

THE MURRAY WATT CONNECTION



William Watt

George Murray

William Watt and George Murray were contemporaries in Aberdeen in the last quarter of the 19th century. Both were born outside Aberdeen, at Droichsburn in the Vale of Alford and at Kineff in Kincardineshire, respectively, before moving into the city to make their careers. They were both self-made men, who left school in their early teens and had no further formal education

William Watt (1846-1906) became Joint Proprietor and Joint Editor of the Aberdeen Free Press who lived at 27 North Albert Street and then 17 Queens Road.

George Murray (1848-1925) became a shipowner and wholesale merchant who lived at 81 Fountainhall Road.

They knew each other well, not only through the business of the Aberdeen, Leith and Moray Steam Shipping Co. Ltd (both were involved in a public hearing to resolve a mutiny of shareholders in 1887) but many other professional and social activities. The Murrays and Watts went hillwalking when William Watt was married to his third wife, Mary Martin, not long before she died in childbirth. There are notes of joint family occasions.

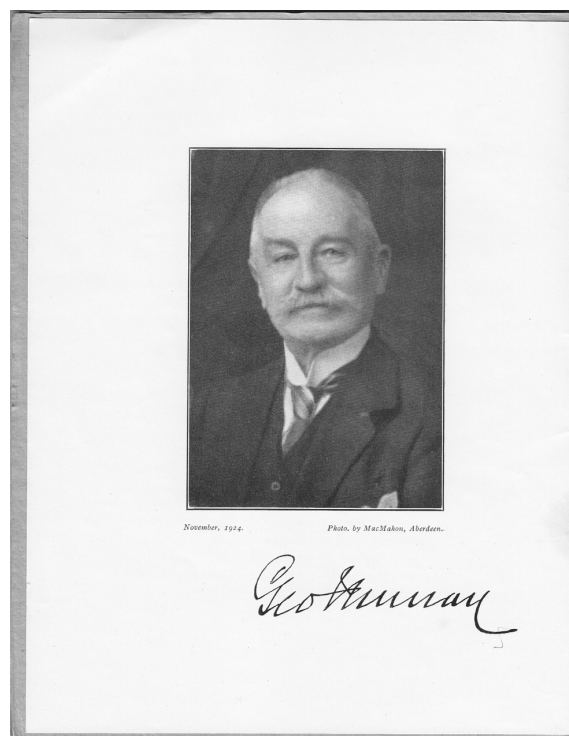
In 1906, George Murray noted the death of William Watt in his diary, and attended the funeral at Rubislaw Parish Church, commenting on the perfunctory

nature of the service. After William Watt died, the Murrays spent a Christmas Day at the Watt home at 17 Queens Road.

When William Watt died suddenly from acute appendicitis on 1st April 1906, he could not have known how closely the two families would become related, as his two sons Edward and Theodore married George Murray's two daughters Alice and Mabel in 1909 and 1911.

William Watt's story has been told before (see "William Watt of Aberdeen" at electricScotland.com). This paper describes the lives of George Murray, his wife Mary Ann Murray (nee Crombie) and his two daughters, the Misses Murray, Alice Isabella and Mabel Florence.

GEORGE MURRAY (1848-1925)



George Murray was born in Kineff, Kincardineshire on 13th December 1848. He died 77 years later at Newquay in Cornwall on 29th September 1925, where he had been on holiday.

Early life

George Murray's parents came from families that had lived for many generations in the vicinity of Kineff in Kincardineshire, about 8 miles south of Stonehaven and two miles inland from the village of Catterline (made famous by the paintings of Joan Eardley)

Kineff is famous as the place where the Scottish crown jewels (crown, sceptre and ceremonial sword) were hidden, under the floor of Kineff Old Church, between 1652 and 1660, having been removed from Dunottar Castle to prevent their seizure by Cromwell's army.

George was the second son of William Murray, shopkeeper and merchant, who ran a grocer's shop and post office at Roadsides in Kineff. William was born on 28th March 1816 and in 1845 married Susan Baird, who was born on 8th January 1814.

William and Susan had five sons. William, born on 4.4.47 became a paper mill manager in Ohio and died aged 62 on 1.10.09. George was born the following year. Robert Murray was born on 22.1.51, worked in the family business, and died aged 30 on 3.2.81. James Murray was born on 27.10.52, becoming an apprentice clerk, before dying aged 18 on 9.7.71. The fifth brother Arthur John was born on 29.10.54 and died aged 3 on 18.8.58. Of the five sons, only William and George married.

Their father William died aged 49 on 12.11.65, leaving his wife Susan with four sons, aged 18, 16, 14 and 7. It seems that while the two eldest sons made their way in the world, Robert stayed in the family business at Kineff with his mother and younger brother James. When James died in 1871, he was buried in the church yard at Catterline.

At some point during the late 1870s, Robert and his mother left Kineff to take over the village shop and post office at Comers in Midmar, about 20 miles due west of Aberdeen. When Robert died in 1881 and his affairs were brought to a conclusion, he was in joint business with his elder brother George, as "*merchants at Comers, Midmar*". Their mother stayed on at Comers until her death in 1891 at the age of 77.

The family archive includes several documents concerned with the last will and testaments, and estates, of William, Robert and Susan Murray.

Career

On leaving school, George Murray moved to Aberdeen to enter the service of Mr William Paterson, wholesale druggist, and then of Mr Alexander Skene, tea merchant. There is a note of his having completed a three and a half year apprenticeship in 1867, aged 18, suggesting he had left school in his early teens.

He was next employed by Mr James Crombie, wholesale produce merchant, and eventually became a partner in the firm of Messrs. James Crombie & Sons. His work brought him into wide touch with the trading community not only in Aberdeen but throughout the North of Scotland. In his obituary in the Aberdeen Press and Journal in 1925 (on which much of this text is based), it was said that he was everywhere respected for his business enterprise and his high personal integrity. His firm were managers for the Aberdeen, Leith and Moray Steam Shipping Co. Ltd., and also agents for the Langlands Line, and were intimately connected therefore with the general interests of Aberdeen as a shipping port and commercial centre, *“and these interests Mr Murray, with his progressive outlook and buoyancy of spirit, spared no effort to foster and encourage”*.



George Murray, 4th from left, with employees

Marriage

George and Mary Ann Crombie, daughter of George's employer James Crombie, married on 20th August 1874, aged 25 and 23. On the marriage certificate, their Aberdeen addresses are given as 1 Broad Street and 30 Albert Terrace, respectively.



George and Mary Ann Murray

Their first child, Mary Susan Murray, was born on 24th October 1875 but died 13 months later at 31 Victoria Street, and was buried at Allenvale cemetery in Aberdeen (the first of five Murrays to be interred there – Mary Susan, Robert, Susan, George, Mary Ann). The family archive contains several letters of condolence that George and Mary received.

Alice Isabella Murray was born on 7th September 1880 and her sister Mabel Florence Murray three years later on 27th December 1883. By 1891, the family had moved to 81 Fountainhall Road.



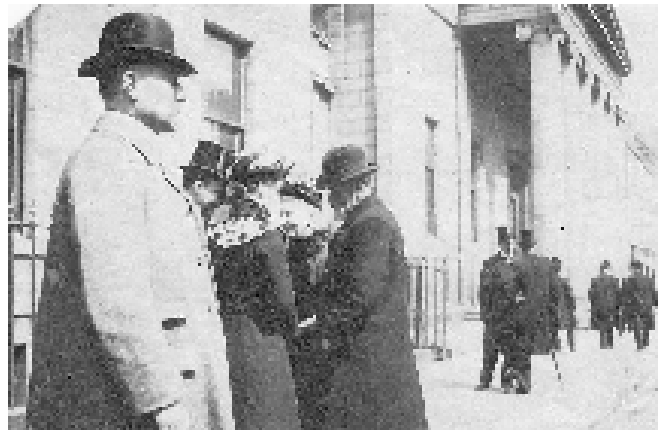
George Murray and his daughters outside 81 Fountainhall Road in the late 1880s

Three of the family had birthdays within a two week period (on 12th, 13th and 27th December), which also included Christmas Day and presumably determined how the family celebrated these events.

Further Career

He was elected a member of the Harbour Board in 1889, at the age of 41, and remained on the Board for seven years, during six of which he was Convener of the Docks and Pilotage Committee. Subsequently he associated himself with the work of the Chamber of Commerce, being a member of the General Purposes Committee, and interesting himself in the business of the Chamber.

A fluent and forceful speaker, he had the happy art of driving home the opinions which he held in trenchant and telling fashion, but without offence to those who differed from him. When responsible for the conduct of a public meeting or business committee, he ruled with a firm hand, yet in a kindly fashion, smoothing over moments of difficulty or bad feeling by his genial personality, and always securing the prompt and efficient dispatch of the matter in hand.



George Murray about town, near the Music Hall, Aberdeen

Public service

In Poor Law administration, he had extensive and practical experience. For many years he was connected with the Old Machar Parochial Board, and continued to give his services after the union of the two city parishes in the City Parish Council. The first Chairman of the united Council was Baillie Pyper and George Murray succeeded him, holding office for 6 years, from 1898 to 1904.

The Kingseat and Oldmill building schemes were carried through during his regime. In planning the new mental hospital at Kingseat, advantage was taken of the latest and most approved method of hospital practice, a deputation, of which he was a member, visiting the Continent in order to inspect some of the leading institutions of the kind there, and no effort being spared to secure the best medical and architectural advice available. The system of separate blocks was adopted, and "Mr Murray had the satisfaction of seeing Kingseat Hospital, one of the most modern and best equipped mental institutions in the country, opened before he demitted office in 1904".

Under the old parochial system there were two poor houses in Aberdeen. It was decided to consolidate the two and it was largely on George Murray's initiative and due to his driving power that the Oldmill site was secured, and a new and commodious set of buildings erected there for the housing of the city poor. The Oldmill Poorhouse was opened in 1907 and "*was turned to most valuable account during the First World War as a military hospital*".

Interests

George Murray was an ardent Liberal, and for many years took a prominent part in the Aberdeen Liberal Association, holding office in its council and executive, and doing much, by personal interest and endeavour, to foster and develop the cause locally. His speeches on the Liberal platform were outspoken and fearless – a reflection of his firm conviction on the merits of the principles for which his party stood, and this in days when political feeling was most pronounced. But he could, and did, do battle with political opponents, and remained with them the best of personal friends. This indeed was a remarkable feature of all he did in public life – that he gave frank expression to the views which he held upon any matter, and yet emerged from the turmoil of every controversy without having given offence to anyone.

He took an earnest and wholehearted interest in the temperance movement, being a strong supporter of total abstinence.

He was much interested in music. At one time an active and keen participant in local musical affairs, he, in later years, continued, so long as health was vouchsafed him, to be a zealous concert-goer. In the 1870s he was organist and choirmaster of St Paul Street Congregational (then Evangelical Union) Church, being a loyal, hard-working office-bearer, and a generous donor to the congregational funds. (*"It is interesting to recall that there was considerable stir in the church and city generally when in 1855, the St Paul Street congregation introduced an organ for use in its services – the first organ used locally outside the Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches"*.)

He took particular interest in choirs and choir-training, and was to the end a member of the Aberdeen Precentors' and ex-Precentors' Association. It was largely owing to his efforts and enterprise that the first visit of the Glasgow Select Choir to Aberdeen was secured.

He was recognised as a skilled player of the cello and gave valuable service to the first Queens Cross Orchestral Society. For a time he was also a member of Aberdeen University Orchestra. He played the violin, and played it well, gaining a measure of renown locally as an exponent of strathspeys and reels.

A striking example of the self-educated man, he was widely read in general and religious literature. In his later years he devoted not a little of his spare time to the study of Greek.

He was described as an ardent Churchman and a loyal member of St Paul Street Congregational Church, his connection with that church extending back over all five of its ministers. He "sat under" The Rev Fergus Fergusson, who had David Livingstone in his Sunday School in Glasgow before he came to Aberdeen.



A Murray family event at 81 Fountainhall Road

Character

"Mr Murray was a man of string convictions which he expressed as strongly. I remember him, as chairman at a church lecture, pitching into ministers who omitted a verse or verses of a hymn because they had preached too long. But he was a genial, kindly soul, and popular in a wide circle of friends. He took a large part in various forms of religious service, especially those connected with the musical part of church worship".

At a well attended memorial service, held shortly after his funeral, the Rev. Ellis Pearson said, *“He was ever a fighter : it is the way of such vehement natures. He held strong opinions, and he could earnestly contend for right and truth as he saw them. Some of you knew him in middle life as a doughty controversialist on occasion; and sometimes as the unflinching supporter of unpopular causes. Several of his friends of many year’s standing have remarked to me that he had mellowed and softened in later years; and it has always seemed to me a mark of great grace in him that one with a mind so keen and feelings so strong was yet without rancour or bitterness of spirit. I wonder how many of you have noticed a thing in him which I have marked again and again – how, when he had expressed himself with force and fervour after his own drastic fashion, he would pull himself up and give a short chuckle – a laugh at himself, really, and at his own downrightedness!. He was a fighter, but with no poisoned weapons; and he conceived his whole life as the good fight of faith”*.

A month later, the incumbent minister at St Paul’s Street Church, wrote, *“It is an obligation of one we have loved, that we should at least make the effort to understand him, and to see what is “the very pulse of the machine”, and in meditating on the character of George Murray, it has seemed to me that his root quality, from which, as in a pedigree, all his characteristics branch out, is that he was a Learner. You always found George Murray sitting at the feet of some master. Now it would be the scholars – for he had all the good Scotchman’s reverence for education; now it would be the great Artists – for how was it tolerable to such an incorrigible learner that Bach and Beethoven and Aeschylus and Shakespeare should get away, without some intimate word in the ear as to what they had really been after? Or again, it would be nature; he would not let go until she had blest him by whispering some secret of hers from lonely spaces or everlasting hills. But oftenest of all, and best loved of all, it would be the Bible; for it was as a daily learner that he sat at the feet of the prophets and saints and apostles.*

And I suppose it must have been this attitude of the learner that gave him his gift of permanent Youthfulness. That old saying, that whom the gods love die young, was peculiarly and touchingly true of him. To the very last hour of his life he found the cup brimful of thrilling interest – indeed his secret satisfaction in his last trip (a holiday in Cornwall) must have been that he had now rounded off his knowledge of an hitherto unexplored part. Now that Youthfulness was given him as the reward of discipleship – it was that that kept his personality so vivid and so vehement. And this posture of the learner explains, too, I think, his loyalty, a very marked characteristic of the man. Loyalty to men and causes, to family, and to church and to his ministers – from the first of them to the present one – loyalty to his political heroes and principles, to his birthplace and his city and his native land

– his loyalty to these was effortless, as loyalty always is to those who are constantly renewing their sense of indebtedness.

In one of those ancient books he loved so well there is a passage that tells of the pilgrim's joy when he arrives in the other world, and finds himself at last free to converse with Orpheus and with Homer. No doubt that joy has come to our friend now – but before a Divine Teacher. No doubt he is sitting now, a humble learner, in the School of Christ, his eyes growing big with wonder, as we used to see them grow big here, as the mystery of the heart of God is disclosed to him, and he discovers that what he had always believed is right after all, that there is a Cross there. No doubt this old learner is going on learning new lessons; and if we could see him, we should find him sitting in the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love, while

*There entertain him all the saints above
In solemn troops and sweet societies.”*

George Murray's Diaries

The family archive includes diaries of George Murray from 1889 to 1923, with daily entries, usually of 4-5 lines (i.e. an early version of Twitter in terms of length and regularity). He had large handwriting which is hard to read. There is also some of his correspondence, including a long letter to his cousin Charlie in the United States (returned to Harold Watt by his descendants), which appears to include a robust succession of opinions on the political situation in 1916.

In general, the records of George Murray say more about his personality and character than the details of his “*controversial views*”. The archive also contains several pages of a handwritten account of his “*phrenological character*”, provided by LN Fowler, practical phrenologist, of Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London.

The diaries were read from start to finish by Harold Watt who made a note of the key points, in handwriting which is as small as George Murray's was large.

The diaries reflect a steady interest in Liberal politics, musical activities, church, family, golf and national events, including the deaths of sovereigns, general elections, the sinking of the Titanic, the San Francisco earthquake, the opening of the Forth Railway Bridge, and so on.



George and Mary Murray with unidentified friends and carriage

MARY ANN MURRAY (1850-1936)



Mary Ann Crombie was born in Aberdeen on 12th December 1850, where she died on 2nd November 1936, aged 85, the longest-lived member of the whole family at that time. Her parents were also octogenarians.

Mary Ann was the elder daughter of Mr James Crombie, of the firm of Messrs James Crombie and Sons, shipping agents and produce merchants, Trinity Buildings, Aberdeen.

James Crombie was born at Skene in 1826 and died in Aberdeen in 1906. His wife Mary (nee Scott) was born in 1823 and died in 1907. In addition to Mary Ann, their other children were James who died in infancy, Isabella, William and John. The two brothers worked in their father's business.



Back row : George Murray, John and William Crombie
Front row : Isabella Crombie (sister of Mary Ann), Mabel Murray, Alice Murray, Mary Scott (from New Zealand)

Correspondence to the Murrays, after the death for their first child, was addressed to George and "Molly", suggesting that Mary Ann was called this by close friends.

In 1893, when she was 43, there is the following mention in a letter from Oxford, whose author had recently visited Aberdeen and went to church with Mr and Mrs Crombie. "Their daughter who had for years seemed to be dying, is now almost quite well, the cure seems most marvellous". It is not clear whether this refers to Mary Ann or her sister Isabella.



Back row : Mary Crombie (nee Osborne), Mary Ann Murray, Alice Murray
Middle row : James Crombie (husband of MC), George Murray, John or William Crombie (brother of MAM)
Front row : Mabel Murray

She took a great interest in charitable and philanthropic work. During the First World War she was closely identified with the Aberdeen YMCA in its efforts to look after the soldiers and sailors, a duty which she considered a labour of love. She spared neither time nor energy to ensure that the men home on leave were looked after.

She was also a keen temperance worker, and practically all her life was associated with the Aberdeen branch of the British Temperance Association, of which she was an office-bearer up to the time of her death. Church duties were one of her chief interests. She was a life long member of St Paul Street Congregational Church, of which her father was one of the founders.

Her obituary in the Press and Journal highlighted the fact that when she died her son-in-law was Lord Provost of Aberdeen and commented, "Mrs Murray will be remembered, for, like her husband and her father, she had the interests of the poor much at heart".



Mary Ann Murray

George and Mary Murray celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in 1924. He died the following year and she survived him by 11 years, dying at home after a three week illness. Her estate came to £17,522 in 1936. George and Mary Murray are buried at Allenvale cemetery in Aberdeen, a very large municipal graveyard in Aberdeen, which was opened in 1874 and now contains the last resting places of about 40,000 Aberdonians. There is a huge amount of granite on display, with many bushes and trees. It is well maintained with no sign of vandalism. The grave of the Murray family is located at Section A, Lair 599.

George Murray (1848-1925) and Mary Murray (1850-1936) buried their first daughter Mary Susan Murray here in 1877, aged 13 months. George also buried his brother Robert here in 1881, aged 30, and their mother Susan Murray in 1891, aged 77.

George Murray was buried in the family lair in 1925, aged 77, followed by his wife Mary Ann Murray in 1936, aged 85. The site of both burials is recorded in the cemetery register.

It appears that the grave never had a headstone, and it is not known why. All that marks the site now is a tree, which was planted in 1973 as part of a “plant a tree” campaign. It appears that many vacant spaces in the cemetery had trees planted at that time.



It is a mystery why the family grave does not have a headstone, whether this was always the case or whether there was a headstone which was subsequently removed.

According to Aberdeen City Council, “Whenever a tree hinders the work in any cemetery, that tree would be instantly removed, so if the family ever wished to erect a monument the tree would be removed”.

Although it was clearly not the family’s intention to have a tree planted at the site, it is a pleasing, albeit secret, kind of memorial.

THE MISSES MURRAY



George, Alice, Mabel and Mary Murray

Alice Isabella Murray was born in on 7th September 1880 and her sister Mabel Florence Murray three years later on 27th December 1883, both in Aberdeen.



The two sisters married two brothers, Edward William Watt and Theodore Watt. Alice married Edward on 5th June 1909 while Mabel married Theodore on 3rd June 1911.



Alice and Edward, 1909; Mabel and Theodore, 1911



The wedding day of Mabel and Theodore, 1911

Between them the two couples produced ten grandchildren for their parents George and Mary Murray.



Left to right: Murray, Alice, Edward, Betty and Marjorie Watt; Mary Murray; Dorothy (standing), Alice, Harold, Mabel, Alan and Theodore Watt; George Murray; George Watt. Picture probably taken in 1924. Ian Watt had died in 1918 aged 22 days. Donald Watt was born later in 1926.



A later family group, in the early 1930s, a decade after the death of George Murray.
 Left to right : Theodore, Harold, Dorothy, Mabel, Alan, Donald (sitting), George, Mary Murray, Edward, Betty, Marjorie, Alice, Murray and Alice.

ALICE ISABELLA MURRAY (1880-1948)



“By the death of Mrs Edward W. Watt, a former Lady Provost of Aberdeen, the city has lost one of its most active women citizens.

Mrs Watt gave a lifetime of devoted and valuable service to Aberdeen, and to a variety of organisations and public bodies, most notably the Church and the British Women’s Temperance Association.

Her contribution to church work was made through St Paul Street Congregational Church, of whose Sisterhood she was president on several occasions.

Her social welfare work embraced the Shiprow Tavern, the Aberdeen Lads’ Club, and Linn Moor Home, and during the last war she took a deep interest in the YMCA Services Canteen, Union Street. Much of her time was devoted to the Aberdeen centre of the Girls’ Guild, of which she was president.

Mrs Watt’s term as Lady Provost was fulfilled with dignity, and graciousness which won for her the respect of the people of Aberdeen.

She gave her husband, Dr Edward W. Watt, valuable assistance in raising the last £100,000 towards the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary Building Fund.

With Dr Watt she had the satisfaction of seeing the building opened by the King and Queen - then Duke and Duchess of York.



Murray and Marjorie (Back row); Alice and Edward (middle row);
Betty and Alice (Front row); picture probably taken in late 1920s

In 1936 she travelled to Devonport to christen HMS Aberdeen, a ~Naval sloop adopted by the citizens of Aberdeen.

She was a daughter of Mr George Murray, wholesale merchant in Aberdeen, who was chairman of Aberdeen Parish Council for many years.

Mrs Watt, who was sixty-seven, is survived by Dr Watt and one son and three daughters.”

From the Press and Journal, 1948



Alice and Edward Watt and their family lived at 33 Carlton Place for several years before moving to Glenburnie Park, 13 Rubislaw Den North, as shown.

Other information

Alice went hillwalking with her family and was present at the unveilings of the Cairngorm Club indicators on Lochnagar in 1924 and Ben Macdhui in 1925.

The family stayed at Glenburnie, xx Rubislaw Den North. Names in the Visitor's Book include Eric Liddell, the Scottish missionary and athlete, and Joseph Kennedy, US Ambassador to the United Kingdom and father of President John F Kennedy.

In 1937, Alice and her husband, as Lord and Lady Provost of Aberdeen, attended the coronation of George VI in Westminster Abbey. Weeks previously, their daughter Marjorie was married in Aberdeen (see "Wedding of the Lord Provost's Daughter" at electricScotland.com).

MABEL FLORENCE MURRAY (1883-1956)



Mabel Murray as a young woman before she was married



Mabel Murray (3rd from right) with girl friends in fancy dress, in the 1890s



Mabel Murray with infant on the left, and Theodore, George, Dorothy and Alan on the right, about 1920



Mabel and Alice Watt with their mother Mary and an elderly relative at the Linn of Quoich, about 1910 and with their firstborn children, about 1913



Mabel and Theodore Watt with their 5 children. Left to right: Alan, George, Mabel, Donald, Dorothy, Theodore and Harold, about 1930



On holiday at Lossiemouth 1951. Left to right: Helen Hughes (wife of Alan Watt), Harold, Donald, Alan, Mabel, Dorothy and Betty Richards (wife of Harold)



Mabel about town with Theodore and friend; and in New York



Mabel with her three surviving sons in uniform, Donald, Alan and Harold, Her eldest son George, a Surgeon Lieutenant in the Royal Navy was killed in 1941 when his ship HMS Wryneck was sunk in the Aegean by German bombers. The photo was probably taken at the end of the war when the three sons had returned from war service.



Mabel (2nd left) in a women's fiddle orchestra in Aberdeen

Mabel and Theodore started married life at 206 Midstocket Road but soon moved to 10 Moray Place where they lived for over 20 years. In 1938 Theodore bought Culter House in Milltimber, a large, dilapidated historic house, for his household comprising himself (54), Mabel (54), George (25), Dorothy (22), Alan (19), Harold (17) and Donald (13). They lived there for 4 years until 1942 when the house was requisitioned by the army in World War 2. The family relocated to 18 Rubislaw Den North where Theodore died in 1946. Return to Culter House was impractical when the requisition came to an end and the family stayed in town.





After Theodore died from a stroke in 1946, aged 62, and her children got married and moved away, Mabel left 18 Rubislaw Den North to live at No 31 Belvidere Crescent. She died in 1956, aged 72, following complications from a broken hip, at Daviot Hospital in Aberdeenshire, where she had been admitted with dementia for long term care.

The descendants of Mabel and Alice Watt (nee Murray) include :-

Edward William Murray Watt (1913-1980)
Harold Murray Robertson Watt (1921-2003)
Andrew Edward Murray Watt (1948-)
Elspeth Murray Richards Watt (1949-)
Roderic Murray Taylor (1952- 2015)
Graham Charles Murray Watt (1952-)
Alexander Murray Taylor (1989-)
Murray James Mackintosh Watt (1985-)

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