

William Learmonth

Headmaster 1894 - 1923

Early Life

William Learmonth was born at 13 Richmond Place, Edinburgh on 9th April 1860. His parents were Thomas Learmonth, shoemaker, and Elizabeth Baillie, both from Orkney. Thomas was born in Walls in 1832, Elizabeth (Betsy) was born in Stromness in 1834.

Thomas and Betsy married in Edinburgh on 3rd June 1859. They were in Orkney in the 1841 and 1851 censuses, so must have moved to Edinburgh in the 1850s.

In 1861 William and his parents lived at 13 Richmond Place, Edinburgh. William was their only child. Also living with them were Robert Learmonth, a lamplighter. He was a lodger, born in Walls so was maybe Thomas' brother. Jessie Baillie, born 1834 Stromness, was a visitor and was maybe Betsy's sister.

In the 1871 census the family had moved back to Orkney at Stromness. The move seems to have been permanent. William now had 3 siblings, Jane born 1864, Isabella born 1866 and James born 1868, all born in Stromness.

William's father Thomas died in 1872, aged 39 at Lyness, Orkney. His mother continued to live in Orkney, and died at Stromness in 1906 aged 72.

In 1881 William was a lodger at 7 Moncrieff Terrace, Edinburgh and was a 21-year old student. In 1891 he was lodging at 13 Neilson Place, Stirling and was a 'Teacher of English'.

William Learmonth married Kathleen Craig on 28th June 1893 at Crossgar, County Colrairie in Ireland. *(detail from son James' birth certificate).* Kathleen had been born in Ireland c.1863.

Moving to Gatehouse



William and Kathleen Learmonth moved to Gatehouse shortly after their marriage when William took up the post of headmaster at the Girthon Parish School. *(Some sources suggest he may have come to Gatehouse in 1892 prior to his marriage.)*

As there was no schoolhouse attached to Girthon School, the Learmonth's lived at Fleet View, Anwoth (*now 31 Fleet Street*).

James Rögnvald Learmonth was born there on 23rd March 1895.

James' unusual middle name reflects his parents' Orcadian heritage. It is a Norse/Norwegian name meaning Earl of Orkney.

The Learmonth's second child Catherwood Craig was born at Fleet View on 26th October 1896.

In 1901 William, Kathleen and their 2 sons James R. and Catherwood C. lived at Hill Cottage (*now known as Lochlyoch*), a rented property on 'The Cut', the road leading into Gatehouse from the east. William is listed as a Public Schoolmaster. Both James and Catherwood are erroneously entered as being born in Girthon.

About 1910 the Anwoth & Girthon School Board purchased Laurelbank (*77 High Street*) as the schoolmaster's house. The Learmonth's lived here in the 1911 census. Mrs Learmonth is now called Catherine !



Laurelbank



Girthon Parish School

During the First World war both his sons joined the Forces. James left his medical training to join the K.O.S.B. and used his expertise in combating gas warfare while Catherwood joined the R.A.M.C. and later the Royal Fusiliers.



Mr Learmonth with class in 1914

There are more photographs of Girthon & Fleetside School classes in the section Old Photos - Schools.

George Salmond, then headmaster of the Anwoth Parish School at Fleetside, moved to Creetown in 1918. William Learmonth became headmaster of the combined Anwoth and Girthon Schools. During his tenure, the junior sections were taught at Fleetside, while the seniors (up to age 14) were taught in the old Girthon School building, nearly a mile away, at the other end of the town. This sometimes involved movement of pupils between schools.

Arthur Hunter used to recall that when his class was sent from Fleetside up to Girthon, they would kick a ball around on the way up the street and then have a 'proper game' in Birtwhistle Street. One boy would be placed at the corner to warn the group when Mr Learmonth came out the school building on Castramont Road looking for his class. The boys would hide the ball and run round the corner to the school.

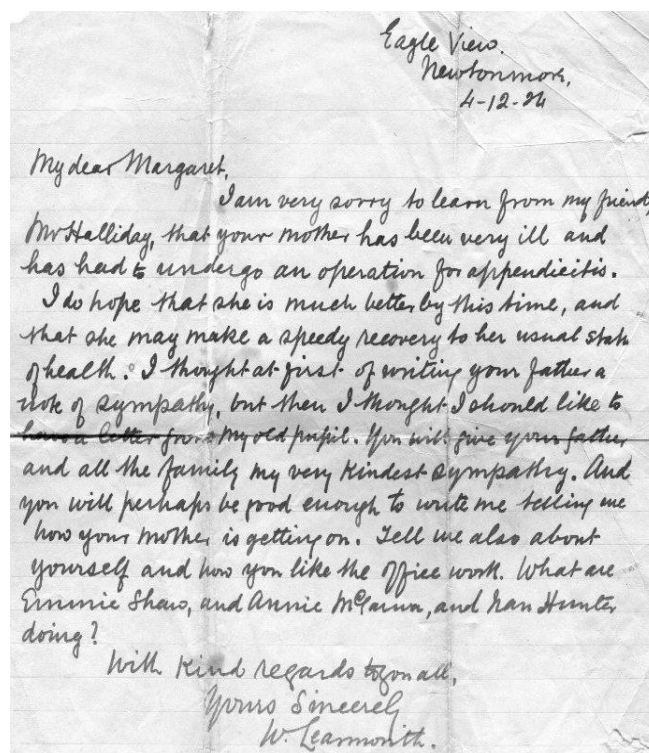
Mr Learmonth is remembered in Gatehouse with both fear and admiration. He stood no nonsense in his school and many received a lashing from his belt (the tawse) for bad behaviour, laziness and other misdemeanours.

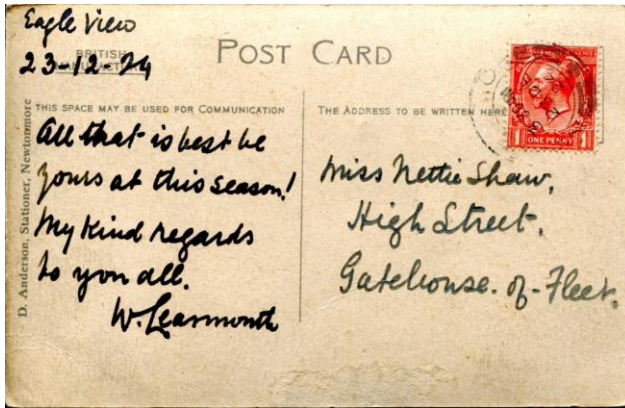
Learmonth is also remembered for giving a very good grounding in education for those of a higher ability, and several of his former pupils were very successful in later life. His own sons did well. James became a Professor of Surgery and surgeon to the King while Catherwood became Secretary Law Agent to the Merchants of the City of Edinburgh. Sir John McMichael, cardiologist, was another of his pupils.

He also had a softer side and sent Christmas cards and letters to former pupils after his retirement.

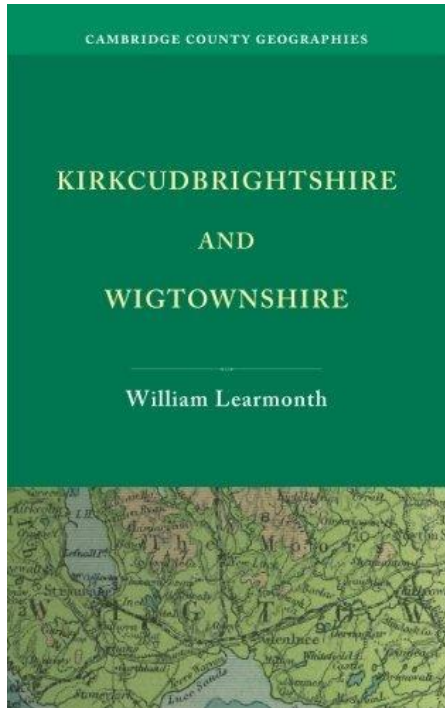


Mr Learmonth with some of his 'girls'. Possibly Margaret Adams, unknown, Maggie Davidson, Annie McConchie, & Margaret (Peggy) Shaw & a letter written to Peggy Shaw.





Nettie Shaw c. 1920



He was a book reviewer, and in 1920 he wrote about the Geography of 'Kirkcudbrightshire & Wigtownshire'.

He was a keen public speaker and President of the Stewartry Educational Institute for Scotland.

He retired from his post as headmaster in 1923 and received a glowing testimonial and gifts from the people of Gatehouse. He never forgot his friends and old pupils in Gatehouse and provided money for a prize

to be given annually at the school.

He and his wife first retired to Glasgow, but also lived in Ayr and Newtonmore. He moved to Aberdeen in 1937 where he died in March 1938.

The obituary alongside appeared in the Galloway News on 26th March 1938.



**THE LATE.
Mr WILLIAM LEARMONTH.**

Former Headmaster of Gatehouse.

We regret to record the death in Aberdeen on Tuesday of Mr William Learmonth, a revered personality in Gatehouse where he was headmaster for the long period of 31½ years, retiring in 1923. Mr Learmonth had a notable record of scholastic service and during his sojourn in Gatehouse maintained a standard of efficiency which was widely recognised, the measure of success he achieved being frequently eulogised by the authorities. On the occasion of his leaving the burgh to take up residence in Glasgow he was made the recipient of a handsome testimonial from the pupils and those who had passed through the school. In handing over the gift, the late Rev. R. B. M'Glashan paid a striking tribute to his services, remarking that about one thousand pupils had passed through his hands, all of whom would have life-long appreciation of what had been done for them by Mr Learmonth.

His literary gifts were of a high order and he had a wide connection as a reviewer of books, while many notable articles came from his pen, some of which appeared in our columns. He was an authority on the history, antiquities and topography of the Province and he was the author of "The Geography of Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire" published by the Cambridge University Press, a work which was highly valued. He was president of the Stewartry Branch of the Educational Institute for a term and lectured in many Galloway towns. He had a great love for Galloway and few were so familiar with its byways, and picturesque places. Since leaving Gatehouse he has always maintained a close contact with the district and its people and his continued interest in the school has been reflected in many ways especially in the gift of a dux medal, competed for annually. For a time after his retirement he gave appreciated service in the Highlands and Islands Mission, and then took up residence in Ayr. About a year ago he went to Aberdeen.

He is survived by Mrs Learmonth and two sons, one being Regius Professor of Surgery in the University of Aberdeen and Surgeon to the King in Scotland and the other Secretary Law Agent and Chamberlain of the Company of Merchants of the City of Edinburgh.