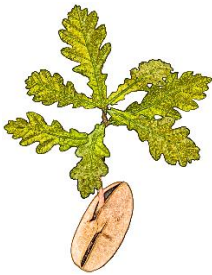


# The Sprouting Oak

The Newsletter of the Clan Watson Society  
[clanwatson.org](http://clanwatson.org)



No. 4 – Mar 2025

**W**elcome to the fourth edition of the newsletter of the Clan Watson Society!

The last year has been another year of growth as we burst through the 500-member mark and are now narrowing in on 600 members of our community.

Along with our ever-increasing numbers we are also slowly adding to the number of events that we run each year. We are adding more and more festivals in the USA to our calendar thanks to our wonderful volunteers, and we also did the ground work on investigating what a potential future Watson gathering in Scotland could look like. Take a look at our Out and About article to see our volunteers at events, and have a read of the article about our trip to Edinburgh to read about some of the places that will be on the itinerary for a future gathering.



## Contents

Clan Watson – Out and About! .....	3
Meet the Clan .....	6
Research Update.....	8
The Search for a Chief – What’s Next? .....	10
Watson Places: USA Edition .....	13
The Watsons of Cranston .....	19
An Introduction to DNA Testing for Genealogy.....	25
2024 Edinburgh Trip.....	32
Get Involved! .....	38

Every issue, we like to introduce a member of our diverse community. In this issue, we say hello to Joanna Watson, with whom many of you are already familiar. Jo is a remarkable individual, combining a busy career as a dress historian with running a charity (and proofreading some of my articles)!

Our research continued into a second year and was helped massively by the professional researcher that we have brought onboard thanks to the generous donations of our Clan Watson Supporters. While our first year was all about expanding the family tree of our last Chief as far and as wide as possible, our second year was very much about digging into each possible line of descent in detail to look for hints at living heirs. Read our Research Update article for full details, and to find out how you can get involved.

The ultimate aim of our research is to find living heirs to the Watson chiefly line, but we are also working on a Plan B should we continue to draw a blank. Our article on What’s Next in the search for a chief will give you an overview of our potential next steps.

The vast majority of our members are in the United States, so this issue our Watson Places article looks at a number of towns called Watson in the USA. There are some fascinating histories to be found, with many of these towns springing up as the railroads expanded throughout North America, creating new business opportunities as they did so. I very much enjoyed researching this article, and I hope it acts as inspiration for a few of you to investigate places near you that are of importance to Watson history!

Our series of deep dives into Watson clusters continues with a look at the Watsons of Cranston, who were reportedly the ancestors of the Watsons of Saughton, the line that became the Chiefs of the Watson name.

I know that many of you are interested in the use of DNA testing to help you find connections to your relatives and your ancestors and, in this issue, we present an article covering all the basics, written with the assistance of two of our experts in DNA and genealogy.

Finally, if this issue has whetted your appetite and you'd like to get more involved, I've finished off with a few words on some ways in which you can potentially contribute to our society. As we continue to grow, we will need more volunteers, both to increase our event footprint and to help with the running of the society. The more that we can grow our community in various regions across the globe, the more it will help us with some of our key objectives, including the potential appointment of a new Chief or Commander of our name.

I do hope that you enjoy this issue. As usual, I extend my thanks to each and every one of you for sticking with me as we continue to build our community

As always, I welcome your feedback on this newsletter and any contributions that you may have for the next one. Of course, there's no need to wait for the next issue to get involved – head on over to the [Facebook group](#), sign up, say hello and join the discussion! Don't forget to check out our other social channels – links are below!

Long may we flourish!



Shane Watson  
President  
The Clan Watson Society





## ***Clan Watson – Out and About!***

2024 was the second year that we were active on the US eventing scene, and I am very encouraged at the direction of our growth in the region.

We attended 9 events in 2023 and 10 events in 2024. Excitingly, we welcomed newcomers to our group of conveners and have even more wanting to represent us this year! 2024 was also the first year in which we've seen groups of Watsons meeting up at events, and in full Watson regalia at that, so the momentum is definitely in the right direction! Huge thanks to Michael & Sarah Watson, Barry Watson & Linn Beels, Todd & Linda Watson, Katrina Watson-Rumley & Tonya Watson Pence and James E Nedrow for manning stands, competing in games, attending events and engaging with people everywhere they went! Our increased visibility is clearly having an impact, as I'm now regularly being contacted by event organisers inviting us to attend their events!

More volunteers convening stands at more events is a great way for us to raise awareness of who we are and what we are trying to achieve together. It is also an excellent opportunity for members of our community to arrange to meet up, which is why I was pleased to see a few of you meeting up at events this year. It is also why I floated the idea of regional chapters earlier in the year; ideally, as more of you meet up at events and (hopefully!) hit it off, it will sow the seeds of some regional chapters in which members in the same area will start to meet on a more regular basis!



*Mark Watson Meeting Katrina and Tonya at the Watson Stand at the Pleasanton Scottish Highland Gathering and Games*

All of this requires volunteers, not just to set up and man our stands, but also to help with distribution of materials and general coordination as the number of events that we attend grows. With this in mind, I added the Volunteers page to the website this year to outline some of the ways in which people can get involved. If you are interested in playing a role in growing our footprint anywhere in the world, we will find a role for you and will give you all the support that you need, so please head over and take a look! We are already planning our events calendar for 2025, including a collaboration with the Clan Buchanan conveners in Pleasanton, so now is a great time to register your interest in volunteering!

If you're not ready or able to volunteer but are interested in meeting up with fellow Watsons, drop us a line and we can look at the best way to put you in touch, whether it's at a major festival or a dedicated event. Our aim for 2025 is to start forging more connections between members of our community to support our ambition to get some regional chapters up and running. If you head to the article on the next steps in our search for a Chief, you'll see why this is so high on our agenda!

Keep an eye on our [Clan Watson Near You](#) pages to find out which events we will be attending this year – and do come along to say hello! A complete listing of all events in the USA is now available on our [member map](#) – if you see an event near you at which we are not currently represented and you are interested in attending, please [let us know](#)!





*Anthony Watson*  
*Pittsburgh Tartan Day*



*Sara Catherine*  
*Virginia Scottish Games*



*Tonya Watson Pence and Katrina Watson-Rumley*  
*Pleasanton Scottish Highland Gathering and Games*



*Michael Watson*  
*(Beast Mode)*



*Katrina with The Buchanan in Pleasanton*





*James Watson and Family  
Salado Celtic Festival*



*Two of Our Michael Watsons!*



*Travis Watson and Family with Barry Watson  
Salado Celtic Festival*



*Matthew Heady  
Scotland County Highland Games*



*Matt Watson and Family with Barry Watson  
Salado Celtic Festival*





# Meet the Clan

## Joanna Watson

*As we continue our series of articles about members of our diverse community we meet Joanna Watson, dress historian and founder of a new charity.*

Originally from south of the Scottish border, Jo has been living in Doune, Perthshire for many years with her husband Doug and their two children. In 2015, she caught the Outlander bug, but instead of getting sucked into the fantasy she decided that she wanted to learn more about the true history behind the inspiration for the series, so she read a Master's degree in Highland and Islands Culture at the University of the Highlands and Islands. After further studies and a couple of international conferences, she became a postgraduate member of the Royal Historical Society and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Jo specialises in recreating historical Scottish clothing using materials and techniques that are as close as possible to those used at the time the clothing was originally made. One of her most notable projects was the recreation of the maid's costume that Bonnie Prince Charlie wore as a disguise when he fled Scotland following the defeat of his forces at the Battle of Culloden. The project was [covered by the press](#), and Jo was even invited to the 2024 Grandfather Mountain Highland Games to give a demonstration and talk on the costume.



*Jo Modelling Bonnie Prince Charlie's Maid's Outfit  
on the Isle of Benbecula*



*Children Learning the Art of Cross Stitching  
at One of Làmhàn's Workshops*

Jo has always believed very strongly in giving back to her local community. Recently, and after many years of running community craft projects aimed at encouraging people to try crafting from textiles, she took a big leap and founded a new charity do just that! Làmhàn's (pronounced lah-vun) stated mission is to teach, promote and sustain traditional sewing and textile crafts, with a focus on heritage skills that are in danger of being lost. The charity runs hands-on workshops, apprenticeships and public education aimed at people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.



The crafting bug runs in the family, and Jo's daughter Zoe is the youngest apprentice kiltmaker in Scotland!



*Jo's Daughter Zoe Watson Working on a Watson Kilt for Her (Very Lucky!) Brother*

Check out the following links to learn more Jo and Làmhàn and to follow them on social media:

- Jo's website: <https://www.ioannafwatson.co.uk/>
- Làmhàn's website: <https://www.lamhan.org.uk/>
- Làmhàn's [Facebook page](#) and [Instagram feed](#)

Our aim for the *Meet the Clan* page is to feature a different member of our community in each issue, so if you'd like to appear in a future edition please [contact us](#)!





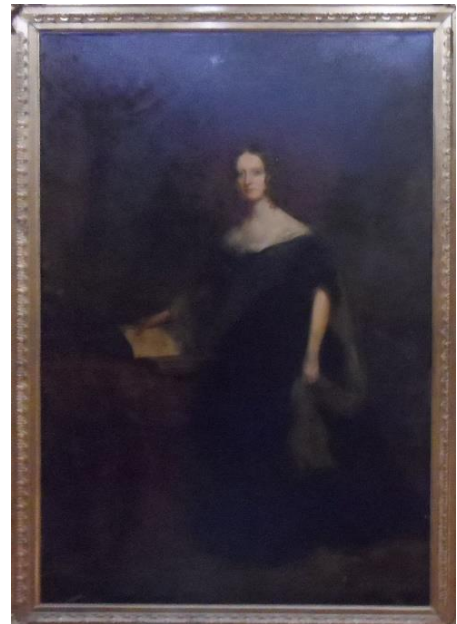
## **Research Update**

By the end of 2022, after 20+ years of research, we realised that we'd got as far as we could go in looking for a hereditary heir to the Watson Chiefship without professional assistance. In February 2023, we put out a call for funding and The Clan Watson Supporters group was born. Through their generous donations, we were able to build a good-sized fund and to hire a professional genealogist to help us.

As we covered in the last issue of *The Sprouting Oak*, we made huge progress in 2023, tracing various lines of descent from the last Chief, James Watson, 10<sup>th</sup> of Saughton, and his father, Charles Watson. We confirmed that the present-day Earl of Morton is the most senior of James's living descendants through Helen Watson, the only one of James's children to have children of their own, and we'd also started to explore possible lines of descent from two of Charles Watson's siblings.

David Watson, 5th of Saughton, who died in 1685, was the first of the Watsons of Saughton to register his arms with the Lord Lyon. There was no mention of David being Chief of the Name in the matriculation of his arms, so we can safely assume that he was not recognised as a Chief at the time. As a result, we do not feel a need to look for lines of descent from any of David's siblings or ancestors, which helps us to limit the scope of our search.

Over the past year, we've been working back from Charles towards David and expanding the family tree of the Watsons of Saughton as we look for other possible lines of descent to the present day. We have also started discussions with an advisor to the Lord Lyon who has advised that the Earl of Morton is too many generations removed from the last of his ancestors who carried the Watson name to be considered as an eligible candidate for the Watson Chiefship; this is useful feedback as, although the Earl of



*Picture of Helen Watson from the Private Collection of the Earl of Morton*



*Reviewing Progress with Our Researcher Pauline McQuade*

Morton has advised that he is not interested in petitioning for the Watson Chiefship, it tells us that none of his living relatives will be eligible either. We can also assume that the descendants of any of Helen's female ancestors who married and took their husband's name will also be too far removed from their last Watson ancestor, further helping us to put a limit on our scope.

Although we have continued to explore all lines of descent from the Watsons of Saughton, our primary focus has been on tracing male lines. A remarkably high percentage of these lines became extinct almost immediately, which paints a fairly tragic story in terms of life expectancy and child mortality but does make our search a lot easier!





We are still working on a couple of male lines, but the chances of us finding a living heir who still carries the Watson surname decrease with every line that we rule out. As such, we have also started discussions with our advisor on the process for nominating a Commander of the Name while we continue our search to cover an outcome in which we demonstrate conclusively that there is no heir to the Chiefship – see the next article for more details.

Our fantastic progress to date would not have been possible without our Clan Watson Supporters, who are listed at the end of this article. Although it feels like we are close to completing this particular piece of the puzzle in our overall quest to find a new Chief, we still need funds to close out our research. If you are interested in joining the ranks of our Supporters, please visit our [donations page](#) to find out more!

Massive thanks to our Clan Watson Supporters, not just for funding our research but for being so actively involved in the surrounding discussions and decision making: Anthony Watson, Barry Watson, David Watson, Gary Rummel, Glendon Watts, Heather Sholter, James Watson, Jennifer Watson, John Neth III, Jon Watson, Justin Watson, Katrina Rumley, Matthew Watson, Michael Watson, Monette Chilson, Peter Warren, Robert Wedding, Scott Watson, Steve Watson, Todd Watson and William J. Watson.



# ***The Search for a Chief***

## ***What's Next?***

As we covered in the previous article, our research to find a hereditary heir to the Watson Chiefship is progressing well, but the more it progresses the lower the chances appear to be of us finding a living Watson descendant of the Chiefly family. To prepare for an outcome in which we demonstrate that there are no living Watson descendants, we have begun to look into the process for appointing a Commander as an intermediate step to appointing a new Chief.

### ***What's the Difference Between a Chief and a Commander?***

A Chief of a clan or family is somebody that is recognised as representing a significant proportion of people who carry the same surname. A Chief is a Chief for their natural lifetime, and the title is a hereditary one that typically passes to their immediate next of kin upon their death. Since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to be recognised as Chief of a clan or family has required an individual to be entitled to bear the undifferenced arms of the name, i.e. the principal arms associated with that surname. This requires an individual petitioning for the title of Chief to satisfy the Lord Lyon that he or she is the superior descendant of the last registered Chief. In the case where a Chief has not been recognised for many generations, this can be a very laborious process indeed (and is one that we are currently going through as we try to find Watson heirs to the last Chief).

A Commander is someone that can be appointed by the Lord Lyon in the case that no hereditary Chief has yet been identified. A Commander does not have the same status as a Chief in that they are not considered to be a head of a clan or family and their position cannot be handed down to a biological heir – or, indeed, anyone. The function of a Commander is two-fold: Firstly, they lead a clan or family while the kin group is seeking to reestablish itself and, secondly, they lead the search for a hereditary heir to the Chiefship by ensuring that no stone is left unturned. The role of Commander is a temporary one; the Lord Lyon generally appoints a Commander with a five-year term, which can be renewed for a further five years if the Lord Lyon is satisfied that the Commander has been performing well in the role. After a Commander has completed two successive five-year terms and, assuming it has been demonstrated to the Lord Lyon's satisfaction that all viable lines of descent from the last Chief have died out, the Lord Lyon will consider allowing a clan or family to petition to have a new Chief appointed who does not descend from the previous one. The Commander's final role here is to encourage suitable candidates for the Chiefship to come forward, ensuring that any candidate put forward to the Lord Lyon has wide support from the family or clan. As you can see, the appointment of a Commander is a prerequisite to appointing a new Chief of the Watson Name if we cannot find an eligible heir.



*A Modern-Day Chief: Charles Kennedy, 8<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Ailsa, 19<sup>th</sup> Earl of Cassillis and Chief of the Name of Kennedy*

Assuming our search for a hereditary Watson Chief continues to draw a blank, we will initiate the process for appointing a Commander so that we can start the ten-year stopwatch as quickly as we can.





### ***What is the Process for Appointing a Commander?***

For the Lord Lyon to appoint a Commander, it is necessary to hold a family convention in which a candidate is put forward and it is demonstrated to the Lord Lyon that the candidate has wide support from the global Watson community. Although this may seem fairly straightforward on face value, there is a long and complex process required to get to this point.

First, it is necessary to find one candidate for Commander that the whole Watson community will rally behind. This requires a selection committee to be set up that comprises of individuals who will be viewed as representing the Watson community in their region. Here we hit our first stumbling block; we simply do not have a meaningful enough proportion of the world's Watsons engaged with our society to be able to make the claim that regional committee members speak for Watsons in their area. Although we may be able to argue that we have sufficient representation in North America, the case may be harder to make for the UK and impossible for other areas with reasonable numbers of Scottish diaspora such as South Africa,



*Dr. Joseph Morrow, Lord Lyon King of Arms*

Australia and New Zealand as we simply don't yet have the member count. Our current priority therefore has to be increasing our member count across the globe and appointing regional directors to help grow our community and to represent Watsons in their area.

Assuming we clear this first hurdle, we will need to form a selection committee. This committee will be comprised of representatives from our most populous regions (in terms of member count). Two important criteria are that the selection committee represents different opinions and isn't just stuffed full of people who obediently back a common candidate, and that it contains an odd number of people (to avoid any tied votes). The committee should ideally have five or seven people on it (too many increases the risk of protracted disagreements!), and I would propose to form a committee comprising of representatives from the USA, Canada, the UK & Ireland, Australia & New Zealand and South Africa, although this will be finalised on a future date depending on the distribution of members at that point.

Once a committee is formed, a call will be put out across all our Watson communities for those interested in standing for Commander. A Commander must have a few key attributes. They must be well-acquainted with the history of the name and with Scottish history, heritage and genealogy in general. They must have the time, energy, ability and resources to attend games and other gatherings to engage the family and to promote the family to the wider public. They must act as a leader and an ambassador as the family seeks to reestablish itself and plans for the future. They must also work closely with the various clan societies and associations worldwide as they build the profile of the family. Although it is no longer a strict necessity, the Lord Lyon does have a preference for Commanders who reside in the UK.

Assuming that candidates for Commander come forward, the job of the selection committee will be to screen all applicants and to put together a shortlist upon which the wider family will be asked to vote.

Ideally, the end result of this process is that the worldwide Watson community rallies behind a single candidate, who can then be put forward to the Lord Lyon via a dedicated family convention. This



convention will have to be held in Scotland (with video conferencing facilities available to enable Watsons from across the globe to tune in) and will have to be held in the presence of an officer of the Lord Lyon. This officer will need to be satisfied that any proposed candidate is in good standing, is suitable for the role, and is unanimously backed by the Watson community.

The complexities of navigating this process are such that it will be necessary to employ the services of an intermediary who is well-versed in working with the Court of the Lord Lyon. This is especially true when it comes to writing a petition to the Lord Lyon to grant the holding of a family convention, but it is also a necessity when conducting all the activities that lead up to that convention. We have already started consulting with just such an expert and will formally engage him when the time is right.

### ***Summary***

The above outlines, hopefully pretty clearly, what is required to appoint a Commander in the increasingly likely event that we cannot find a hereditary heir to the Watson Chiefship. Our key stumbling block right now is that we simply do not have the required member base in many regions to satisfy the Lord Lyon that any candidate for Commander can be considered to speak for a significant number of the world's Watson.

On a positive note, our society continues to grow. We would like to be in a position to petition for a Commander within the next 2 – 5 years and will continue to consult with our expert to ensure that we can launch the process as soon as the time is right. In the meantime, if you are interested in helping to drum up membership numbers in your region, and to potentially be considered as a regional director, please [let us know](#)!

### ***Useful Reading***

The Court of the Lord Lyon updated the guidance on nominating Chiefs and Commanders in 2021 to make the process much more accessible. The updated guidance note can be found [here](#).



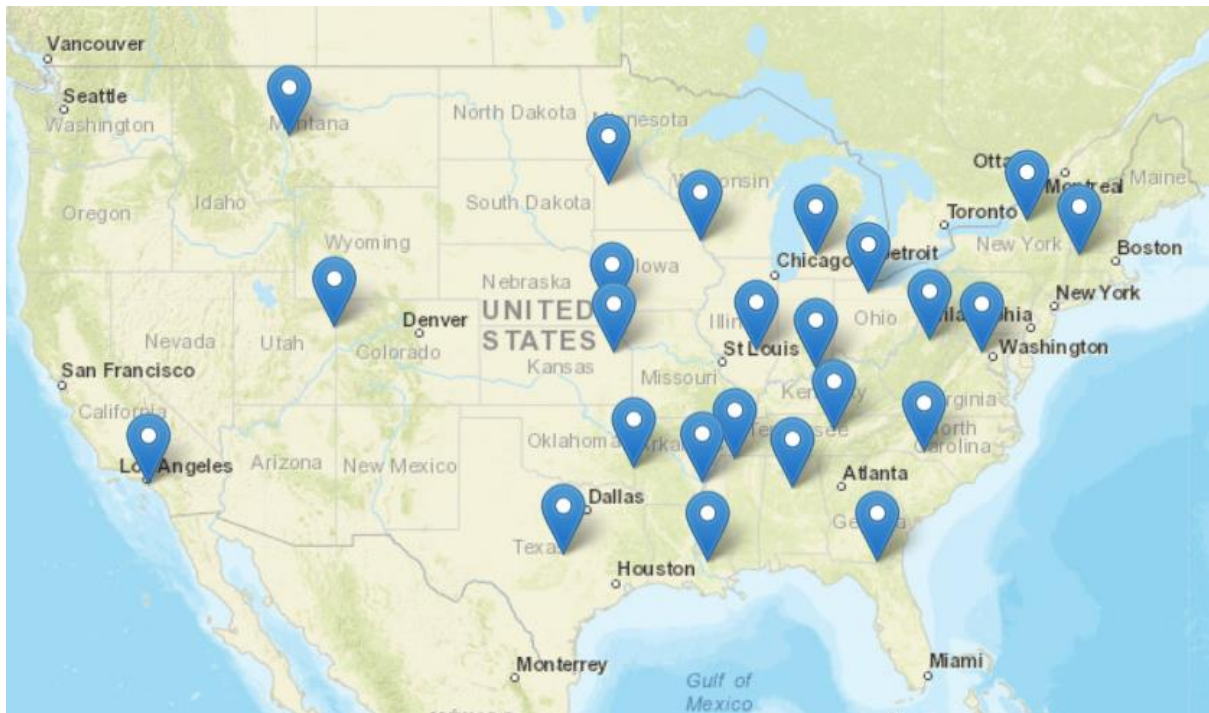


## ***Watson Places: USA Edition***

For this edition of Watson Places, we decided to step outside of the British Isles. As the majority of our members are from the USA, we thought we'd take a look there – and we were pleasantly surprised to find that there are 24 towns called Watson! Here we will look at those for which we were able to find some details; if you live near, or know the history of, any of these towns, do reach out and let us know!

### ***Watson, US***

All of the US towns called Watson are shown on the map below, although on closer inspection it is



*US Towns Called Watson (Source: [geotarget.com](http://geotarget.com))*

hard to find evidence of settlements at all of them, so some may reflect historic settlements that no longer exist. As you can see, they are heavily weighted towards the eastern half of the country, with the highest density around the Appalachian area in which the majority of early Scottish immigrants settled.

The full list is as follows:

Watson, Alabama	Watson, Iowa	Watson, Mississippi	Watson, Oklahoma
Watson, Arkansas	Watson, Kansas	Watson, Missouri	Watson, Tennessee
Watson, California	Watson, Louisiana	Watson, Montana	Watson, Texas
Watson, Florida	Watson, Massachusetts	Watson, New York	Watson, Utah
Watson, Illinois	Watson, Michigan	Watson, North Carolina	Watson, Virginia
Watson, Indiana	Watson, Minnesota	Watson, Ohio	Watson, West Virginia

In the sections that follow, we will take a brief look at some of these towns.



### ***Watson, Jefferson County, Alabama***

Watson, Alabama is first mentioned in 1903 when a post office was opened, run by a postman called Mr. Watson, after whom the town was named, although it also goes by the name of Mineral Springs (not to be confused with today's Mineral Springs, which is some 55 miles to the south). Coal mining in the area was financed by Daniel Pratt and most mining activity was run by his company, The Pratt Coal and Coke Mining Company. By the late 1800s, many families were living in houses built by and rented from the company, and community buildings were provided that functioned as both church and school. By 1920, the local school had four faculty members and 189 students. In the early 1970s, the surrounding communities began to grow and, in 1972, the Mineral Springs School in Watson was closed down and the pupils routed to new, larger schools. The school sat empty for a couple of years and burnt down in 1974. Today, a house stands on the land on which the school once stood and the coal mining industry has long gone.



*Mineral Springs School in Watson, Alabama in 1955*

Further information on the school and the local community can be found here:  
<https://www.mineralschool.org/>

### ***Watson, Desha County, Arkansas***

The Little Rock, Pine Bluff and New Orleans Railroad was established in 1868 to cross diagonally through Desha County, which itself was founded in 1838. Watson, Arkansas was founded in the early 1870s when a Mr. L. W. Watson donated five acres of his land to Desha County. Watson was initially called Watson Station and the Texas, Mississippi River and Northwestern Railroad company operated through there until about 1878.

Mr. Watson erected a building in Watson that soon became the county courthouse of Desha County,



*An Old Industrial Building in Watson, Arkansas*

and in 1874 the county seat relocated there, remaining in the town until 1880 when it moved to Arkansas City, which had grown into a major port on the Mississippi. Development of the town ceased temporarily until the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad completed a rail line over the Arkansas River to Watson from Helena in

Phillips County to tap into the prosperous timber market. Numerous sawmills operated, and business thrived in Watson until a major flood in 1927, from which it took the town many years to recover.





In the 1930s and 1940s, many families moved to the area to become day labourers on the surviving farms, and the numerous new residents bought land that their descendants still farm to this day. Watson had a population of 185 people in the 2020 census.

Further information on the town, including its development with the railways and some text about the town jail, can be found here: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/watson-desha-county-6184/> and here: <https://www.arkansasheritage.com/arkansas-register/watson-jail>.

### ***Watson, Effingham County, Illinois***

The Illinois Central Railroad was established in 1856, and the town of Watson was platted<sup>1</sup> in October 1857 by the deputy county surveyor on land owned by John L. Bernard. The town was initially called Salt Creek, with a post office established in 1856, but in 1868 the name was changed to Watson after a local railway official at the request of the town's residents. Watson's location on the railroad allowed it to thrive as a hub for agriculture and trade, connecting local farmers to larger markets. To this day, it is a major producer of corn, soybeans and pigs, and has a strong supporting industrial base that includes agricultural equipment manufacturers and suppliers. It's proximity to major interstate highways also makes it a hub for logistics and distribution. The town had a population of 668 in 2020.

### ***Watson, Clark County, Indiana***

Watson, Indiana, is an unincorporated community in Utica Township in Clark County, Indiana. The community was founded by the Louisville Cement Company who operated large cement plants there. A post office was established at Watson in 1872 that remained in operation until 1928. Watson was laid out as a town in 1876.

An interesting publication on the history of the lime kilns around Utica Township, together with some history on the Watson community, can be found here:

[https://www.in.gov/indot/files/Utica Township Lime Kilns HPP Approved October 15 2012.pdf](https://www.in.gov/indot/files/Utica_Township_Lime_Kilns_HPP_Approved_October_15_2012.pdf)

### ***Watson, Livingston Parish, Louisiana***

The community of Watson is also known as Live Oak by its residents. The school is called Live Oak as is the methodist church, but there appear to be two post offices – one called Live Oak Post Office and one called Watson Post Office. A post office was established in Live Oak in 1869 and is located to the north of the present-day Watson community. A Mr. G. W. Watson moved to the area sometime in the 1870s or 1880s and operated the Live Oak Post Office from 1880 to 1884. He had a small farm and a mercantile business in what is now the centre of Watson, and he went on to establish the Watson Post Office in 1894.. The site of the original Watson Post Office now accommodates the Watson Community Center. Watson, Louisiana had a population 956 in 2020.



You can read more here: <http://files.usgwarchives.net/la/livingston/history/town/watson.txt> and here: <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=108981>

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<sup>1</sup> "Platting" refers to the process of mapping out a new town and dividing it into subplots to demarcate ownership of each plot.



### ***Watson, Marquette County, Michigan***

Isaac Watson Stephenson was a politician and a lumber man who owned a sawmill in Wells, near the North Escanaba community in Delta County, Michigan. He was also the founder of the Escanaba & Lake Superior (E&LS) Railroad, and in 1898 he built a branch from Wells to Watson, continuing the line to Channing to connect with the Milwaukee Railroad in 1900 in order to ship iron ore. The new line was built to ship lumber by rail, a far more efficient method than the previous means of shipping by river in the summer and transporting by sleighs in the winter.

Over time, a thriving community built up. The town operated as a rail stop and a centre for loggers. The town's boarding house accommodated the area's lumberjacks and logging officials, and the



*The Derelict General Store in Watson, Michigan*

warehouse stored supplies from Minneapolis and was used for dances and community events.

The Watson general store, which also housed the post office, opened in 1906 and was located next to the town saloon. The store was the centre of the community, and people would gather around the wood stove to talk.

The iron ore business had disappeared by the late 1930s, and in 1943 the

sawmill in Watson closed. As use of the motor car became more popular, passenger numbers on the railway dwindled and E&LS retired its passenger cars in 1956, although the line continued to carry pulpwood and materials for the manufacturing industry.

As the community ebbed away, the post office was discontinued in 1961, the general store closed down in 1979 and the railroad was taken out of service in 1992. Today, Watson is a ghost town, its decaying buildings laying testament to its industrial past.

Further reading can be found here: <https://archives.nmu.edu/beaumier/ghosttowns/Watson.html> and here: <https://lostinmichigan.net/the-ghost-town-of-watson/>

### ***Watson, Chippewa County, Minnesota***

A railroad survey was completed through the area that would become the town of Watson, Minnesota in the summer of 1878 and the construction of buildings on the right-of-way was started immediately afterwards. One of the first buildings, built in the autumn of that year, was C. V. Lang's grain elevator, which was still standing in 1972 when the picture on the next page was taken, although it appears that it has since been taken down. The town was platted in 1879 and in the spring of that year, the passenger station and freight depot were completed. By the early summer, the first store building was built, a furniture store owned and managed for many years by Lewis Peterson, a Dane who was a carpenter by trade and who built the store himself.



At the time the station was built, it carried no name as no-one had yet decided what the name of the new town should be. The old teacher in the town took this matter quite seriously and decided that he would name the station, so he found a piece of pine board and painted “Tunsberg” on it in tall letters and erected it on a post. The next day, a train was spotted approaching. It was hoped that it might be the railroad superintendent’s train and that he would give a nod of approval when he saw the new name. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a construction train, which stopped briefly before moving on. As one of the wagons passed the new sign, a leg flashed out and kicked the sign, which flew off the post and splintered. Not long after this, the station was named Watson and, although the reason behind the new name has been lost to history, it stuck this time!



*The Original Watson Grain Elevator, Pictured in 1972*

The town of Watson still exists to this day and now sports a more modern grain elevator. In 2020, it had a population of 182 people.

A book about the history of the area and the town is available here: <https://www.cityofwatson.com/history> and you can find some old pictures of Watson here: <https://www.lakesnwoods.com/WatsonGallery.htm>

### ***Watson, Atchison County, Missouri***

Watson, Missouri was platted on 1 February 1869 by Marion McDonald Good, a farmer and dealer in stock and grain. In 1867, he rather astutely bought 134 acres of land on which future railroad grounds and a new town were to be located. He sold the land for the town to a company of which he owned a quarter of the stock, and sold half of the land for the railroad, retaining 93 acres that he had turned into a “beautiful and finely cultivated land” by 1882.

The town of Watson was named after one of the engineers on the Burlington Railroad whose first name appears to have been lost to history. It rapidly became an important shipping point and business centre for the county, and by 1882 it was the only surviving town within the limits of Nishnebotna Township. Its population peaked at 269 in 1940 before slowly ebbing away to 61 people by 2020. The town is still a busy railroad stop, with large warehouses and grain silos signifying that the agricultural industry is still alive and well.



*The Methodist Church in Watson, Missouri*

You can read about the early history of the town in quite some detail here: [https://usgenealogyresearch.atwebpages.com/Missouri/Atchison/bios\\_atchison\\_1882.pdf](https://usgenealogyresearch.atwebpages.com/Missouri/Atchison/bios_atchison_1882.pdf).





### **Watson, Lewis County, New York**

James Talcott Watson was part of a small fishing party who visited the area of what would become the town of Watson in around 1819 or 1820 to try their luck in the local creek. His father, James T. Watson, was a wealthy merchant serving New York State in several important offices. James Watson Senior, who died in 1808, owned over 60,000 acres in Lewis and Herkimer, lands that were inherited by James Talcott Watson upon his death. The younger James made the first attempt to settle the lands that were to become Watson, and the town was formed in 1821 and named after James's father. When it was first formed, it was home to 44 families and the town embraced all of Lewis County east of the Black River.

The sandy soil in Watson is not good for farming, but large amounts potatoes were grown successfully and shipped out by boat to city markets. Several cheese factories had also sprung up by the late 19<sup>th</sup>



*Mosier Dam, Watson, Lewis County*

century. The main industry in Watson, however, was lumbering and sawmilling, and between 1870 and 1960 a number of sawmills were in operation.

The population grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from 909 in 1830 to 1,707 in 1840, but by 1930 it had dropped to 528, and remained low for many years afterwards. It was not until the 1970s that the population once more exceeded 1,000, growing

to 1,986 by 2000. By the latest population estimate in 2010, Watson had 1,849 inhabitants.

As for James Talcott Watson, he was reportedly “a man of fine education and affable manners”. He travelled as far as China in his capacity as a merchant. Unfortunately, the death of a Miss Livingston, to whom he was engaged to be married, hit him hard and he suffered from intermittent mental health issues for the rest of his life. Sadly, he committed suicide with a razor in New York on 29 January 1839. Having no heirs of his own, his sizable estate was divided up between 44 first cousins, with some of these shares further subdivided between numerous families.

More pictures from Watson, Lewis County are available here, together with some notes on the town's history: [https://historicallylewis.org/township\\_history/watson/](https://historicallylewis.org/township_history/watson/)

A downloadable book from 1864 that gives more details on the early history of the town and surrounding area is available here: <https://www.loc.gov/item/01015017/>

### **Summary**

It has been very enjoyable researching the various Watson towns in the United States, but we feel like we have only just scratched the surface. If any of the place listed at the beginning of this article are near you, why not do a little research of your own, or maybe pay a visit and send us some photos!



## The Watsons of Cranston

The Watsons of Cranston are a key family to Watson historians, but one about which we know frustratingly little. When James Watson, 10<sup>th</sup> of Saughton and Chief of the Name in Scotland, petitioned the Lord Lyon to have supporters added to his coat of arms, he employed a well-respected local historian, John Philip Wood, to catalogue his family history and to write the petition. The petition, penned in 1818, makes the case that the Watsons of Saughton were descended from the earlier Watsons of Cransto(u)n Riddell:

*"The Watsons having thus disappeared from Cranstoun Riddell in the fifteenth century, occur again in the county of Edinburgh early in the sixteenth century, at Saughton, or Long-Saughton, in the Parish of Corstorphine, where Richard Watson was a proprietor of land in 1537. He probably derived his descent from, and was male representative of the Watsons of Cranstoun Riddell, but from the very defective state of the Public Records of Scotland for a long period subsequent to 1424, the point cannot at present be clearly ascertained."*

Wood states that the Watsons of Cranston Riddell were the oldest family of Watsons that appeared in the records of Scotland and hence were the most senior Watsons in the country. By arguing that the Watsons of Saughton descended from these earlier Watsons, he successfully made the case to the Lord Lyon to have James Watson officially recognised as Chief of the Watson name nearly four centuries after the Watsons of Cranston Riddell disappeared from the history books.

### Where is Cranston Riddell?

The parish of Cranston is in Midlothian, some 11 miles southeast of the centre of Edinburgh. Charters of the 12th century refer to the parish as Cranestone, derived from the Anglo-Saxon Craenston meaning "crane's district", a reference to the large number of cranes (the wading birds) that used to frequent the area, although it can often be found spelt as Cranstoun (even today, the church in Cranston is called "Cranstoun Church"). The Cranston family lived in Cranston Castle, of which nothing now remains. The crane features on the arms of all families that went by the name of Cranston at the time. In the 12th century, Cranston was divided into two baronies, Upper Cranston and Nether Cranston, which later respectively became known as New Cranston and Cranston Riddel. Cranston Riddel acquired its name from Hugo de Riddel, a knight who was the proprietor of the district. The parish church was built in New Cranston, the larger of the two baronies.

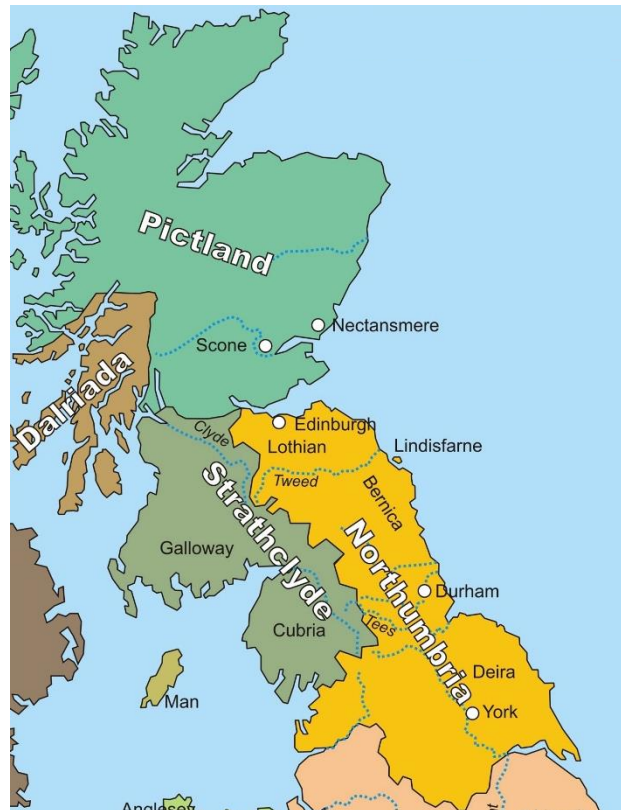


The two baronies can be clearly seen on a map by the 16<sup>th</sup> century Dutch cartographer Johannes Blaeu, on which he called them Nether Kranstoun (Nether Cranston/Cranston Riddel) and Over Kranstoun (Upper Cranston/New Cranston). Note the proximity to Ormestoun, which is spelt as "Ormiston" today.



### ***A (Very Abbreviated) Bit of History***

One important thing to understand about the area of Midlothian is that it wasn't always part of Scotland. After the unification of Dalriada and Pictland, the Scottish kings of old ruled most of the area to the north of the Firth of Forth (I say "most of" as many of the Scottish islands and some of the coastal areas were ruled by the Vikings for several centuries), whereas to the south of the Firth were the two independent territories of Strathclyde to the west and Northumbria to the east. Gaelic was spoken throughout the territory controlled by the Scottish kings and Cumbric, which is of the same language family as Welsh, Cornish and Breton, was spoken in Strathclyde. Northumbria was invaded and then settled by the Vikings, becoming part of a Danish kingdom called the Danelaw that encompassed much of the east of England. The native Anglo-Saxons in the Danelaw spoke Old English and the Viking settlers spoke Old Norse and over time the two languages mixed, evolving into a distinct Northern dialect of Old English. Another thing that these Viking newcomers brought with them was their patronymic naming convention that saw children referred to as the son of their father by adding the suffix "son" to their father's first name, with the resultant compound used as a second name.



*Ancient Northern Kingdoms of the British Mainland*

The Scottish border moved a few times, as did control of Scotland itself, as Scottish and English monarchs squabbled over the crown, but with the 1314 defeat of William II's English army at the Battle of Bannockburn by Robert the Bruce, the border was fixed largely in its current position and the lands south of the Firth of Forth became a permanent part of a soon-to-be-independent Scotland. This had the effect of permanently introducing a new language (the northern dialect of Old English) and a new naming convention (the use of the English suffix "son" to create a surname) to Scotland. It should be noted that the Gaelic language used the prefixes "Mac" (and "Nic" for girls) and "O" to denote descent from a parent or grandparent, but the use of the English suffix "son" was introduced to Midlothian via the Danelaw.

As an aside, once the region south of the Forth became politically isolated from England, the dialect there diverged from the English dialect south of the border and evolved into today's Scots language.

It was not until the Norman conquest of England that surnames began to be used in the British Isles to any degree, a practice that was initially largely confined to the new class of Norman nobles who tended to refer to themselves as "of" their landed estates. The Normans also brought new first names with them and these were rapidly adopted in England, with a small number of names becoming very popular – to the extent that a large number of people in any one area had the same name (popular names were John or William for boys and Joan, Margaret or Matilda for girls). With the inevitable confusion that this caused, it wasn't long before the use of a second name was more widely





implemented to help identify which John, William or Margaret it was that you were talking about. These second names were typically based on either a geographical feature that a person lived near (or a town name if they had moved from a different area), a person's profession, or a physical characteristic such as hair colour or height. We won't cover the subject of names in any more detail here but suffice it to say that by the time the Domesday Book was issued twenty years after the Norman conquest, the use of surnames was becoming quite common, although it wasn't until well into the 13<sup>th</sup> century that surnames became hereditary rather than changing with every generation. Although the use of the "son" suffix did see some, limited use in England, this naming convention really took off in the Danelaw, especially in Northumbria, which explains why, even as late as the 19<sup>th</sup>



*King David I of Scotland*

century, the name Watson was concentrated around the northeast of England and southeast of Scotland.

Following the Norman conquest of England in 1066, the newly installed Norman monarch, William I (aka. William the Conqueror) rewarded his nobles by giving them lands in exchange for their continued loyalty. The Normans came later to Scotland, but come they did, being invited in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by the Scottish King David I, who embraced the model employed in England and granted Norman nobles land in exchange for their loyalty, introducing the feudal system of landholding to Scotland in the process. He brought in great religious reforms and supported the setting up of large abbeys, some of which accumulated significant landholdings of their own. He also encouraged the founding of burghs, including Edinburgh, which were special settlements set up to promote trade. The burghs quickly became associated with English-speaking culture, undermining the position of the Gaelic

language and giving birth to the idea of the Scottish Lowlands.

This may seem like a very lengthy diversion from the topic of the Watsons of Cranston, but it is key to understanding why these first recorded Scottish Watsons appear in the Lothians, how they came by their lands and how the patronymic naming convention spread through the Lowlands.

### ***What of the Watsons?***

According to the book *Scottish Arms: A Collection of Armorial Bearings A.D. 1370-1678 Vol. II*, published in 1881, a William Watson of Cranston was regranted the lands of Cranstonriddel in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Robert II of Scotland, which would have been 1383. It is interesting to see the use of the word "regranted", as this implies a renewal of a previous grant of the same lands to the same person, suggesting that William was already established in the area. Interestingly, the grant states that should William fail to produce male heirs, the lands would fall to Alexander de Moravia and George de Moravia ("de Moravia" was an early form of the surname Murray) when William died, suggesting that William had no sons or other male relatives at the time.

This is the first recorded mention that we have found of somebody by the name of Watson being granted lands in the UK or, for that matter, anywhere in the world. It is quite possible that William was the first Watson in Scottish history to be granted a significant landholding, which adds support to the John Philip Wood's position that the Watsons of Cranston were the principal family of the name in medieval times. Given the brief history of Northumbria presented above, it is no surprise to find the name Watson is first mentioned in this area. In the early 1380s, King Robert II was busy seizing back



lands in southern Scotland that had been reoccupied by England. He rewarded those who supported him by giving them lands in the area, and this could well be why William Watson was granted his land. Such support to the armed campaigns of a monarch would almost certainly be financial and would often include the supply of a large number of fighting men, so if this is why William was granted the lands, he was probably already well off and holding a prominent position in society.

As another slight aside, it is worth noting that this period is within a generation or two of the first major pandemic of the plague, which devastated the population of Europe in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the British Isles, 30 to 40% of the population was killed, and some villages were completely wiped out. The plague was a great leveller and killed rich and poor alike. In the period following the pandemic, many members of the peasant classes took advantage of the reduced number of nobles to build landholdings of their own, a process that saw some former tenant farmers become landowners in their own right. It could well be that the Watsons of Cranston came from this new type of landholder, some of whom came into possession of significant areas of land and became very wealthy.



*People Dying of The Plague - Apparently, Whilst Naked*

Going back to *Scottish Arms: A Collection of Armorial Bearings A.D. 1370-1678 Vol. II*, we are told that early in his reign (about the year 1392), King Robert III, the son of King Robert II, “confirmed to William Mautalent (an early form of “Maitland”), son and heir of Thomas Mautalent of Halsington, and Elizabeth his wife, daughter of William called Watson, the lands of Shillinglaw, Traquair, and Innerleithen, settled on them by Thomas on their marriage”. In 1407, William Watson of Cranston had a Crown charter, having purchased Traquair and Shillinglaw from the Maitlands. William was clearly expanding his landholdings at this point, and he was doing so at the expense of the Maitlands. In 1409, the Maitlands granted annual-rents from the lands of “Griestoun, etc., in Peeblesshire, to Marion de Craigie and William Watson her son”. We assume that because this William Watson is not styled “of Cranston”, he is the son of the above-mentioned – and presumably by this point deceased – William Watson and that Marion was the wife of the earlier William.

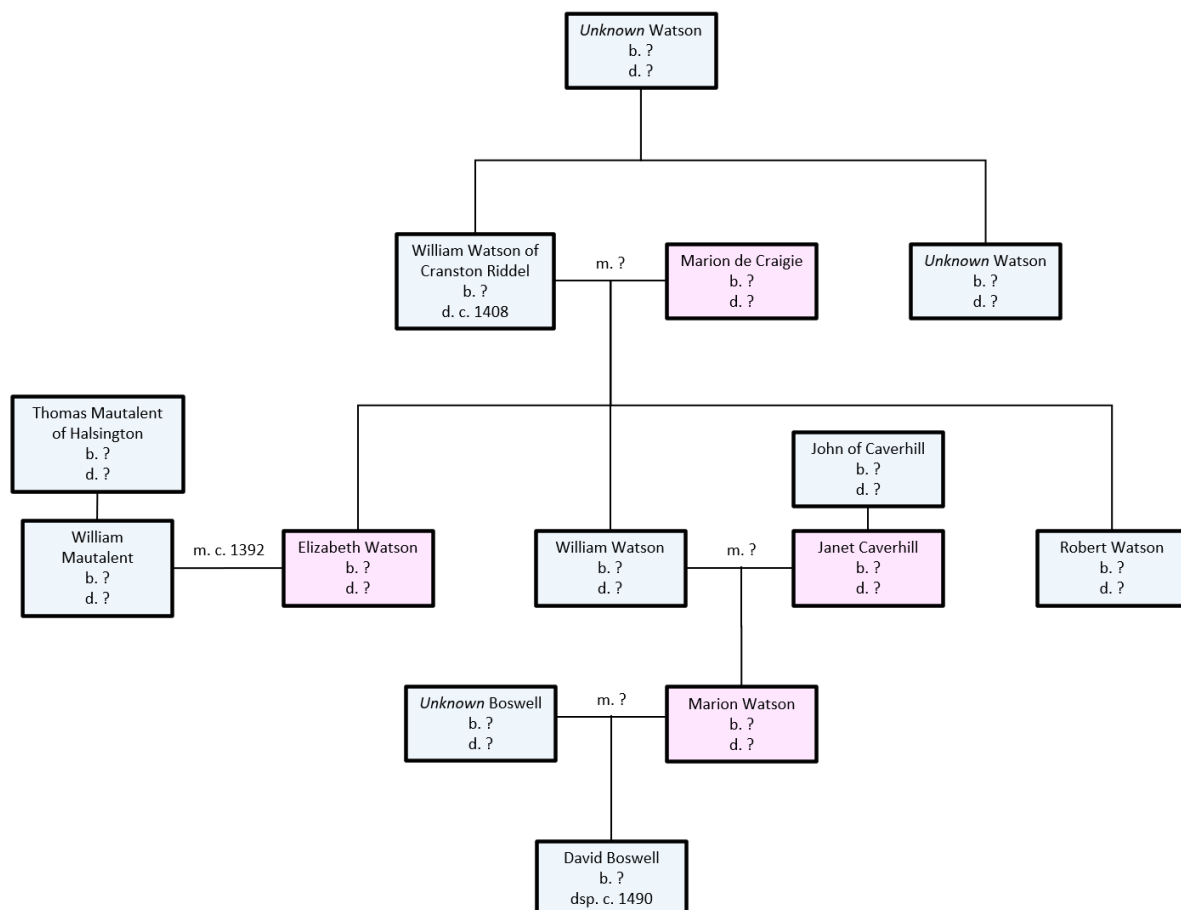
Another Crown charter was granted by Robert Stewart, Duke of Albany and Regent of Scotland, dated 14<sup>th</sup> March 1409/10, of the lands of Traquair and Shillinglaw in Peeblesshire to William Watson, son of William Watson of Cranston, and to his wife Janet, daughter of John of Caverhill. The charter stipulated that the lands were granted to the “longest liver” of William Watson (Junior) and Janet, then to any legitimate male heirs, and failing that to Alexander de Moravia, son of the deceased John de Moravia of Blackbarony, failing that to Alexander’s legitimate male heirs, failing that to Robert Watson, brother of William Watson (Junior) and his legitimate male heirs, failing that, to Roger Watson, William’s uncle and any of this second Roger’s legitimate male heirs.

This later charter gives us some extremely useful insights, not just about the family of William Watson of Cranston, but also the order in which heirs to the lands were lined up. Interestingly, the de Moravias take precedence over other members of the Watson family. This particular piece of information is good to bear in mind when evaluating the next milestone in our story.



In 1489/90, David Boswell, the son and heir of Marion Watson, died without heirs, and the Crown granted his lands of Griestoun to John Murray, son of Patrick Murray of Falahill, both of whom were presumably descended from the earlier de Moravias. Ultimately, it seems that a John Auchinleck inherited the lands as the nearest heir of Marion Watson, but we can see from the earlier order of heirs that the pattern of inheritance didn't necessarily go from Watson to Watson and that someone from a different family could be viewed as having a superior claim. It could well be that David Boswell had living male Watson relatives at the time of his death who were deemed to be inferior claimants to other potential non-Watson heirs. This gives some credence to the family lore of the later Watsons of Saughton, recounted to John Philip Wood in 1818, that although the senior male Watson line of the Watsons of Cranston died out, a junior male line survived and gave rise to the Watsons of Saughton some 34 years later (the first Watson of Saughton is recorded in 1524, earlier than the 1537 record unearthed by Wood).

The above represents the sum total of the information unearthed to date on the Watsons of Cranston. It is, however, enough for us to have a stab at putting together a family tree for the family, although it does require some assumptions to be made.



It may be that there is more information hiding in an as-yet-to-be-discovered record, or it may be that no further information will come to light; regardless, it does appear that the Watsons of Cranston were one of the most prominent families of Watsons – if not *the* most prominent – in the period shortly after patronymic surnames started to become hereditary. That the first Watsons in the records appear in the south of Scotland, in the region that was formally part of the Danelaw, is no surprise, and given the proximity to one of King David's new burghs, it is no surprise that many of the prominent families in the area were merchants and burgesses by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, including the





Watsons of Saughton. As to whether the chiefly family of the Watsons of Saughton was descended from these earlier Watsons of Cranston, it's a nice family story, but remains to be proven conclusively. We'd like to think that the odds are in its favour!

### **References**

Thanks must go to Scott Watson, whose excellent Substack feed provided considerable input to this article. You can read the two articles that Scott has penned on the Watsons of Cranston, together with other Watson-related articles, here: <https://insperatafloruit.substack.com/>

Those of you that are full members of the website can download a copy of John Philip Wood's petition to the Lord Lyon in which he requested supporters for the arms of James Watson, 10<sup>th</sup> of Saughton. This document, which appears to be handwritten by Wood himself, relates the family story of the Watsons of Saughton that tells of their proposed descent from the earlier Watsons of Cranston. You can get a copy from the members-only library: <https://www.clanwatson.org/library>

The book *Scottish Arms: A Collection of Armorial Bearings A.D. 1370-1678 Vol. II* is cited several times in this article and can be found here: <https://archive.org/details/ScottishArmsV2/>. Similar text can also be found in *Origines Parochiales Scotiae: The Antiquities Ecclesiastical and Territorial of the Parishes of Scotland* (1851): <https://archive.org/details/originesparochia01bann/page/n7/mode/2up>



## ***An Introduction to... DNA Testing for Genealogy***

Those of you who are interested in researching your family history have no doubt come across the concept of DNA testing. It's fair to say that DNA testing has revolutionised the field of genealogical research and in this article, we will look into what kinds of DNA tests are available and which companies and testing options there are. Thanks are due to two of our DNA experts – William J. Watson in the USA and Karen Stoerkel in Scotland – who between them provided a wealth of inputs and resources for this article.

### ***How DNA is Used in Genealogy***

If you search the internet for DNA testing, you will see a range of companies offering tests that promise to tell you all sorts of things about yourself, including your “ethnic origin”, your health status and your family tree.

DNA tests that promise to tell you your regional genetic makeup are good fun, but they shouldn't be considered as rely-upon information. When these first hit the scene, they were fairly approximate, but the main testing companies have invested significant efforts in recent years in finding reference panels of people whose ancestry has been proven to come from a particular area, often backed up with substantial scientific research. Regardless, although it is tempting to describe yourself as “32% Scottish, 27% Irish and 1.5% Viking”, the results from this kind of analysis will only ever be estimates and shouldn't be considered a substitute for rigorous genealogical research.



We will not cover DNA testing for health reasons in this article; if you have concerns about your health or your susceptibility to certain health conditions, we strongly recommend that you consult with an appropriately qualified health professional.

DNA testing is an excellent tool for confirming suspected family connections and for discovering new ones, and it's fair to say that it has transformed genealogy, even allowing descendants of people who have been dead for hundreds of years to be traced with accuracy. These are the kinds of tests that we will look at in this article, and we will now look at the main types available.

### ***Types of DNA Test***

There are three types of DNA test commonly used in genealogy: autosomal DNA, mitochondrial DNA and Y DNA.

**Autosomal DNA** tests are probably the most common and are usually the ones that people take when they first decide to take a DNA test. These are the relatively cheap tests that companies like Ancestry promote heavily during their regular sales.



Autosomal DNA refers to the 22 pairs of chromosomes that you inherit from both parents. As such, autosomal matches can connect on any branch of your tree. You receive half of your autosomal DNA



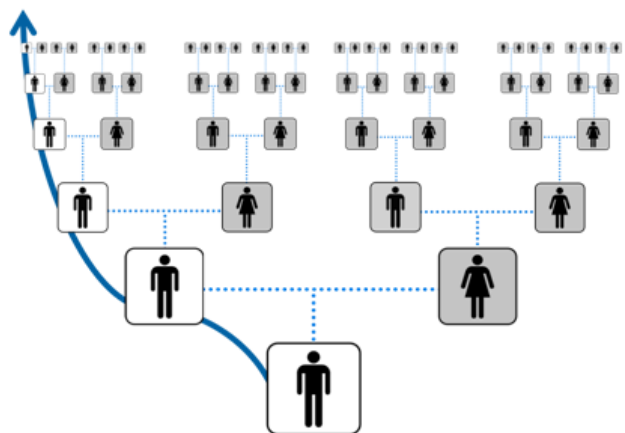
from each parent, and they pass along to you half the DNA that they carry. That means that the more distant the connection to your match, the less DNA they will share with you and that the amount of DNA you share can give you an idea of how close your connection to your match is. Figuring out connections can prove challenging, particularly once the amount of shared DNA falls below a certain point. It's also possible that a known cousin may not share any DNA with you, and that you have genealogical ancestors from whom you received exactly zero DNA. All second cousins will always appear as matches, but only **most** third cousins will. Figuring out where your connection lies in your tree and in your match's tree can take significant effort. Having trees that connect in more than one way can present significant

challenges and some matches may appear in your list due only to random chance, without any genetic connection whatsoever.

Autosomal DNA is very useful for finding DNA matches with reasonably close relatives, but the likelihood of a match does drop off quite quickly with genetic distance. The likelihood of a reliable match diminishes significantly by the time you are four to five genetic steps away.

**Mitochondrial DNA**, as the name suggests, is associated with the mitochondria of your cells. Mitochondria are specialised units within cells that are responsible for supplying energy to the cell. Millions of years ago, they were separate, bacteria-like organisms that formed a symbiotic relationship with other simple organisms, eventually becoming fully embedded. They have their own DNA signature that can be detected with modern DNA testing. Although both males and females receive mitochondrial DNA from their mothers, it can only be passed on by females. It is therefore of use when both males and females want to trace back their matrilineal line.

**Y DNA** is only present in males and is passed on largely unchanged from father to son. This makes it very useful for males who want to trace back their patrilineal line, and because of its very stable nature it can be used to investigate ancestry dating back thousands of years. Y DNA is key facilitator when running surname studies in cultures in which offspring take their father's surname. Rather than comparing the complete strand of DNA, the most-affordable Y-DNA tests examine genetic markers known as STRs ("short tandem repeats") that appear at specific known locations on the chromosome. The Y chromosome carries hundreds of these markers, and results for a given marker are represented as a count of the number of



copies. The value of any given marker can change **up or down** in any given generation, though changes are infrequent. Alas, this means that the same change can appear independently in multiple lines of descent, **and** that a change which appears in one generation may disappear in a subsequent generation. Nevertheless, **patterns** of marker value changes can provide significant genealogical clues.





More advanced (and more expensive) tests (see the Big Y-700 mentioned below) examine the details of broad portions of the chromosome, looking for "single nucleotide polymorphisms" (SNPs – pronounced as "snips"), which are single "letter" changes that can be traced back through male lines. A given SNP is essentially a "once in the descent of mankind" event. The patterns of SNP inheritance have revealed details of the tree connecting all men to each other over the last 200,000 years.

The table below provides an at-a-glance summary of the key points of this section:

Test Type	Who Can Test		Matches With
	Males	Females	
Autosomal DNA	✓	✓	All close relatives
Mitochondrial DNA	✓	✓	Matrilineal ancestors
Y DNA	✓	✗	Patrilineal ancestors

Now we have an understanding of the kinds of test available, let's look at where you can buy them.

### **Overview of DNA Testing Companies**

There are many companies out there that offer to test your DNA, and they although many of them may at first appear very similar, there are often small differences in their offerings. Here we will cover the major sites that the majority of people use.

The first thing to understand is that some companies will let you upload DNA test results from other companies whereas some won't. You can often save time and money by getting a DNA test from a company that doesn't allow external uploads and uploading those results to websites that do.

You may wonder why a company would let you upload results from somewhere else instead of insisting that you pay for one of its tests. The answer is simple; their business model requires that they have a well-populated database of results for other potential customers to match with, so it is in their interests to drop any barrier to filling that database! The way they make money is by charging you for various add-on services, often for upgrades to more comprehensive tests, for subscriptions to their collections of records or for access to their enhanced tools.

**Ancestry** and [23andMe](#) are the two major DNA testing companies that do not allow you to transfer DNA tests in from elsewhere. [Ancestry](#) has a huge user database, both of DNA tests and family tree data, and it is an excellent place to start if you are new to DNA testing, but there are a couple of major caveats. Firstly, Ancestry does not check the veracity of the family tree information that people enter into the site, so there is nothing to stop you from building a family tree that shows you as descended from Robert the Bruce, Tutankhamum or Papa Smurf, and once these trees are on the site they will be presented as fact to other users.

What Ancestry is excellent for – and this is due to its large user base – is presenting potential matches to other people. Its ThruLines feature will even give you suggestions as to how you might be linked to your DNA matches. As we covered in the article on researching your family history in Issue 3 of *The Sprouting Oak*, these matches need to be treated as useful leads rather than dependable facts. You still need to validate each suggested connection; although your link to your DNA match is almost certainly correct (although not necessarily the suggest pathway for the connection), everyone else in their tree should still be viewed with suspicion until proven otherwise.

**23andMe** makes DNA screening for different physical and health traits its key focus. Its functionality for sharing or viewing genealogical information is quite limited, so we don't prefer it for this. If you



are after the purported health insights it may be worth considering, but please take note of our earlier caveat that you should consult with a qualified health professional if you have any health concerns. All that said, 23andMe does offer DNA matching for family history research, and some people who test there for health information may appear in the list of matches 23andMe provides and not in the database of any other DNA testing company.

Sites such as [MyHeritage](#), [FamilyTreeDNA](#), [GEDmatch](#), [LivingDNA](#) and a few others will allow you to upload DNA results from other testing companies like 23andMe and Ancestry. The sites listed here, with the exception of GEDmatch, also sell their own DNA tests.

**MyHeritage** has similar functionality to Ancestry in that it will allow you to build a family tree and link it to your DNA results. It will also present DNA matches in a similar way to Ancestry together with “Theories of Family Relativity”, which are MyHeritage’s version of Ancestry’s ThruLines feature. The same caveat applies here – treat all proposed relatives of your DNA matches as nothing more than potential leads that need to be properly verified rather than accepting them at face value, otherwise you will very quickly lose control over the veracity of your tree!

MyHeritage can also give you a suggested breakdown of your ethnic origins, although again we recommend that you don’t take the results as gospel.

One significant difference between MyHeritage and Ancestry is that the former provides a tool for viewing the specific parts of your DNA that you share with a match. You can use this “Chromosome Browser” to clarify the connections you share with your matches and get some insights into the way your matches relate to each other, although the details of how to do so lie far beyond the scope of this article.

**FamilyTreeDNA** is the only company that offers direct-to-consumer Y-DNA tests. It is also the only testing company that supports surname projects, regional projects, and projects based on genetic results alone. An example of each: The Watson surname project, the Scottish DNA project, and the R1b-P312 project.

FamilyTreeDNA offers three Y-DNA tests:

- Y-37: This test is the entry level test that is usually enough to confirm (or otherwise) if you connect to members of an existing family, although the results are never clear enough to show you where in history that connection was formed. It can, however, turn up connections between male lines going back hundreds of years.
- Y-111: This will leave little doubt as to which family it is you connect to and will allow a much more objective screening of any Y-37 matches.
- Big Y-700: This is the most detailed Y-DNA test, and the cost reflects this. This test will provide insights into ancient connections and relationships to other family lines even if they occurred thousands of years ago. Given enough Big Y tests within a family, results can confirm specific modern family tree connections, or identify which parts of a tree have errors.

It is worth noting that FamilyTreeDNA stores your genetic samples. This means that if your budget won’t stretch to the Y-111 or Big Y-700 for your first test, you can order the Y-37 test and upgrade later without sending in a new sample, allowing you to break up the costs. FamilyTreeDNA has regular sales, and those sales include upgrades, so keep an eye on their site or sign up for their newsletter!

**GEDmatch** does not offer DNA tests but it does accept uploads of DNA test results from a number of other providers. The site aims to enable DNA comparison results from tests taken at any testing



company, and they have a number of free tools to facilitate this. These free tools suffice for many people, but GEDmatch also offers some premium tools that can be accessed by paying for their “Tier 1” membership package.

**LivingDNA** is another site that offers ancestry and health data. They primarily target customers in the British Isles. They claim to have the most detailed regional breakdown of your origins, and provide information on a county-by-county basis throughout the isles. In 2024, they added tools to help interpret connections to matches. If you do choose to upload data to their site, you may want to pay the modest one-time fee to unlock some of these tools. LivingDNA also offers to tell you about your body’s response to certain types of nutrition and the best types of exercises and equipment that support your genetic makeup, all from a swab of your saliva. If this sort of thing interests you, feel free to take a look at their offering, but again we strongly recommend that you also seek the opinion of a qualified professional before acting on any personalised information regarding your health and wellbeing.

The above sites are among the best known of the DNA testing firms, although there are several others. We do suggest doing some due diligence before taking a DNA test or uploading your results to any site. Make sure that you read over the terms of service to understand exactly what your data is used for before uploading anything.

### ***The Watson Y-DNA Project***

As mentioned above, FamilyTreeDNA is the only site that offers Y-DNA tests and hosts surname-specific projects that can allow people of the same surname to trace common connections, sometimes many thousands of years in the past. One of these projects is the [Watson Y-DNA project](#), which currently has over 600 members. William J. Watson, who is a member of the Clan Watson Society, is one of the administrators of the project and is always happy to answer questions. He can be contacted through the project’s landing page.

### ***A Word of Warning***

Although DNA testing might seem like a fantastic way to firm up your family tree and to make new discoveries, you should not consider taking a test unless you are prepared for surprises. It is surprisingly common for people taking DNA tests to discover that their biological ancestors are not who they thought they were, even if they have an unbroken chain of verified documents confirming their family tree going back several generations. This is often due to what is known as an NPE, which is an acronym for either “non-paternity event” or “not parent expected”. Whichever definition you come across, it is a reference to one of a person’s ancestors (or the person themselves!) not having the parentage that the records would lead them to believe. These biological excursions are not solely down to people playing away from home; it was not uncommon for children who had lost one or both parents to be adopted by relatives or neighbours, sometimes unofficially, and upper-class families would sometimes take in and raise unrelated orphaned children. It’s also not uncommon for people to find unexpected DNA matches with living people descended from children born through previously unknown extramarital affairs, which can open the door to whole new families to whom they are related!

If you are not prepared to take the chance that your ancestors may not be who you think they are, or to find that you have a secret half-sibling, you really should think very carefully before taking a DNA test!





### ***Our Recommendations***

If you are new to DNA testing, we suggest that you start with an entry-level kit from AncestryDNA as it has the largest database of test results. Keep an eye out for sales, which happen several times a year and massively reduce the price. While you are waiting for your results, add whatever validated family tree data you have to the site.

Once you have your results, use the DNA matching feature to look for matches and investigate potential links to the family trees of other testers. We'd also recommend downloading your results and uploading them to MyHeritage, FamilyTreeDNA and GEDmatch, although we would recommend waiting until you have completed as much of your family tree as you can in Ancestry before exporting the family tree data to another site, as it is much more efficient to upload your up-to-date tree than to build the same tree separately on each site.

We recommend that you take a look at the add-on tools in MyHeritage, as in our view it is worth paying the modest fee to unlock some of them. This approach has the advantage that unlocked tools for uploaded kits are available forever, whereas for tests taken through MyHeritage, you only have access to the tools for as long as you maintain a subscription.

For those of you that are Watson males or who have living male Watson relatives, we'd strongly encourage you to take a Y-DNA test through FamilyTreeDNA and to join the Watson Y-DNA project. We'd suggest starting with the entry-level Y-DNA test to test the waters – after all, if you get zero matches with the Y-37, more detailed tests are unlikely to improve that situation – and upgrading to the Y-111 or Big Y-700 if you feel a more detailed test is warranted.

### ***Wrap Up***

This completes our very high-level look at DNA testing in genealogy. Hopefully you have found it to be of interest and have been inspired to get your own DNA tested if you have never done it before. Provided you take heed of a few warnings, DNA testing is an incredibly powerful tool, and one that can help to prove tentative family connections and to open up new avenues of research. It is also an essential resource in our quest to investigate connections between various groups of Watson kin around the world!

### ***Resources***

To close out this article, we've put together this list of resources that will help you to study the subject in a lot more detail should you be interested in doing so. We have also collated the links to the various DNA testing companies referred to in the main text above.

### ***Further Reading***

- Roberta Estes is one of the top experts in DNA and her website contains many useful articles on the different types of DNA and where to get tested, plus a blog that is well worth checking out: <https://dna-explained.com/>
- Blaine Bettinger is another long-time expert. He has been writing a blog for years (see link within the link) and has done quite a few sessions for Legacy Family Tree Webinars, some of which are free to watch: <https://familytreewebinars.com/speaker/blaine-bettinger/>
- The MyHeritage Knowledge Base has lots of educational articles, including this one on the very limited uses of so-called "ethnicity estimates":



<https://education.myheritage.com/article/the-founder-populations-project-how-myheritage-estimates-your-ethnicities/>

- This article does a good job of spelling out some of the benefits and potential risks involved in DNA testing, with a skew towards testing for genetic health conditions: <https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/understanding/dtcgeneticstesting/dtcrisksbenefits/>
- YouTube has lots of videos on genetic genealogy, not least those from the RootsTech conferences. We recommend starting here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEMbirtlBZo>
- Cyndi's list contains links to genetic genealogy resources under the various headings on this page: <https://www.cyndislist.com/dna/>
- If you are trying to work out how a match links you, one method for sorting matches was developed by Dana Leeds. It is also possible to follow a similar method to colour code your matches at Ancestry or MyHeritage within the respective websites rather than creating by a spreadsheet: <https://www.danaleeds.com/the-leeds-method/>
- Diahan Southard is an experienced genetic genealogist who writes a blog, runs webinars – some of which are free to view – and provides coaching. Her approach is well-suited to the kind of population and DNA matches typical in the USA, and she also works with Y DNA: <https://www.yourdnaguide.com/ydgblog/shared-matches-of-matches>
- The wiki site of the International Society of Genetic Genealogy provides a wealth of resources for those interested in learning more about DNA testing, together with links to dozens of DNA testing companies: [https://isogg.org/wiki/Wiki\\_Welcome\\_Page](https://isogg.org/wiki/Wiki_Welcome_Page). Note that this wiki, whilst very thorough, does assume significant familiarity with DNA testing.
- Those interested in the Watson Y-DNA project can visit the project page here: <https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/watson/about>

#### DNA Testing Companies

This is a compiled list of those companies mentioned in this article. Note that there are several others, but in the interests of producing a readable article we have limited our writeup to the most popular ones.

- 23andMe: <https://www.23andme.com/>
- Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/dna/>
- FamilyTreeDNA: <https://www.familytreedna.com/>
- GEDmatch: <https://www.gedmatch.com/>
- LivingDNA: <https://livingdna.com/int/>
- MyHeritage: <https://www.myheritage.com/dna/>



## ***2024 Edinburgh Trip***

Following our trip to Edinburgh in the autumn of 2024, I wrote an article for the newsletter of the Clan Buchanan Society International, *The Buchanan Banner*. Clan Buchanan includes the Watson family of names on their list of septs, and I use their newsletter to reach out to Watsons that may not find us independently. A slightly edited version of the article is included below; I hope you will enjoy reading it, and maybe be inspired to make a visit of your own!

### ***The Watsons of Aithernie***

After spending a weekend in Perth, during which we went to see the Stone of Destiny in Perth Museum and then Scone Palace, where Scottish kings were crowned in centuries past (both well worth a visit if you're in the area!), we headed to Fife to visit the ruins of Aithernie Castle.

The Watsons of Aithernie were descended from a line of Provosts in St. Andrews. James Watson, who came from this family, bought the estate of Aithernie in 1670, becoming the first Watson of Aithernie. He is described as "a successful merchant and Provost of St. Andrews", so carried on the family tradition, and



*Yours Truly with the Ruins in the Distant Background*



*The Ruins of Aithernie Castle*

also owned lands in Kilmany, Pitcruvie, Auchindoun, Bresmyre, Balmain and Largo. James's son Alexander married Margaret Lindsay of Edzell, and Margaret and her brother David were renowned as extravagant spenders. David blew the Edzell family fortune and was forced to part with all his estates in 1714, leaving the Edzell family castle to quickly fall into ruin. Unfortunately, his sister Margaret didn't pay heed to the misfortune of her brother and soon frittered away the wealth of her husband James. James Watson's lands were sold to his son-in-law, Doctor James Smythe, in 1735, ending the short-lived dynasty of the Watsons of Aithernie.

Nowadays, Aithernie Castle has been reduced to a ruin, with a column of remaining stonework standing in a farmer's field being all that is left of a once magnificent country mansion. I tracked down its location and paid a visit, taking some time to look around the ruins – although I was careful to stay within the tracks of the farmer's tractor given that the fresh shoots of this season's crop were sprouting! I'm yet to find any sketches of what the mansion looked like at its finest, so I could only use my imagination!





### ***The Watsons of Saughton***

The Watsons of Saughton were the last – and as far as we know, the only – Watsons to have been recognised as Chiefs of the Name in Scotland. Their family origin story, as recounted to an 18<sup>th</sup> century



*Charles Watson, 9th of Saughton and Chief of the Name in Scotland*

historian, states that they were descended from the much earlier Watsons of Cranston Riddell (see the earlier article in this newsletter), who owned lands southeast of Edinburgh in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and are the first Watsons to appear in the public records of Scotland. It appears that the principal male line of this family was extinct by the mid- to late 15<sup>th</sup> century, but in 1524 the Watsons resurface when a John Watson is granted some land in Saughton to the west of Edinburgh. By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Watsons of Saughton had increased their land holdings and had elevated their social status above that of their farmer forebears, and in 1691 James Watson, 6<sup>th</sup> of Saughton, had his lands erected into a barony by royal charter. Helen Watson, 13<sup>th</sup> of Saughton, was the last of this line. In 1844, she married Sholto John Douglas, who was to become the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Morton. In so doing, she added the Watsons' considerable land holdings to those of the family of the Douglas Earls of Morton. The present-day Earl of Morton is one of Helen's descendants.

Following our trip to see the ruins of Aithernie Castle, we headed to Edinburgh for a few days to visit some locations relevant to the Watsons of Saughton.

### ***Graveyards***

I had a couple of key graveyards down on our itinerary. The first was Old Pentland Cemetery, which contains an impressive mausoleum erected by the Gibsons of Pentland. Henrietta Watson, sister of Charles Watson, 9<sup>th</sup> of Saughton and Chief of the Name in Scotland, married Sir John Gibson of Pentland and was buried in the mausoleum when she died in 1803. Old Pentland Cemetery is small, and tucked away in a remote location, but it has a few notable features. One is the discovery of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century gravestone of a Templar Knight that is now on display in the nearby Rosslyn Chapel (another must-see!). The cemetery also looks out across the scene of the 1666 Battle of Rullion Green, a major battle between Covenanters and Scottish government forces, and a number of the Covenanters who were killed in the battle are buried here. There also stands an impressive watch house, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by families of those interred here, who would pay for guards to watch the graves of the recently deceased to stop body snatchers from digging up the corpses and selling them for medical lessons, a disturbingly common issue at the time! If you do pay a visit, it is worth taking the time to check out the gravestones, some of which are ornately carved with unusual symbols.



*The Imposing Gibson Mausoleum*



We also paid a visit to the church yard of St. John Episcopal Church in Edinburgh city centre to locate the memorial to Charles Hope Watson, who died in 1836 and is buried here with his wife and infant son (Charles's middle name was a nod to his great grandfather, Charles Hope, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Hopetoun).

No graveyard tour of Edinburgh would be complete without a visit to Greyfriars Kirkyard. Although we don't believe that any of the Watsons of Saughton are buried there, we made sure that we found the memorial to George Watson, the famous merchant after whom the present-day school is named. We timed our visit to meet up with some Watsons



*Shane & Véronique Watson in Greyfriars Kirkyard with Michael and Sarah Watson of Ohio*

from the USA who were making the trip of a lifetime to Scotland and spent a lovely day touring the kirkyard followed by some traditional fare and a couple of pints in the Greyfriars Bobby pub next door!

### **Churches**

We had a couple of must-see churches on our list, and we started with St. Mary's Episcopal Church.



*The Rear of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, showing the Burial Plot of the Earls of Morton*

This church was built by Helen Watson after she married into the Douglas family and moved to their family estate in Dalmahoy. The church was consecrated in 1850, only a few months before Helen died following a short illness. Helen is buried behind the church in the family burial plot of the Earls of Morton, and one of the stained-glass windows in the church pays tribute to her. The church stands in a beautiful setting and is well worth a visit for those that make their own trip to Edinburgh. One remarkable object to be found

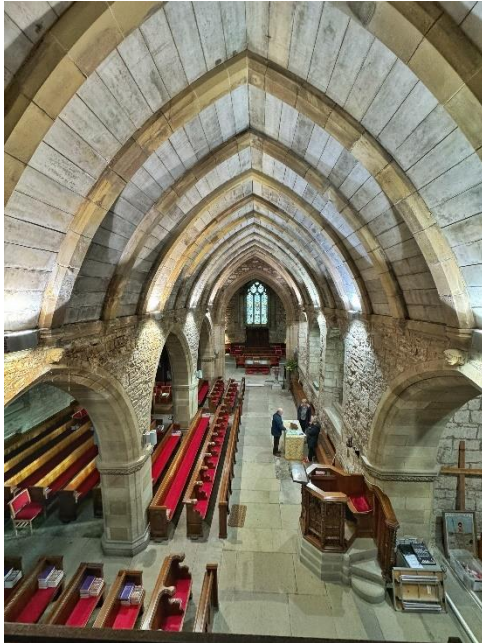
in the church grounds is a medieval carved stone cross, believed to date from between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and moved to St. Mary's sometime before 1915.

The second church, Corstorphine Old Parish Church, is the most significant one to Watson historians. Built by the influential Forrester family in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the church has been expanded several times in the centuries since. The Watsons of Saughton had their own private seating area in the church, and even had their own entrance made so that they could access it directly without having to mingle with the other churchgoers! Many generations of the Watsons of Saughton are buried below the church in their dedicated burial crypt, a practice that they continued long after the Reformation



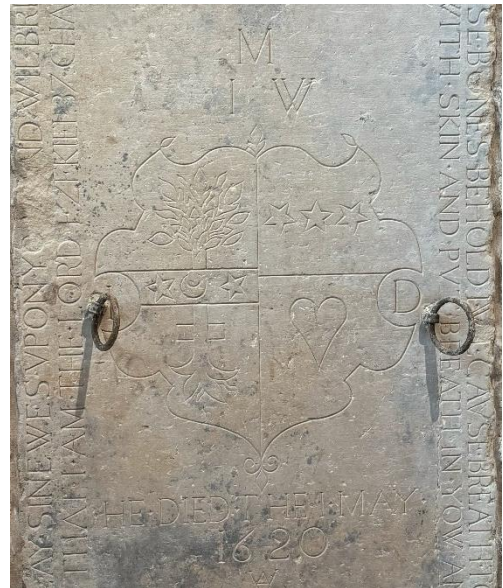


when interment in churches was banned, a clear sign of their influence. The church underwent major



*The View into Corstorphine Old Parish Church from the First-Floor Gallery of the Bell Tower*

renovations in 1905, during which the Watsons' private entrance was bricked up and their burial place apparently heavily disturbed. One item of special interest is the remaining one of the two ring stones that once covered the Watson burial crypt. These stones could be lifted to allow access to the crypt. The remaining stone is carved with the arms of James Watson, 3<sup>rd</sup> of Saughton, who died in 1620, and his wife Anna Douglas, who died in 1629. It is unknown when the stone was carved, but it is likely to have been reasonably soon after James and Anna were buried below it. Today, the ring stone is set into the wall of the south transept in the location of the old Watson entrance to the church. Also in the church are several tombs



*The Watson (Left) and Douglas (Right) Coats of Arms on the Surviving Ring Stone*

with effigies and heraldic plates of some of the ancient Forresters, although many of them were intentionally damaged when Oliver Cromwell's forces occupied the church in 1650/51. While you are in the church, it is worth climbing the narrow spiral staircase to the gallery in the bell tower. A local girl named Bessie Watson hung herself here with the bell rope while she was imprisoned and awaiting trial for witchcraft!

### **Cammo Estate**

The one place we really, really wanted to see was the Cammo Estate. This was where the last few



*All That Remains of the Once-Grand Front Entrance to Cammo House*

generations of the Watsons of Saughton lived, although they renamed it New Saughton (it reverted to its traditional name of Cammo when the Douglasses sold it in 1873).

Cammo is first mentioned in the records in 1296, although it didn't appear on maps until the 1600s, with maps at the time suggesting the presence of a modest manor house. John Menzies rebuilt the manor house in 1693, and Sir John Clerk of Penicuik landscaped the grounds in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. James Watson, 8<sup>th</sup> of Saughton, bought Cammo in 1741, moving

his family from their existing manor, Saughton House, and renaming their new estate New Saughton.





James was too busy enjoying the high life in Edinburgh to do much to the estate, but his son Charles made extensive upgrades to the house and by the time he'd finished it had over 50 rooms and required a small army of household servants, maids, cooks, stable boys, coachmen and gardeners to run it. Charles's son James, 10<sup>th</sup> of Saughton, also made considerable changes, building the beautiful stable block, adding a new wing and a crenelated parapet to the house and constructing the water tower that still stands to this day to supply all the water that the estate needed.



*The Magnificent Stable Building*

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cammo House was sold to Margaret Maitland Tennant. She became estranged from her eldest son Robert and lived on the estate as a recluse with her youngest son Percival. They deliberately allowed the house to deteriorate to ensure that the estate would have minimal value if they were to both die before Robert. When Percival died in 1975, he left the estate to the National Trust for Scotland, but after decades of neglect, vandalism and arson attacks the house had to be largely demolished to make it safe. All that remains today are the ruins of the first floor of the original Menzies mansion, although there are plenty of other reminders of the Watsons of Saughton around the estate.

We were lucky enough to have a private tour of the estate with Ann Kerrigan of the Edinburgh Archaeological Field Society (EAFS) who is managing the digs on the estate and has collected a mass of research material on Cammo and the Watsons.

Together with Norma Johnston, the EAFS treasurer, she was kind enough to spend a good couple of hours taking us around the estate, showing us various buildings and other features that we never would have found on our own. After having read about this place for so many years, it was an amazing experience to see it in real life! Nowadays, the estate is owned by the council and is open to the general public, and it's a lovely spot for some fresh air and a stroll.



*A Bridge on Cammo Estate Built by James Watson, 8th of Saughton, and Bearing his Initials and the Date of Construction*



### ***Meet the Buchanans!***

We topped off our week by attending the UK premiere of the full-length Meet the Buchanans movie at the Central Scotland Documentary Festival in Stirling. This struck me as an excellent opportunity to meet up with some UK-based Watsons, so we agreed to meet up for a pub meal before heading to the movie venue, where we were greeted at the door by a beaming Bruce Buchanan. After catching up quickly, it was in for the screening, followed by a lovely Q&A session with the producer and Lady Buchanan. For those of you yet to see the movie, you can either check out the shorter version on BBC Scotland (for those in the UK), or follow the [meetthebuchanansmovie](#)



*Shane Watson, Joanna Watson, Doug Watson and Véronique Watson  
at the UK Premiere of the Meet the Buchanans Movie*

Instagram account for details of future screenings of the full-length version. If you watch the full-length version without blinking, you may even catch a fleeting glimpse of yours truly!



## ***Get Involved!***

We love to see our members getting involved in our society, and if that's something that you might be interested in, head over to the Volunteers page that we revamped on our website this year for inspiration! We suggest a few ways in which you may wish to get involved, and provide brief descriptions of each role. Please don't feel limited by our suggestions – if you have a particular passion or skill set and think you could be of use, you're probably right, so drop us a line so we can discuss further!

We're also always on the lookout for new material, so if you have a story to tell, have visited somewhere related to Watson history or have been looking into your own family tree, we'll happily help you put an article together for our newsletter or website.

Even if you don't have the time or the energy for a volunteer role, you can still help us just by telling other people about us! If you know someone who may be interested in learning about Watson history (hint: if you are a Watson you probably have other family members, for a start), tell them about what we do and point them towards our website, Facebook group or social media channels!