. Cyrus) and Andrew Bonar (Collace), commissioned by the Church of Scotland to acquire information about the condition of the Jews in Palestine and Europe, and to enquire into the possibility of establishing mission stations. He took time to reply to Janet Thain on 15th March 1839, before leaving on his journey to Palestine: "I shall be quite delighted if Jessie is able to take a small part in the Sabbath school. She knows it is what I always told her – not to be a hearer of the word only, but a doer. It is but a little time, and we shall work no more here for Him. Tell Jessie to stay herself upon God."<sup>67</sup>

Jessie taught at the Sabbath school of St. Peter's Church on Perth Road but the family continued to be members at St. John's Church in Small's Wynd. Jessie continued to teach girls in the Sabbath school for several years, both in Dundee and Rattray (then a burgh adjacent to Blairgowrie)<sup>68</sup> with diary entries in 1844 and 1845 recording her feelings about teaching and her desires for the spiritual welfare of her charges.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 18th June 1866, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> The Thains spent part of each year in Dundee and part in Blairgowrie, not least because of Mrs. Thain's unspecified ill-health.

<sup>67</sup> Bonar, p. 177.

<sup>68</sup> The burghs were united by Act of Parliament in 1928.

<sup>69</sup> *Diary*. The entry for 14th January 1844 (p. 17) states: "Was very weary on returning home, but thankful that I had been able to go. Oh that the Lord may use me as the weak instrument of lasting good to the souls of these dear children – to those of them whom He may have already saved, and to those (the greater part of them) who are still thoughtless and careless about divine things. Read to the girls a long letter from Alexander [her brother] to themselves. They listened attentively and a few seemed affected. Oh that it may have been blessed to them!" The following week, she wrote on 25th January (p. 21): "At the school last Sabbath evening read to the girls (at their own request) Alexander's letter a second time, which, the Lord grant, may come to them as a message of power from Himself." The entry for 8th April 1844 (pp. 35-36) records self-reproach: "Did not enjoy being with my class in the evening. Taught with great discomfort to myself and I am persuaded with little profit to others. My heart was unmelted and mouth closed."

Jessie did not undertake remunerated employment. When she was aged 29, the 1851 census refers to her as “shipowner’s daughter” and the decennial censuses of 1841 (age 19), 1861 (age 39), 1871 (age 49) and 1881 (age 59) uniformly leave the relevant sections blank, indicating no formal occupation.<sup>70</sup> Her death certificate in 1889 describes her occupation as “independent” (i.e., of independent means).<sup>71</sup>

### **(3) The religious friends of Jessie Thain**

Jessie’s diary records her spiritual exercises and the pleasure she got from hearing the Word preached and in partaking of the Lord’s Supper during communion seasons, both in her own congregation and in Dundee congregations. She also attended the public meetings of the Free Church Presbytery in nearby Coupar Angus and missionary meetings. In addition, there are references to hearing and meeting a goodly number of Free Church ministers, many of whom were visitors to the Thain family; some of these men, like Andrew and Horatius Bonar, Robert Candlish and Islay Burns, remain well-known to the present day, whereas others have passed into obscurity.<sup>72</sup>

Other ministers, such as Thomas Chalmers, who were friends of John Thain, spent periods of time at the Thains’ villa in Blairgowrie, but they are not referenced in Jessie’s diary.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Census 1841 335/00 004/00 015 Blairgowrie; Census 1861 282/02 025/00 013 Dundee; <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=7619>; Family History Library Film 1341522, PRO Ref. RG11, Piece 2169, Folio 143, Page 41.

<sup>71</sup> General Register Office, Registration District Newton Abbott 1889: Death in the Sub-district of Torquay, No. 396.

<sup>72</sup> The *Diary* mentions the following nineteen ministers, listed in alphabetical order, with the page of first occurrence included in parenthesis: William Arnot of St. Peter’s, Glasgow (p. 53); John Bain of Logiepert, Angus (p. 35); Bain (unspecified: either Thomas Bain of Coupar Angus or John Bain, q.v.) (p. 17); John Baxter, DD, of Hilltown in Dundee and Blairgowrie (p. 16); Andrew Bonar of Collace, Perthshire (p. 19); Horatius (or Horace) Bonar of Kelso, Roxburghshire (p. 61); Islay Burns, DD, of St. Peter’s, Dundee (p. 38); Robert Candlish, DD, of St. George’s, Edinburgh (p. 48); John Cook of Auchtergaven, Perthshire (p. 20); Archibald Ferguson of Alyth, Angus (p. 19); Francis Gillies of Rattray, Perthshire (p. 20); Robert Macdonald, DD, of Blairgowrie, Perthshire (p. 31); Manson (unspecified: likely James Manson of Duns, Berwickshire, as he was one of the circle of ministers including the Bonars and McCheyne) (p. 36); George Millar of Clunie, Perthshire (p. 43); Patrick Miller (or Millar) of Wallacetown, Dundee (p. 31); Samuel Miller (or Millar), DD, of Monifieth in Angus and St. Matthew’s, Glasgow (p. 37); William Moncur of Liff, Angus (p. 20); Alexander Somerville of Anderston, Glasgow (p. 60); Alexander Thain of New Machar, Aberdeenshire (Jessie’s brother) (p. 17).

<sup>73</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 19th June 1866, p. 2.

Jessie made diary entries about sermons, with reflections on their application to her spiritual condition and her situation in the providence of God. These entries show that she enjoyed preaching which was distinctively Calvinistic. However, it should be noted that a number of the ministers became more lax in doctrine and practice as the years passed, with some later supporting the Arminian campaigns and unscriptural worship of Moody and Sankey (in common with many Free Church ministers) or adhering to erroneous doctrines.<sup>74</sup>

Turning now to consider Jessie's female friends, we find only seven women named in the published diary (in addition to her mother). There are repeated references to Eliza McCheyne and Isabella Williamson, and single references to Eliza Anne Ireland (p. 29), Anne Clarke (p. 29), Miss Whitson (p. 30), Mrs. Moncur (wife of William Moncur, minister of Liff – who, with her husband, accompanied the Thains on a tour of northern Perthshire in 1844, p. 44), and Sarah Williamson (also present on the tour, p. 44). It has not been possible to find further information about these individuals, who may have been acquaintances rather than close friends. Towards the end of the diary there is a reference to an unnamed "friend who is very dear" who joined the Thains on holiday in Bridge of Allan, Stirlingshire, in the summer of 1845 (p. 60). Bridge of Allan was then a burgeoning venue for the moneyed classes of Victorian Scotland, advertising itself as a spa. The Thains holidayed there at least once more in May 1861, with Herbert staying alone at the Royal Hotel and later in the month Jessie and her mother stayed at Park Cottage.<sup>75</sup>

It is clear that Jessie had a very close friendship with Elizabeth Mary McCheyne (known as Eliza), the elder sister of Robert Murray McCheyne. Eliza was born in Edinburgh 1806 – she was almost the same

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<sup>74</sup> The Bonars and Somerville were strongly associated with Moody and Sankey. Candlish had defective ecclesiology and had an ecumenical outlook. Even McCheyne himself was not above associating with a denomination with an Arminian standpoint; he had been scheduled to address a missionary meeting of the Wesleyan Methodists in April 1843 but died a month before the event (*Northern Warder and General Advertiser For The Counties Of Fife, Perth and Forfar*, 18th April 1843, p. 3). His latitudinarian views of erroneous positions is also reflected in his continued admiration for Edward Irving, despite the latter being deposed for heresy (Bonar, p. 37) and the unqualified acceptance of members of degenerate churches as being "different in name, and yet, we trust, one in Christ" (A. A. Bonar, R. M. McCheyne, *Narrative of a Mission of Enquiry to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839* (Edinburgh, William Whyte & Co., 3rd edition, 1845), pp. 250-251).

<sup>75</sup> *Stirling Observer and Midland Counties Advertiser*, 9th May 1861, p. 2; 16th May 1861, p. 2. The newspaper regularly listed the names and holiday addresses of visitors.

age as Janet Thain and was fifteen years senior to Jessie Thain.<sup>76</sup> Eliza moved to Dundee when her brother became minister of St. Peter's in 1836: she was his *de facto* housekeeper at the manse at 16 Strawberry Bank.<sup>77</sup> Jessie affectionately referred to her as "dear Eliza", both in addressing her directly in the body of a letter (p. 11) and in two diary entries.<sup>78</sup> Her feelings for Eliza were expressed at greater length in two further diary entries. Firstly she recorded: "Had a sweet letter on Monday from Eliza McCheyne, in which she speaks of some scenes of the past. (Her affectionate kindness is often very affecting)."<sup>79</sup> Secondly, towards the close of the diary, she wrote wistfully: "I left the city of Edinburgh – where, with mamma, I spent a month – with much regret. Not a little sorry to say farewell to dear friends. But with none did I feel so much to part as with dear Eliza McCheyne, for my affections are entwined around her in no ordinary degree. Will it ever be ordered that our lots be cast near each other? The Lord grant that our friendship may be very profitable to us both, and that we may at length meet in that blessed land where parting is unknown."<sup>80</sup> However, that intense desire to be near Eliza was not realised – whilst Jessie remained in Dundee and Blairgowrie, and subsequently moved to Torquay after her father's death in 1866, Eliza remained in Edinburgh to the end of her days; she resided with her parents first at 20 Hill Street<sup>81</sup> and then moved with them to 24 Maitland Street.<sup>82</sup> Sometime around 1864 Eliza and her unmarried brother William went to reside together at 13 Osborne Terrace, Edinburgh, a terraced house which he had built

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<sup>76</sup> OPR Births 685/01 0400 0324 Edinburgh.

<sup>77</sup> Van Valen, pp. 147, 149, 153, 155.

<sup>78</sup> *Diary*, p. 48 (entry of 2nd November 1844): "Received a kind letter from dear Eliza McCheyne yesterday, giving a delightful account of their communion week"; p. 60 (entry of 8th September 1845).

<sup>79</sup> *Diary*, p. 28 (entry of 28th February 1844).

<sup>80</sup> *Diary*, p. 60 (entry of 8th September 1845).

<sup>81</sup> Census 1841 685/01053/00 007 Edinburgh. Her brother William Oswald Hunter M'Cheyne, LRCS (Edinburgh), a surgeon who had practised in India, also resided there, and a servant (Agnes Sinclair) was also present at the time of the census.

<sup>82</sup> Census 1851 685/02 152/00 010 Edinburgh. A cousin (John Pearce, a scholar) and a servant (Marion Thom, aged nineteen) were also present at the time of the census. The 1861 census (685/01 046/00 021) records the household as consisting of her brother William, Eliza, and a "general domestic servant" (Agnes Jack, from Inchope, Markinch, aged twenty-one). Eliza's parents, Adam and Lockhart M'Cheyne, had both died in 1854.

in 1864.<sup>83</sup> Both brother and sister eventually died at that address – Eliza on 22nd May 1888 of “Old age and Debility”, aged eighty-two,<sup>84</sup> and William on 24th October 1892 of heart failure at age eighty-three.<sup>85</sup> Neither Eliza nor William was married.

One other close friend is mentioned in Jessie’s diary – Isabella Crichton Williamson, who lived in Dundee. In the diary Jessie refers to her on a few occasions as “dear Isabella” but the language of intense affection retained for Eliza is not expressed in relation to this friend.<sup>86</sup> Isabella wrote to Jessie in January 1844 to intimate her “intended union with Mr. Moncur” and they met later that month when Isabella shared the instruction of Jessie’s Sabbath school class in Blairgowrie.<sup>87</sup> Jessie attended the marriage which took place in the middle of March that year, spending the afternoon (immediately before the evening wedding) with Isabella and discoursing on Christ’s union to His people being illustrated by marriage.<sup>88</sup> Isabella’s husband, David Moncur, was a Dundee merchant who lived at 11 Hawkhill, and whose business premises were at Cowgate.<sup>89</sup> A month later she spent a week with the newlyweds and she took that opportunity to attend the communion services in Dundee.<sup>90</sup> The following year the couple had a baby girl, Agnes Margaret Moncur, and Jessie visited them on the Wednesday before the baptism on Sabbath 27th July 1845.<sup>91</sup>

The diary extracts deal almost entirely with religious matters and there is very little to cast light on recreational aspects of Jessie’s life. Two trips are mentioned: one to the northern areas of Perthshire in summer 1844, in the company of her family and several friends,<sup>92</sup> and the other

<sup>83</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/208895/edinburgh-13-osborne-terrace>. Census 1871 685/01 053/00 004 Edinburgh and Census 1881 685/01 085/00 031 Edinburgh record the presence of a servant at each census.

<sup>84</sup> Statutory Deaths 685/01 0526 Edinburgh.

<sup>85</sup> Statutory Deaths 685/01 0919 Edinburgh. The wording on the certificate states, “Cardiac Incompetence, Oedema of Lungs and Limbs”.

<sup>86</sup> *Diary*, pp. 18 (entry of 18th January 1844), p. 21 (entry of 25th January 1844); p. 59 (entry of 27th July 1845).

<sup>87</sup> *Diary*, p. 18 (entry of 18th January 1844).

<sup>88</sup> OPR Marriages 282/00 0230 0118 Dundee. *Diary*, pp. 32-33 (entry of 23rd March 1844).

<sup>89</sup> *The Dundee Post Office Directory for 1845* (Dundee, n.p., 1845), p. 65.

<sup>90</sup> *Diary*, p. 36 (entry of 29th April 1844).

<sup>91</sup> OPR Births 282/00 0190 0225 Dundee; *Diary*, p. 59 (entry of 27th July 1845).

<sup>92</sup> *Diary*, pp. 44-45 (entry of 16th August 1844).



a holiday in Bridge of Allan, with a trip to Loch Katrine, in June 1845.<sup>93</sup> She was evidently pleased with the beauties of nature, writing of these as related to the work of God as Creator and Redeemer.

#### (4) Residences of Jessie Thain

Tracking the residences of Janet Thain can only be based on the discontinuous records of the family's addresses. Given that she was not employed and that the decennial censuses uniformly list her residence with her parents, it is probably safe to assume that she resided with both parents until the death of her father in 1866 and with her widowed mother thereafter. Entries in the commercially orientated *Dundee Registers, Directories* and *Post Office Directories*, and the municipal and parliamentary *Lists of Voters* record the addresses of John Thain as head of the household and make no reference to household members.<sup>94</sup> The records indicate that the family moved freely between their Dundee homes and the Blairgowrie estate (Heath Park) that they acquired in 1837, until the sale of that estate in 1858. Several issues of the Dundee directories list Heath Park as John Thain's residence for correspondence,<sup>95</sup> whereas his voting rights remained in Dundee at all times. He became an elder in Blairgowrie Free Church after the Disruption and much of Jessie's diary (1843-1847) relates to activity in and around Blairgowrie, confirming that the family spent significant time in Heath Park. No residential address is given in 1854-5. With these provisos, the following list is given as an approximate guide to Jessie Thain's residences:

1821-1843 (or beyond)	Park Place, Dundee
1837 (approximately)-1858	Heath Park, Blairgowrie, alternating with residence in Dundee
1856-57 (approximately)	Blackness Terrace, Dundee
1858-59 (approximately)	17 Roseangle, Dundee
1861-66 (approximately)	Magdalen Place, Dundee

As Heath Park features so prominently in the life of the family over a two-decade period, it is worth digressing to describe the estate. John Thain acquired land on Blair Muir, south of Blairgowrie village in 1837,

<sup>93</sup> *Diary*, pp. 60-61 (entry of 12th August 1845).

<sup>94</sup> There are no extant directories for 1844, 1848, 1849, 1851, 1852, 1863, or 1866.

<sup>95</sup> In 1845, 1846-7, 1850.



*Fig. 3. Heath Park, Blairgowrie.*

shortly after the death of his four-year-old son James, and built a large villa in extensive grounds: nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps show trapezoidal boundaries approximately 220 yards by 265 yards (200 x 242 metres), an area just over 12 acres (4.85 hectares). The entrance lodge bears the carved date of 1838 but the date of building the villa (fig. 3) is not known with certainty. When the estate was sold by roup (public auction) in a Blairgowrie hotel in 1858, the house consisted of two public rooms, five bedrooms, two dressing rooms, kitchen and servants' apartment, pantries, store-closet, water-closet "&c". The offices [outbuildings] consisted of coach and car-house, stable, byre, and servants' room. "The garden is large and well stocked with fruit trees and bushes in bearing, and is enclosed with a wall."<sup>96</sup> This terminated the Thains' formal connection with Blairgowrie. Whilst Somerset's article was entitled "The Thains of Blairgowrie",<sup>97</sup> it should be noted that their intermittent residence in that locality lasted around twenty years and

<sup>96</sup> *Perthshire Advertiser*, Thursday 15th April 1858, p. 1. The house has been considerably modified since then. Much of the estate was subsequently sold for housing development in 1979, forming a significant part of the present village of Rosemount, and a recent estate agent brochure (2016) stated the present-day grounds of Heath Park amount to approximately 1.75 acres (0.7 ha). Both Heath Park and the adjacent entrance lodge on Coupar Angus Road (now known as Heath Park Lodge) are now Guest Houses (2016).

<sup>97</sup> Somerset, pp. 142-149.

Blairgowrie may best be considered a retreat for the family from the city and the Thain business interests.

The Scottish decennial census began in 1801 as a rudimentary enumeration and a copy of that Dundee census has survived. Returns for the next three Dundee censuses are missing, in common with many other areas of Scotland. Only returns from 1841 onwards carry details of named residents and the nationally organised surveys are complete thereafter. The returns give an indication of the wider household – family members and servants – with the proviso that only overnight residents in the household are recorded. Ages (some of which are inaccurate in the 1841 return) and stated occupations are given in parentheses:

1841 (Heath Park, Blairgowrie)	John (40), Janet (35), Janet [Jessie] (15), Alexander (15), David (12), John (11), Herbert (6); Elizabeth Duncan (25, servant) and Grace Macdonald (30, servant), James Saunders (25, agricultural labourer). <sup>98</sup>
1851 (Heath Park, Blairgowrie)	John (55, ship owner), Janet (47, ship owner's wife), J [Jessie] (29, ship owner's daughter), A [Alexander] (27, Probationer Free Church of Scotland); Vilet [ <i>sic</i> ] Brown of Edinburgh (28, unmarried, servant), Mary Frazer of Perth (31, unmarried, servant), John Morrison of Kirkmichael, Perthshire (15, unmarried, stable boy). <sup>99</sup>
1861 (Magdalen Place, Dundee)	John (65, shipowner and merchant), Janet (57), Janet [Jessie] (39), Herbert (25, unmarried, shipowner and merchant); Emily Spence (35, unmarried, servant), Eliza Mackay (18, unmarried, servant). <sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Census 1841 335/00 004/00 015 Blairgowrie. The census sheet inexplicably displays erroneous ages for John (senior), Janet, Jessie, and Alexander, whose actual ages were respectively 45, 37, 20, and 17. The census took place on 6th June 1841.

<sup>99</sup> Census 1851 335/00 004/00 003 Blairgowrie – took place on 30th March 1851.

<sup>100</sup> Census 1861 282/02 025/00 013 Dundee – took place on 7th April 1861.



Fig. 4. The Thains' house at 2 Magdalen Place, Dundee.

[Photo: courtesy of K. Walker]

The contemporary nineteenth-century *Dundee Directories* list the house owners in Magdalen Place but do not number the properties. It is a short dead-end residential street containing six substantial detached properties constructed in the middle of the nineteenth century. Examination of the *Register of Sasines* indicates that the Thain's house is now known as 2 Magdalen Place (fig. 4).<sup>101</sup> This house was put on the market for sale in April 1866, two months before John Thain's death. At some point after that (and before 1868) Jessie Thain and Janet, her mother, removed to Torquay on the south coast of Devon: their whereabouts are tracked by a newspaper report, census returns, and death certificates.

1871 ( <i>Lynfield</i> , Middle Warberry, Torquay)	Janet (67), Janet D [Jessie] (49); Agnes Macfee of Newton Stewart, Wigtown-
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<sup>101</sup> *The Scottish General Register of Sasines* is the oldest land register in the world, dating back to 1617. It is a chronological list of land deeds, which contain written descriptions of properties and is gradually being replaced by the map-based land register. Information about the sasine entries for Magdalen Place has kindly been provided by K. Walker, Dundee (personal communication, 2016).

shire (44, unmarried, visitor), Jane Helen Duncan of Edinburgh (37, unmarried, visitor); Helen Craib of Lintrathen, Perthshire (40, unmarried, cook), Frances Hooper of Torquay (20, unmarried, housemaid).<sup>102</sup>

1881 (4 Kents Terrace, Kents Road, Torquay) Janet (77), Janet [Jessie] (59); Elizabeth Ann Bartlett of Somerton, Somerset (17, unmarried, parlourmaid), Elizabeth Ellen Blockam of Exeter, Devon (19, unmarried, cook).

*Lynfield* in Middle Warberry (now Middle Warberry Road) is a large detached villa, nowadays divided into three flats. The Thains later moved 0.6 miles (0.9 km) to the smaller (but still substantial) terraced property at Kents Terrace in Kents Road at some stage between 1871 and 1881.<sup>103</sup> The house in Kents Terrace at that time was named *Aboyne*, strongly suggesting an earlier Scottish connection. This address was to be the final residence for Janet and Jessie and, in due time, the location where both would die.

### **(5) Births, marriages, and deaths of Jessie Thain's siblings and their families**

Following the childhood deaths of three siblings, Jessie and three brothers survived to adulthood – in order of birth, Alexander Davidson Thain, David Davidson Thain, and the youngest brother, Herbert William Thain.

#### ***Alexander Davidson Thain***

Alexander Thain was born in Dundee on 28th July 1823, and he was baptised there three days later. There are no recorded details about his early childhood. When he was fifteen he contracted scarlet fever in Blairgowrie during May 1839. William C. Burns had been visiting Heath Park and wrote of speaking to the lad: “On Sabbath night he was very

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<sup>102</sup> Census: Parish of Tormoham, Town of Torquay, Ecclesiastical District of Torwood, p. 28 (1871).

<sup>103</sup> Kents Terrace no longer appears as a separate address within the numbering system of Kents Road, and the house is now subdivided into four small flats.

anxious to see me regarding the state of his soul; however, we were afraid to increase the fever, and I only stood at his bedside and repeated a few of the invitations to come to Christ for all.”<sup>104</sup> McCheyne had a special affection for Alexander, and particularly mentioned him as one among the crowd who welcomed him on his return to Dundee in November 1839.<sup>105</sup>

Alexander was eighteen years old when his younger brother Johnnie died in 1842, aged eleven. McCheyne wrote him in tender condolence the day following Johnnie’s death: Bonar includes this letter, “To A. T.”, in McCheyne’s biography.<sup>106</sup> He wrote of his certainty that Johnnie had been a believer: “I do trust and believe that he was a saved boy. You know I am rather slow of coming to this conviction, and not fond of speaking when I have not good evidence; but here, I think, God has not left us in doubt.” Near the conclusion of the letter McCheyne exhorted Alexander: “Remember D\_\_\_ and H\_\_\_ at the throne of grace. If God had taken them, where would they have been?” Bonar represented the names by initials in the biography but it is clear that McCheyne referred to Alexander’s two surviving younger brothers, David and Herbert.

Alexander studied at the University of Edinburgh from 1840 to 1843 and then he enrolled in the Free Church College in Edinburgh from 1844 to 1848. He had written a long and impressive letter to Jessie’s Sabbath school class in 1844; she read this to them and, at the request of some pupils, she read it to them again the following week.<sup>107</sup> The 1851 census described him as a probationer of the Free Church.<sup>108</sup> It is not clear why ten years elapsed from the time of finishing his divinity course to his ordination as Free Church minister of New Machar in Aberdeenshire in 1858; Somerset speculates that this was due to ill-health but this is unsubstantiated and his obituary suggests he had always been a fit man. A comment in the obituary raises a different possibility, namely that he may have travelled widely: He brought to the pulpit a mind enriched by study, by travel, by manifold converse with

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<sup>104</sup> I. Burns, *Memoir of the Rev. Wm. C. Burns, M.A., Missionary to China from the English Presbyterian Church* (London, James Nisbet & Co., 1873), p. 49.

<sup>105</sup> Somerset, p. 146.

<sup>106</sup> Bonar, pp. 269-70.

<sup>107</sup> *Diary*, p. 17 (entry of 14th January 1844) and p. 21 (entry of 25th January 1844).

<sup>108</sup> Census 1851 335/00 004/00 003 Blairgowrie.

books and men, and a heart bent on the one sublime achievement – the winning of immortal souls.<sup>109</sup>

The year after his induction Alexander married Elizabeth Crombie, on 23rd June 1859, in her home at Cothal Mills, Fintray, Aberdeenshire. Elizabeth was from a very well-to-do background, the youngest of nine children of John Crombie (a manufacturer of luxury woollen cloth, of international repute) and Catherine Harvey.<sup>110</sup> The marriage was conducted by the Rev. John Murray, minister of the Free North Church, Aberdeen.<sup>111</sup>

Alexander and Elizabeth Thain's first child, Catherine Susan, was born on 3rd April 1862 and a son, Alexander John Ramsay, was born on 26th December 1863. Poignantly, Alexander did not survive to see the birth of his son, however. He became ill with a chest infection in September 1863 but appeared to improve and it seemed he would recover. However, he had partial relapse. It was recommended that he should have a change of air and he himself had an intense longing to visit the home of his early days. In view of this he was removed from New Machar to his parents' house in Magdalen Place, Dundee. He arrived there on 14th October, weak, breathless and moribund. He lay down on the couch when he arrived and never rose again.<sup>112</sup> Aged forty, Alexander Thain died there in the early hours of 21st October, due to "Inflammation of Lungs & Typhoid fever".<sup>113</sup> His obituarist writes that "as he lay during the last two days of nature's feebleness, with closed eyes and face upturned to heaven, it was plain to the sad bystanders that he was walking in glorious company; and there was a grandeur which is not of this world in his last broken utterances: 'Christ's righteousness is all I want.' One having said to him, 'You will soon be in heaven', he exclaimed, 'Oh yes – a palace!'. 'I am going to God – to Jesus.' 'I am near heaven.' 'Remember, Lord.' 'Jesus – Jesus – Jesus.'"<sup>114</sup> Due to Jessie

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<sup>109</sup> *The Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1st January 1864, p. 425.

<sup>110</sup> John Crombie and his brother James owned Cothal Mill on the River Don, and had produced luxury woollen cloth there since 1805; subsequently production was moved several miles downstream to Grandholm Mill, where cloth manufacture continued until 1990. By the time of Elizabeth's marriage, Crombie had won awards at the Great Exhibition of London (1851) and the Exposition Universelle in Paris (1855).

<sup>111</sup> Statutory Marriages 193/00 0002.

<sup>112</sup> *Brechin Advertiser*, 3rd November 1863, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Statutory Deaths 282/02 0978 Dundee.

<sup>114</sup> *The Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1st January 1864, p. 425.

residing with her parents it is likely she was present during the illness of (and possibly at the death of) this brother whom she admired.

Alexander Thain's widow was left with a young daughter and two months later she gave birth to Alexander's posthumous son at her parents' house, the Old Manse, Cothal Mills. Before the birth a roup took place in the New Machar manse, disposing of the entire manse household furniture together with farm stocking, and shortly afterwards his library was auctioned in Aberdeen.<sup>115</sup>

The three young siblings who predeceased Alexander Thain had been buried in the Howff graveyard in central Dundee but burials there were discontinued in 1857.<sup>116</sup> From 1863 onwards the Western Cemetery, laid out in 1845, would be the place for Thain interments in Dundee.<sup>117</sup> John Thain purchased three adjacent lairs in the cemetery<sup>118</sup> and Alexander was the first of the family to be buried there. Later burials included Alexander's wife Catherine, who died nearly thirty-seven years later<sup>119</sup> and their unmarried daughter Catherine Susan Thain,<sup>120</sup> and their son Alexander John Ramsay Thain<sup>121</sup> with his wife Ethel Douglas Mackinnon.<sup>122</sup> Their names are recorded on a monument of Aberdeen granite surmounted by an unadorned obelisk.

### **David Davidson Thain**

The next breach in John Thain's family came with the death of David Davidson Thain, the middle of the three sons who survived to adulthood. Details about his life are sketchy but they would suggest that he had little direct contact with Jessie – or indeed his parents – after childhood. He was born in Dundee on 6th March 1829, and was baptised there three days later. He was brought up in the city but then attended the High School of Edinburgh for some of his education.<sup>123</sup> The reason

<sup>115</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 11th November 1863, p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> [www.fdca.org.uk/Howff\\_History.html](http://www.fdca.org.uk/Howff_History.html).

<sup>117</sup> [www.scottish-places.info/features/featurefirst8123.html](http://www.scottish-places.info/features/featurefirst8123.html).

<sup>118</sup> Lairs 181a,b,c in compartment VII of the graveyard.

<sup>119</sup> Died of "Senile decay" on 17th October 1910 in Murray's Asylum, Kinnoull, Perth (Statutory Deaths 387/00 0459 Perth).

<sup>120</sup> Died in Aberdeen on 8th August 1888.

<sup>121</sup> An Advocate in Aberdeen, who died on 6th March 1934.

<sup>122</sup> Died on 24th February 1964.

<sup>123</sup> J. Colston, *History of Dr Boyd's Fourth High School Class with Biographical Sketch of Dr Boyd and Reminiscences of High School Days* (Edinburgh, Colston & Son, 2nd edn, 1873), p. 97.



for this is not clear, as equally prestigious establishments were present in his home city: the Dundee Public Seminaries (now known as High School of Dundee). He then went to India where he served in the HEIC (Honourable East India Company) Service Bombay Establishment and was appointed Sub-Assistant Commissary-General and Lieutenant of Her Majesty's 24th Regiment of the Bombay Army. He saw active service in the Anglo-Persian War (1856-57) and the Indian Mutiny of 1857. David married Elizabeth Mary Edwards in Bombay (nowadays known as Mumbai) on 20th September 1856 and they had three sons – Leslie Davidson Thain (born in Bombay on 30th June 1857), Ernest William Thain (born in Darawar, Bombay, on 13th November 1858), and Herbert David Livingstone Thain (born in Kensington, London, on 30th December 1859, died in Tonbridge, Kent, on 2nd November 1951).

David Thain, aged thirty, returned from India in very poor health and died on 3rd November 1859 at 8 Howley Place, Little Venice, a few days after reaching London<sup>124</sup> – nearly two months before the birth of his youngest son. David's remains were taken north and he was buried in the Howff cemetery in Dundee.<sup>125</sup> McCheyne had exhorted Alexander Thain to pray for David's conversion:<sup>126</sup> there is no evidence for or against the answer of his prayers, but the later history of Janet Thain will demonstrate that David's widow subsequently lived a scandalous life.

### ***Herbert William Thain***

With the death of David in 1859, Jessie's sole remaining sibling was her youngest brother, Herbert Thain. He was born in Dundee on 1st May 1835, and baptised there four days later. Like his siblings, details of his childhood are lacking. Entries for him in the *Dundee Directories* begin in 1858 when he began trading as H. W. Thain & Co. at the age of twenty-three, initially as a rope and twine manufacturer. His commercial interests became remarkably diverse, as he was regularly mentioned in the *Inverness Courier* and the *Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser* as attending Inverness Wool Sales as a buyer or commission agent in the 1860s and one newspaper item also listed him as selling tar and butter as smearing

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<sup>124</sup> *Aberdeen Herald and General Advertiser*, 19th November 1859, p. 5; *Aberdeen Journal*, 19th November 1859, p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> [www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/HowffT02.pdf](http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/HowffT02.pdf).

<sup>126</sup> Bonar, p. 270.

agents for sheep.<sup>127</sup> It is likely that his business prospered, as later directories list him as (simultaneously) ship broker, ship owner, and merchant (trading in copper, tin, rope and twine). In 1867 the name of the business changed to simply Thain & Co. following the death of his father the previous year. Likely as evidence of his ongoing success he became a committee member of the Dundee Professional Supply Association in 1877. In addition to his extensive professional activities he was appointed an Ensign in the Dundee Rifle Volunteer Corps (8th company) in 1860.<sup>128</sup>

Herbert hailed from the very wealthy Thain family. His wife, Emma (1843-after 1901), shared a similarly opulent background as she was the second daughter of William Brown by his much younger wife, Adelaide Campbell Galloway. William Brown's occupation was recorded in official documents as flax spinner and merchant.<sup>129</sup> These modest declarations obscured the fact that he was one of the "jute barons" of Dundee; with his brother James they founded the highly successful firm of J&W Brown. Herbert and Emma married on 27th June 1865 at her parents' home, Spring Grove House, 172 Nethergate.<sup>130</sup> They had two sons and two daughters, all born in Dundee – John William Brown Thain (20th April 1866-1941), Adelaide Campbell Thain (20th October 1867-after 1901), Fanny Brown Thain (16th April 1869-March 1953) and William Brown Thain (6th December 1870-March 1953).

There is sadly nothing to suggest that McCheyne's prayer for Herbert's conversion was answered. Whilst he engaged enthusiastically in a profusion of lawful business ventures it was clear that his interests centred on worldly entertainments rather than the house of God. He became a member of Dundee Choral Society in 1861 and was an honorary member of that society from 1865 to 1874.<sup>131</sup> His interest in performing arts endured and in 1883 a list of items stolen from his empty house in Magdalen Yard Road included his opera glasses.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>127</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 16th July 1863, p. 6; *Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser*, 19th July 1864, p. 8; *Elgin Courier*, 21st July 1865, p. 7; *Inverness Courier*, 12th July 1866, p. 11.

<sup>128</sup> *Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser*, 10th February 1860, p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> OPR Deaths 282/00 0280 0109 Dundee; Census 1851 282/00 028/00 046 Dundee; Statutory Marriages 282/02 0248 Dundee.

<sup>130</sup> Statutory Marriages 282/02 0248 Dundee. Spring Grove House is a listed building. See <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB25477>.

<sup>131</sup> [www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/ChoralSociety%20T.pdf](http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/ChoralSociety%20T.pdf); [www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/Choral%20Hon%20T.pdf](http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/Choral%20Hon%20T.pdf).

<sup>132</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 23rd July 1873, p. 5. The thief was apprehended wearing a stolen suit of Herbert's clothes; the miscreant had left his own (recognisable) tattered garments in

Before marriage Herbert lived in the Dundee home of his parents. Once married, his substantial properties, successively at 8 Windsor Street, 4 Airlie Place, Magdalen Yard Road (nos. 26, 18, and 20) and 3 Hyndford Terrace (now part of Perth Road), testify to his personal wealth. The reasons for the frequent changes of address are not clear. However, in the late 1880s it seems that he and his wife separated for cause or causes unknown. She and the children moved to Edinburgh to reside with their eldest son John (then in his early twenties) in his substantial house at 6 Drumsheugh Place,<sup>133</sup> whilst Herbert, unaccompanied, moved into lodgings at Taybank Cottage in Collingwood Terrace in Barnhill, Broughty Ferry.<sup>134</sup>

Around that time Herbert's professional status seemed to be somewhat lower than previously. From being listed as a merchant and shipowner in 1886, he was recorded as a jute merchant in 1890 and then as a commission merchant in 1893. He fell ill with a chest infection in September 1893, and died in his lodgings about ten days later on 26th September, aged fifty-eight.<sup>135</sup> His son John, a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh, dealt with the registration of his death. With his demise Herbert's business was dissolved and "any persons having claims against the late Herbert William Thain of 62 Commercial Street, Dundee, and the Firm of Thain & Co., Merchants" were requested, by means of a newspaper advertisement, to lodge their claims against his estate.<sup>136</sup>

It has not been possible to determine how long Herbert's estranged widow survived him. It is known that Emma Thain was alive at the time of the census in 1901, where she was listed as the head of the household, living on her own means, and residing with her son John at 25 Castle Terrace, Edinburgh.<sup>137</sup>

## **(6) The death of John Thain, father of Jessie Thain**

John Thain was predeceased by five of his seven children. Despite his advancing years he maintained some of his commercial shipowning

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Herbert's house. He was subsequently convicted of both crimes (*Dundee Advertiser*, 23rd July 1883, p. 5, and 8th August 1883, p. 6; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 13th August 1883, p. 2).

<sup>133</sup> Census 1891 685/01 035/00 018 Edinburgh.

<sup>134</sup> *Dundee Directory* 1890; Census 1891 310/00 007/00 014 Dundee. Collingwood Terrace formed part of what is now known only as Collingwood Street.

<sup>135</sup> Statutory Deaths 310/00 0146 Monifieth. The registered cause of death was "pleuropneumonia".

<sup>136</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 12th October 1893, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Census 1901 685/1 34/4 Edinburgh.

interests.<sup>138</sup> Due to declining health he relinquished his business to his son Herbert about 1865, and “retired to the quiet of the country”.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, on 1st January 1866, he could still describe himself as the oldest living shipowner in Dundee when writing to a newspaper about the need to light the River Tay in the approaches to Dundee harbour.<sup>140</sup> The move to Blairgowrie did not result in his recovery from the increasing debility of a serious chronic illness, however. It may well be that he realised that he was slowly dying, as he put his Magdalen Place house up for sale in April 1866.<sup>141</sup> Two months later he died at *The Alders*, the house of a friend in Rattray, by Blairgowrie. The cause of death was given as “Disease of the Spleen and Mesenteric Glands” and the death certificate (fig. 5) recorded that he had had this condition for eighteen

	John Thain	1866	Age 70	Alexander Thain	Disease of the Spleen and Mesenteric Glands	18 Months	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18	1866
	Ship owner	June, Rattray	years	Merchant	deceased,	deceased,	deceased,	June 19 <sup>th</sup>
32	Married to Janet Davidson	Magdalen Place Dundee		deceased,	deceased,	deceased,	deceased,	John Thain Registrar

Fig. 5. Death certificate of John Thain.

[Crown copyright, National Records of Scotland]

months.<sup>142</sup> Based on the necessarily limited death certificate information it is likely that he had a malignant disease such as lymphoma or a lymphoproliferative disorder.

The settlement of his estate was concluded on 18th September 1866: it amounted to £34,968.<sup>143</sup> The terms of the will made provision to transfer to his widow “the whole Household Furniture and Plenishing [Scots: fittings and furnishings of the house] including silver plate”

<sup>138</sup> At the time of his death he had minority shareholdings in a barque named *Heath Park* and a brig named *Annie Laurie*, as well as a majority shareholding in a brig named *Nimrod*. SC45/31/20 Dundee Sheriff Court, dated 18th September 1866.

<sup>139</sup> *Brechin Advertiser*, Tuesday 19th June 1866, p. 3.

<sup>140</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 4th January 1866, p. 4.

<sup>141</sup> The house was placed on the market in April 1866, two months before John Thain died: *Dundee Courier and Argus*, Wednesday 18th April 1866, p. 4. Two weeks later a further notice intimating the sale, together with the sale of his office in Commercial Street, appeared in *Dundee Courier and Argus*, Wednesday 2nd May 1866, p. 4.

<sup>142</sup> Statutory Deaths 389/32 Rattray.

<sup>143</sup> Approximately £3.755 million in present value. Calculations of present value in this paper are derived from the Bank of England’s Inflation Calculator ([www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/resources/inflationtools/calculator/flash/default.aspx](http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/resources/inflationtools/calculator/flash/default.aspx)).

together with “the free annual income of the nett Residue of the whole Trust Estate Heritable and Moveable real and personal and that at such times as to my Trustees may seem advisable. And if it shall at any time appear to my Trustees that such Income is insufficient for the proper maintenance of my said wife, I empower them to make such advances from time to time out of the capital stock of the said Residue as they may consider proper for that purpose.”<sup>144</sup>

### **(7) Janet and Jessie Thain in Torquay**

The subsequent history of Janet and Jessie Thain relates to residence in Torquay, as evidenced by a newspaper report in 1868, census returns of 1871 and 1881, and subsequently by death certificates in 1882 and 1889. The date when they moved from Dundee to Torquay is likely to have been shortly after the death of John Thain as their Magdalen Place property was sold in 1866.

It is not possible to ascertain the reason for the move to Torquay. There are no readily apparent family connections and the little information available does not point to residence with friends or relatives. It is tempting to speculate that they moved for health reasons, the commonest reason for Scots to move to the “English Riviera”. During the nineteenth century Torquay promoted itself as a place where the chronically ill could recuperate, initially as summer visitors but then as long-term residents.<sup>145</sup> The claims of health benefits were endorsed by doctors in books issued by John Churchill, London’s foremost medical publisher.<sup>146</sup> It is known that Janet Thain suffered unspecified ill-health and, as previously noted, this was one reason for John Thain acquiring Heath Park in Blairgowrie. Jessie Thain’s diary also includes references to bouts of undefined illnesses, some for a short spell (which temporarily unfitted her for attending church),<sup>147</sup> and others of longer duration.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> SC45/31/20, Dundee Sheriff Court.

<sup>145</sup> J. T. White, *The History of Torquay* (Torquay, n.p., 1874).

<sup>146</sup> C R. Hall, *Torquay in its Medical Aspect as a Resort for Pulmonary Invalids* (London, John Churchill, 1857); T. Shapter, *The Climate of the South of Devon, and its Influence upon Health: with Short Accounts of Exeter, Torquay, Babbicombe, Teignmouth, Dawlish, Exmouth, Budleigh-Salterton, Sidmouth, &c.* (London, John Churchill, 2nd edn., 1862).

<sup>147</sup> *Diary*, pp. 16 (1st January 1844), 17 (14th January 1844).

<sup>148</sup> *Diary*, p. 28 (entry of 28th February 1844): “Felt lately (which was perhaps owing to my being rather feeble for the past fortnight) that I might soon be called away.” Later that year, the entry of 2nd November (pp. 47-48) states: “Was taken ill last Thursday, and confined to bed for a few days; but the attack was much milder than those of the past years. I am almost well again.”

An entry in 1845 indicates that she had a recurrent chronic respiratory illness<sup>149</sup> but there are insufficient details to ascertain the diagnosis: from the symptoms, chronicity and the recurring nature of the problem, conditions such as tuberculosis, asthma, adult whooping cough or bronchiectasis could all be contenders.

It appears from census information that the Thain ladies lived at two addresses in Torquay – first at *Lynfield*, Middle Warberry, and latterly at *Aboyne*, 4 Kents Terrace, Kents Road.<sup>150</sup> It should be noted that this does not rule out residence at other locations: unlike the situation in Dundee, local directories are not available.

Given the Thain ladies' attachment to evangelical religion, it is necessary to consider their place of public worship in Torquay. Based on the funeral arrangements for both ladies it is clear that they were members of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, the Torquay church for Scots expatriates, which was located in Torwood Gardens, Torquay,<sup>151</sup> relatively close to both their known residential addresses. Scottish Presbyterian services had earlier been held in the Masonic Hall, Park Street, until the church in Torwood Gardens (with seating for five hundred) was built in 1862-3 (fig. 6). The first service was held there on 5th April 1863, when the preacher was Andrew A. Bonar, the biographer of McCheyne. For administrative reasons, in common with many other Scots churches in England, the denominational oversight of the congregation was subsequently transferred to the Presbyterian Church of England.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church was built in response to the arrival in Torquay of Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889), the well-known Biblical scholar and Jewish convert to Christianity. Edersheim had been licensed and ordained in the Free Church of Scotland in 1846. He was

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<sup>149</sup> *Diary*, pp. 55-56 (entry of 6th April 1845): "I am not permitted to visit the House of prayer. Indeed I have only been once within the courts of the Lord's House since the middle of January owing to a tedious illness. Was better a fortnight ago and was out once at church; but have relapsed since and am still very weak. Although my illness has not been very severe, yet it has been long continued. Great exhaustion accompanies the cough." *Diary*, pp. 57-58 (entry of 4th May 1845): "It is now nearly four months since this illness made its appearance." By this stage, however, she had returned to attending church, having heard Dr. Candlish preaching in Dundee two weeks previously and Mr. Gillies in Rattray the previous week and also on 4th May.

<sup>150</sup> See pp. 234-235 for details.

<sup>151</sup> It should be noted that Torwood is a local Devon topographical name and has no connection with the Scottish village of that name, near Larbert, made famous by Donald Cargill's *Torwood Excommunication* (1680).



*Fig. 6. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church building, Torquay.*  
[Photo: courtesy of J. Macintyre, 2016]

appointed as the assistant minister to Robert Forbes (1812-1859)<sup>152</sup> at Woodside, Aberdeen, at the end of 1847. During 1848 he became the Free Church Minister of Old Aberdeen where he ministered until 1861, when ill-health forced his resignation. He moved to Torquay for health reasons and became minister of St. Andrew's from 1863 to 1872, when once more he resigned for health reasons.<sup>153</sup> As the Thains resided in Torquay from 1868 (or earlier), it is therefore reasonable to conclude that he was the Thains' minister for the first part of their stay in the town.

<sup>152</sup> Author of *Digest of Rules and Procedure of the Inferior Courts of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, Johnstone and Hunter, 1866).

<sup>153</sup> Edersheim thereafter went to live in Bournemouth. In 1875 he was ordained in the Church of England and became successively curate of the Abbey Church, Christchurch, Hampshire (1875-1876), then vicar of Loders, Bridport, Dorset (1876-1882). In 1882 he resigned and relocated to Oxford, with University lecturing appointments from 1884 to his death in 1889. E. Edersheim, *Tohu-va-vohu: Without form and void: a collection of fragmentary thoughts and criticisms* (London, Longmans, Green, 1890), pp. xvi-xxviii.

Edersheim's successor in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church was Archibald Neilson Mackray (1837-1921). Mackray was born in Stirling, where his father, William Mackray, was minister of Spittal Square Chapel.<sup>154</sup> A. N. Mackray was Free Church minister of Kirkurd, Peeblesshire (1865-1867). He resigned through ill-health and later became minister in Ashfield, New South Wales (1860-72). He was inducted to the Torquay congregation in 1872 and remained there until his translation to Croydon in 1886. Mackray conducted the funeral service for Janet Thain in 1882.

The year after Mackray left St. Andrew's a further Free Church of Scotland minister was inducted as his successor. Alexander Humphrey Reid (1844-1909) was, like Mackray, a son of the manse.<sup>155</sup> He was ordained at Gartly, Aberdeenshire, in 1868 and was translated to Dundee to become the first minister of the McCheyne Memorial Free Church in Taylor's Lane in 1872.<sup>156</sup> He was translated to Torquay in 1887 and remained there till he resigned in 1893. In 1894 he was settled in Ellon, Aberdeenshire.<sup>157</sup> Reid conducted the funeral service for Jessie Thain in 1889.

All three ministers during the Thains' time in Torquay originated from the Free Church of Scotland, and indeed Reid's successor, J. Nisbet Wallace, was also the son of a Free Church minister.<sup>158</sup> There is no contemporary information about the religious life at St. Andrew's during that period. The downgrade in Free Church doctrine, worship and practice in the latter decades of the nineteenth century is well known. Whilst St. Andrew's had become part of the Presbyterian Church of England and therefore no longer formally associated with its Scottish roots, the succession of ministers originating from the Free Church may be significant. In the early 1900s a series of whimsical articles about local

<sup>154</sup> He joined the Free Church of Scotland at the Disruption, and became minister in Huntly from 1844-1849. *FES*, Vol. 4, p. 331.

<sup>155</sup> His father, Alexander Reid (1801-1863), was minister of Portsoy from 1829 until his death, and joined the Free Church at the Disruption. Obituary in *The Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, 2nd March 1863.

<sup>156</sup> This congregation began as a mission of St. Peter's Free Church, Dundee, in 1857. The church was opened by C. H. Spurgeon. [http://ecclegen.com/congregations-9/#\\_Hlk377384732](http://ecclegen.com/congregations-9/#_Hlk377384732).

<sup>157</sup> <http://ecclegen.com/ministers-r/#REID>, ALEXANDER HUMPHREY.

<sup>158</sup> J. Nisbet Wallace (born 1842) was the son of John Aikman Wallace (1802-1870), minister of Hawick, Roxburghshire (Church of Scotland 1833-1843; Free Church 1843-1870). *FES*, Vol. 2, p. 116; <http://ecclegen.com/ministers-w/#WALLACE>, JOHN AIKMAN.



churches appeared in the *Torquay Times* and these were later collated and published in booklet form under the author's pen-name "Criticus".<sup>159</sup> The article makes it evident that Wallace was of an ecumenical outlook and public worship in St. Andrew's by that time included hymns, an organ and a choir.<sup>160</sup>

The only available information relating directly to the Thains during their residence in Torquay is the sequel to an episode which likely caused great distress to both ladies. The background to the incident relates to the licentious behaviour of Janet Thain's widowed daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Mary Thain. As previously mentioned, David Davidson Thain died in 1859, leaving his widow with three boys (one of whom was born shortly after his death). His widow became the centre of public interest due to a liaison she formed with Dr. Gatehouse, a medical doctor from London, who had separated from his wife in 1856 and subsequently abandoned her by living in an adulterous relationship as man and wife with Elizabeth Thain at various locations in England, Wales, and the Channel Islands in the 1860s. The divorce case in 1867 was widely reported in the English newspapers and became a legal *cause célèbre* which helped to define desertion in legal terms, not only in England but also for Christian marriages in India: the case of *Gatehouse v. Gatehouse* remains a pivotal case in marital and divorce law and is referenced to this day in legal texts.<sup>161</sup>

The sequel involving the Thain ladies occurred a year after the Gatehouse divorce case. In 1868 Mrs. Thain removed two grandsons from the care of Dr. Gatehouse and took them to Torquay. It was alleged

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<sup>159</sup> "Criticus", *The Churches and Chapels of Torquay* (Torquay, MacKenzie & MacDonald, no date, but possibly 1905).

<sup>160</sup> The church, a Grade-II listed building, closed in 1951. After a period of ownership by the Christian Science cult, it became a nightclub, which then closed in 2001. Redevelopment led to the building being converted into a ten-apartment property in 2008. ([www.torquayheraldexpress.co.uk/price-right-church-conversion/story-12354749-detail/story.html](http://www.torquayheraldexpress.co.uk/price-right-church-conversion/story-12354749-detail/story.html)).

<sup>161</sup> *Inter alia*, in *Morning Advertiser*, 2nd February 1867, p. 7; *Western Daily Press*, 4th February 1867, p. 3, and 14th February 1867, p. 3; *Morning Post*, 13th February 1867, p. 7; *London Evening Standard*, 13th February 1867, p. 7; *The Law Times Reports*, Vol. XVI new series (March to August 1867), *Gatehouse v. Gatehouse* (London, Horace Cox, 1867), p. 33; M. Robertson (ed.), *English Reports Annotated, 1867* (London, The Reports and Digest Syndicate Ltd., 1914), pp. 1292-3; N. Geary, *The Law of Marriage and Family Relations: A Manual of Practical Law* (London, Adam and Charles Black, 1892), p. 342; H. A. B. Rattigan, *The Law of Divorce applicable to Christians in India (The Indian Divorce Act 1869)* (London & Allahabad, Wildy & Sons, 1897) p. 60; R. Probert, *The Changing Legal Face of Cohabitation: From Fornicators to Family, 1600-2010* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 102-3 (footnote 261).

that the abduction was forcible and Dr. Gatehouse travelled to Torquay to remove them from her house on 23rd May. He was accompanied by Sergeant Walter Mashford, Torquay's most senior officer, who was present to prevent a breach of the peace. It was stated that Mashford had to enter the house to advise Mrs. Thain to "settle her affairs quietly". One unnamed witness alleged that the policeman then carried off one of the children, contrary to his remit, and complained about this to higher Police authorities. A Superintendent led the inquiry, which was undertaken without Mashford being present or being able to represent himself. This led to the demotion of the sergeant, who resigned rather than suffer the indignity of lower rank and loss of pension.<sup>162</sup> The publicity would likely have vexed the Thain ladies.

### (8) The death of Janet Thain, mother of Jessie Thain

After spending around a dozen years in Torquay, Janet Thain's health failed. She developed paralysis agitans (now known as Parkinson's disease) around 1880. She died at 4 Kents Terrace on 7th January 1882, some fourteen hours after suffering apoplexy (a stroke), aged seventy-eight (fig. 7).<sup>163</sup> The Rev. A. N. Mackray conducted the funeral ceremony

Seventeenth January 1882 4 Kents Terrace WSD Torquay	Janet Thain	77 Years	Widow of J. Thain Shipowner	Paralysis Agitans 10 months Apoplexy 14 hours Certified by J. Thomson M.D.	H. B. Sheppard Present at the death 3 Kents Terrace Torquay	7th January 1882	Charles Albert Jones Registrar
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Fig. 7. Death certificate of Janet Thain.

[Crown copyright, General Register Office, England]

in the early afternoon of 10th January. Despite the ample provision of Thain lairs in Dundee's Western Cemetery (and the return of David Davidson's remains from London for interment in Dundee), Janet Thain was buried in a "private plain grave" in unconsecrated ground in Torquay Cemetery, in lair 3515 (cemetery section G2, line 8, near the Barton Road entrance). The burial cost £6 14s. and ownership of the grave was granted to her surviving son, Herbert Thain.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>162</sup> *Western Times*, 7th July 1868, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> General Register Office, Registration District Newton Abbott 1882: Death in the Sub-district of Torquay, No. 461.

<sup>164</sup> Approximately £730 in present value.

### (9) The final days of Jessie Thain

Jessie was aged sixty when her mother died. Despite Jessie's express wish in 1845 to one day live near her good friend Eliza McCheyne, they had been several hundred miles apart since about 1866 and were to remain so after the death of Janet Thain. Whether they stayed in contact is unknown. After her mother's death, Jessie remained at 4 Kents Terrace in Torquay, sustained by the generous provisions of her father's will.<sup>165</sup>

There are no items of correspondence or documentary records relating to Jessie's final years on the "English Riviera" until she reached the end of her life. She died in her own house on 18th July 1889, aged sixty-seven, with the cause of death given as "Malignant Disease of the Intestines" together with "Acute Cystitis" (possibly a misprint for Cystitis) and "Syncope" (collapse) (fig. 8).<sup>166</sup> Jessie died intestate and a court order

396	Eighteenth July 1889 4 Kents Terrace W. A. R. Torquay	Jessie Thain	Female	67 years	Independent	Malignant Disease of Intestines Acute Cystitis H. A. R. & M. C. P. Syncope & M. H.	G. Rice Present at the death 4 Kents Terrace Torquay	Nineteenth July 1889	Charles Albert Dorset Registrar
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Fig. 8. Death certificate of Jessie Thain.

[Crown copyright, General Register Office, England]

on 15th August 1889 transferred her personal estate of £598 12s. 8d. to Herbert Thain, her sole surviving sibling.<sup>167</sup> Under the terms of her father's will, the annuity she received from her father's estate would benefit Herbert Thain, then the sole surviving sibling. Jessie's funeral took place on the morning of 22nd July 1889, conducted by Rev. A. H. Reid. She was interred in the same lair as her mother. The cost of burial

<sup>165</sup> John Thain's will (SC45/31/20 Dundee Sheriff Court) is a long and complex document. It made provision for the distribution of the estate (on the subsequent death of Janet Thain) to the surviving children and grandchildren. The sons' shares were equal (with proportionate subdivision of the sums to the children of deceased sons), and Jessie's share was twice the share of each son. In addition, John Thain made provision for the distribution of interest from stocks and shares to go to Jessie after the death of her mother: "to pay one half thereof to her the said Janet Thain; and to retain the other half thereof in trust for her behoof for such period and even during her whole lifetime as to my Trustees in the absolute discretion hereby committed to them may seem most advisable".

<sup>166</sup> General Register Office, Registration District Newton Abbott 1889: Death in the Sub-district of Torquay, No. 396.

<sup>167</sup> Document from Her Majesty's High Court of Justice at the Principal Registry of the Probate Division, dated 15th August 1889 (copy provided by HM Courts and Tribunals Service).

amounted to £2 8s. 6d.<sup>168</sup> Despite annotation in the cemetery's burial record on 10th January 1883 stating "Monumental Head foot & side stones", the grave is unmarked and there is no monument to either woman. Thus ended the earthly course of a woman – one of the many close friends of Robert Murray McCheyne – whose religious diaries continue to give interest and spiritual benefit in the twenty-first century.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has traced the family history of the Thains of Dundee and Blairgowrie, providing extensive details to supplement previously published information about the family and their connections in Scottish evangelical circles. Jessie Thain remains a subject of historical interest, particularly among people interested in the connection between the Thain and McCheyne families.

This paper has succeeded in tracing – for the first time – Jessie Thain's life story to its conclusion in 1889. It has definitively identified the location, date and cause of death, thereby refuting the baseless but nevertheless widely circulated and widely believed speculation of Murdoch Campbell that she died of a broken heart shortly after August 1847, aged twenty-six. It may now be conclusively stated that Jessie Thain survived nearly forty-two further years and died of bowel cancer in Torquay on 18th July 1889, aged sixty-seven.

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<sup>168</sup> Approximately £285 in present value.