

An old grave.

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An Old Grave.



Attention has lately been directed to the state of the tombs in Greyfriars' Churchyard, and public interest in them has not been awakened before it was necessary. Many of the monuments have become ruinous, and not a few have fallen into a condition rendering it impossible to determine whose last resting-places they were intended to mark. This is a common fate, but that it should be so may well be subject for regret. "There is no antidote," says Sir Thomas Browne, "against the opium of time, which temporally considereth all things: our fathers find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our survivors. Gravestones tell truth scarce forty years." The learned author has but too much reason for his quaint remarks, in whatever sense they may be taken; but there is now more reverence for the memorials of those who have gone before, and it must be a matter of rejoicing to all gifted with historic feeling to know that efforts are being made by the authorities to remedy the effects of past neglect in the case of Greyfriars' Churchyard.

Among the graves which have recently undergone repair is that known as "Ray's Tomb," situated beside the monument erected by George Heriot and his brother David to the memory of their father, and, like it, one of the most ancient in the churchyard.

The grounds formerly belonging to the Franciscan Monastery, were granted to the town as a public burial place by Queen Mary in 1562; but there are comparatively few records of those buried in it before the opening years of the following century. In 1616, two years subsequent to the building of Old Greyfriars' Church, Adam Ray of Pitsindie and Canglor, was buried in this tomb, preceding his father, Hector Ray, an Edinburgh burgher, thither by two years. John Ray, another son of the latter, and the forefather of the Raes to be mentioned below, was buried here in 1632; and in the same year his sister, Mrs Carstairs, followed him to the grave. Hector Ray and his two sons are commemorated by three large flat stones, probably placed over their graves about the time of their deaths, and still, for the most part, readable; while Mrs Carstairs has a tablet in the base of the more modern structure built against the wall. The exact age of this monument is uncertain, but, as the coins found in the basement during the restoration belong to the reign of Charles I., it seems probable that it dates from that period. The tablet in memory of Mrs Carstairs is in wonderful preservation, and bears the following inscription:—

“Hic jacet Anna Raya uxor Joannis Carstairs fœmina lectissima quæ conjugii charissima vixit et magno omnium bonorum luctu et desiderio morte immatura prærepta est anno Domini 1632 mensis Julii 14 et ætatis vero 29.”

Amongst those buried in Ray's tomb during the seventeenth century were William Rae, son of the above mentioned John Ray, who died in 1662, and Colonel Adam Rae, who died in 1687.

The connecting links between these Raes and their descendants in the following century, were James Rae, Bailie of the Canongate, a son of William Rae just referred to, who died in 1702, and was buried in the Canongate Churchyard; and John Rae, his son, also buried there in 1754. Their name is still borne by Rae's Close, at the head of the Canongate, on the north side of the street.

John Rae's son was a medical man of some prominence in Edinburgh last century. Born in 1716, he became attached in 1747 to the Incorporation of Surgeons, of which he was Deacon in 1764-5. "On the 27th August 1772," says Gairdner, "is a minute of the Surgeons, from which it appears that James Rae had then for several years given a course of Surgery, and also 'practical discourses on cases of importance in the Royal Infirmary.' These were supported by the Surgeons, and by them advertised. The course being continued, it appears that on 23d October 1776, it was attempted by the Surgeons to get a professorship of surgery established in the University in his person. A petition to the Crown to that effect will be found 1st May 1777. But this endeavour of the Surgeons to have surgery taught separately from other departments, was defeated by the influence of Dr A. Monro *secundus*. Dr Monro afterwards got his own chair of anatomy made also a chair of surgery, which it had not before been." In this transaction, as in many similar matters, the Surgeons appear to have been far in advance of their times. "About the year 1766," remarks the writer of the text of "Kay's Portraits"—in which James Rae is represented in conversation with Dr William Laing and Dr James Hay, afterwards Sir James Hay of Smithfield—"Mr Rae began delivering a course of general lectures on surgery, and after having continued these for some time, in 1769 he was requested by the students to deliver practical lectures on the surgical cases in the Royal Infirmary, which request being highly approved of, both by the Incorporation of Surgeons and by the managers of the Royal Infirmary, he conducted two separate courses of lectures for a period of several years. He had thus the merit of becoming the founder of that branch of surgical teaching—clinical lectures—which has been found so useful in giving a practical knowledge of the science, and for which an academical Chair has been provided in the University of Edinburgh, and in many other schools of medicine."

James Rae married Isobel, daughter of Ludovic Cant of Thurston, a lineal descendant, through the Cants of Giles' Grange, of Henry Cant, who represented Edinburgh in the old Scottish Parliament from 1473 to 1493. The name of this family is still preserved in Cant's Close, near the foot of the High Street, on the south side. James Rae died in 1791, and his wife in 1792, and both were laid in the tomb of his forefathers in Greyfriars' Churchyard.

Their elder son William joined the Incorporation of Surgeons in 1777, and settled in London, where he married Isabella Dallas, sister of the Lord Chief-Justice. He died early in life, leaving a daughter, who married in France.

John Rae, the younger son, like his father and brother, was a member of the medical profession. The Incorporation of Surgeons was in 1778 erected as the "Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh," and John Rae was, in 1781, the first to be admitted under the new Charter as a Fellow of the College, the chair of which he filled as President in 1804-5. He devoted himself entirely to dentistry, and from his skill in that branch of the healing art the phrase "*suaviter in modo et fortiter in re*" was applied to him by a celebrated luminary of the legal world. More distinguished, however, by his social gifts than by his professional attainments, he was in great request at the "high jinks" and other frolics then in vogue. He was a member of the "Cape Club," which met every night, and was in his days at the height of its fame. His diploma, which is in the hands of his descendants, runs as follows:—

"Be it known to all mortals, whether clerical or laical, That We, Sir James Mill, Knight of the Tramp, the Super-Eminent Sovereign of the Most Capital Knighthood of the Cape, having nothing more sincerely at heart than the Glory and Honour of this Most Noble Order, and the Happiness and Prosperity of the Knights Companions, and being desirous of extending the Benign and Social Influence of the Order to every Region under the Grand Cape of Heaven: Being likewise well informed and fully satisfied with the Abilities and Quali-

fications of John Rae, Esqre., Surgeon in Edinburgh, with the Advice and Concurrence of Our Council, We do Create, Admit, and Receive Him Knight Companion of this Most Social Order, by the Name, Style, and Title of Sir John Rae, Knight of the Sergeant and of C.F.D. ; Hereby giving and granting unto Him all the Powers, Privileges, and Pre-eminences that do or may belong to this Most Social Order : And We give Command to Our Recorder to Registrare this our Patent in the Records of the Order. In Testimony of the Premises, We have Subscribed this with our own proper Fist, and have caused append hereto the Great Seal of the Order, at Cape Hall, this twenty-sixth Day of the Month called December, in the Year of Grace MDCCLXXXIX.
 “ Entered into the Records of the Order
 by Surprise D. Recorder.” (L.S.) Cellar Sovereign L.T.

Among the “Knights Companions” of this “Most Social Order,” were enrolled representative men of almost every class of Edinburgh society, which was by no means so exclusive then as in later times, and the Club is referred to in many of the writings of the period. Kay has handed down a couple of sketches representing an amusing episode arising out of one of the convivial gatherings in which John Rae figured. During a carouse one evening at the “Star and Garter Tavern,” in Writer’s Court, a walking match from the tavern to Musselburgh was arranged for the following morning between Hamilton Bell, W.S., and Edward Innes, a well-known baker. The match was in some sort a handicap, inasmuch as Mr Bell had to carry on his back the vintner’s boy belonging to the Star and Garter—a youth named Charles Oman, who afterwards was custodian of Archers’ Hall. John Rae acted as bottle-holder to Bell, and James Cooper, a jeweller of note in the city, attended Innes, who suffered a severe defeat at the hands of his legal antagonist. John Rae was one of the moving spirits in the Royal Edinburgh Volunteers from their formation. He held several commissions in the corps, and was held by competent judges to emulate Justice Shallow’s paragon of a soldier.

He married Ann, daughter of John Fraser, W.S., and his wife, Jean Brown. Mrs Fraser was a granddaughter of John Brown,

minister of Abercorn, whose wife, Elizabeth Williamson, was a daughter of David Williamson, the famous minister of the West Kirk, well known in Scottish song as "Dainty Davie," and Jean Kerr of Cherrytrees, the third of his seven wives. John Rae died in 1808, and his widow in 1819, both being laid in the family tomb which has been restored by their descendants.

James Rae had three daughters. Elizabeth, the eldest, married William Keir, M.D., of Wester Rynd, Perthshire. They had several children, among whom was James Keir, M.D. Mrs Keir was a woman of no mean attainments, and it was she who wrote the following lines on Sir Walter Scott, whom she was accustomed to meet as a boy at the house of her sister, Mrs Keith :—

" Go on, dear youth, the glorious path pursue
Which bounteous Nature kindly smooths for you ;
Go bid the seeds her hands have sown arise,
By timely culture, to their native skies ;
Go, and employ the poet's heavenly art,
Not merely to delight, but mend the heart."

Mrs Keir was engaged in many a philanthropic and charitable scheme, and founded in 1805 the Institution for the Relief of Incurables at their own Homes. She died in 1834, and was buried, as was also one of her sons, in this grave.

James Rae's second daughter, Marianne, was married to William Keith, the younger son of Keith of Ravelstone and Dunnottar. Their children were—Sir Alexander Keith, Knight Marischal, whose daughter and heiress, Helen Margaret Oliphant, married Sir William Murray, seventh Baronet of Ochtertyre ; William Keith, accountant, who married Isabella Craufurd of Braehead ; James Keith, M.D., who became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1810 ; Isabella Keith, who married James Wilson of Woodville, brother of " Christopher North ;" and Agnes Keith, who died unmarried. Mrs Keith was on terms of warm friendship with Sir Walter Scott, and acted as godmother to his eldest

daughter, Sophia Charlotte. Mrs Keith and most of her children were laid in the tomb of the Keith family in Greyfriars' Churchyard, but there are no monuments to their memory except in the case of James Keith and his children.

Isabella, the youngest daughter of James Rae, married James Fleming of Kirkcaldy, and had four children—William, Isabella, Marjorie, and Elizabeth. William Fleming was a naval officer. His sister, Isabella, married Mr Bremner, and their only son holds a high official position in Fife. Marjorie Fleming is the "Pet Marjorie," whose story was told some years ago by Dr John Brown in such fashion as no story of child life was ever written before or since. Elizabeth, "the unforgetting sister of this dear child, who has much of the sensibility and fun of her who has been in her small grave these fifty and more years," to whom Dr John Brown dedicated his story of "Maidie's" life, lived in the kingdom of Fife most of her days, but removed to Edinburgh a few years before her death. One of the last specimens of the old Scottish lady, as portrayed by the sympathetic pen of Dean Ramsay, she was the centre of a small circle of friends, whom she charmed by her kindly manners and witty sayings. The burial place of the Flemings is in Abbots-hall Churchyard, where Marjorie lies beside her parents; but Elizabeth Fleming, who was gathered to her fathers in 1881, was laid in the old tomb of her mother's ancestors in Greyfriars' Churchyard.







