

THE BOOK  
OF THE  
OLD EDINBURGH  
CLUB

---

The Journal for  
Edinburgh History



Graham Palmer, 'Gregor Drummond, 1744–1813, Flesher',  
*Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, New Series 7 (2008), pp. 147–151

~~~~~

This article is extracted from **The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club**, **The Journal for  
Edinburgh History** ISSN 2634-2618

Content © The Old Edinburgh Club and contributors. All rights reserved.

For information about The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club (BOEC), including contents of  
previous issues and indexes, see <https://oldedinburghclub.org.uk/boec>.

**This article is made available for your personal research and private study only.**

For any further uses of BOEC material, please contact the Editor, The Book of the Old  
Edinburgh Club, at [editor@oldedinburghclub.org.uk](mailto:editor@oldedinburghclub.org.uk). The Club has a Take-Down Policy  
covering potential rights infringements. Please see [http://oldedinburghclub.org.uk/oec-  
take-down-policy](http://oldedinburghclub.org.uk/oec-take-down-policy).



Digitised by the Centre for Research  
Collections, Edinburgh University  
Library from the copy in the Library  
Collection



## *Edinburgh Portrait*

GREGOR DRUMMOND, 1744–1813, FLESHER

GRAHAM PALMER

**G**REGOR DRUMMOND was baptised on 24 January 1744 at Corie Chaorach in Glen Dochart, fifth child of the notorious James Mor and grandson to Rob Roy MacGregor.<sup>1</sup> His father provided the model for the brooding villain of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Catriona*, and his grandfather is best known as the 'outlaw and folk hero' immortalised by Sir Walter Scott in *Rob Roy* (and more recently by Liam Neeson in the 1995 film).<sup>2</sup> Proscribed by law from using the name MacGregor, the family had years previously adopted the surname of the Jacobite Duke of Perth on whose land they resided. It was a time of moment, restoration of the House of Stuart was on many Highland lips, scythes were sharpened for want of swords and the more canny Jacobites were calling in their debts and transferring land for safe-keeping to distant relatives. By May, the Duke of Perth had followed suit and sold on Corie Chaorach to help finance the coming war.<sup>3</sup>

James Drummond and his wife Annabel trudged south-westwards to settle in Rob Roy's old wooing grounds at Corriearklet.<sup>4</sup> It was a shrewd choice: without leaving the farmstead the family could easily monitor the comings and goings at the barracks at Inversnaid and, as sub-tenants of that loyal Hanoverian the Duke of Montrose, they now fell under a protective cloak. With the passing of 'Charlie's Year' came its bloody aftermath: by mid June 1746 the house at Corriearklet lay in ashes, a victim of government vengeance. In the next few years Gregor's father came and went with the wind but by 1750 the family were back grazing black cattle on the slopes at Corie Chaorach.<sup>5</sup> It didn't last long: arrested for his part in the abduction of Jean Key, James escaped from Edinburgh Castle, fled overseas and died in Paris in 1754.<sup>6</sup>

Reliant on her brother's generosity, Annabel was soon forced to farm out the children. One became a soldier, another went to live with a lawyer in Glasgow and Gregor was sent off to be brought up by

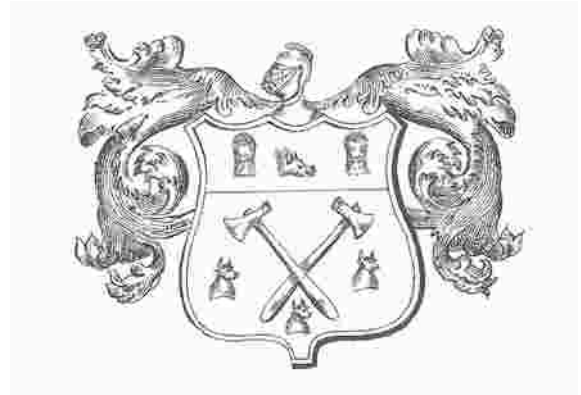


Fig.1. Arms of the Incorporation of Fleshers of Edinburgh, from *An Historical Sketch of the Municipal Constitution of the City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1826). (Courtesy of Andrew Fraser.)

the leading Edinburgh butcher Andrew Greig who was Deacon of the Incorporation of Fleshers in 1749–50 (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> Within the city, members of the incorporation not only had a monopoly on the slaughter and butchering of animals (and the sale of fish) but also on the trade in all the various by-products, including skins. As Deacon, Greig had the right to inspect meat and fish daily to ensure honest dealing and quality: anyone caught breaking the rules could be fined, imprisoned or banished from the city.<sup>8</sup> In September 1753 a distant relation wrote to James in exile, 'I see Gregor frequently who is very well used by the honest Deacon in the same manner as if he was his owne Son'.<sup>9</sup> Gregor was apprenticed to another flesher, Alexander Greig, who had good business connections in the city and was at one time involved in a joint building venture with James Craig, the designer of the New Town of Edinburgh.<sup>10</sup>

To set up in business on his own, Gregor Drummond had to become a burgher of the city and he was eventually admitted into the Fraternity of Freemen on 26 June 1765.<sup>11</sup> Within six months he was married to the daughter of one of his colleagues,

Janet Lawson, who bore him five children.<sup>12</sup> In the course of business Drummond not only traded in meat but also had a sideline in horse-dealing. It was this that led him into much legal dispute and controversy. In September 1774 he was in court over a disputed bill. Drummond was owed two and a half guineas by a man named William Craig who refused to settle. In order to get his hands on his money Drummond accepted a rather complicated deal: he would take Craig's horse, a bay mare worth far more than the debt, and end up owing Craig money. Drummond would then race the horse at the Musselburgh fair day race, which had a purse of three guineas. If he won, he would pay Craig the full amount owed, but if he lost he would pay the balance minus one guinea! However, it was all a fraud as the horse was lame in all its legs and when Drummond tried to return it he was refused by Craig who had tampered with the legal bill in order to try to force Drummond to pay up.<sup>13</sup>

In his day-to-day life Drummond mixed with the best of the Edinburgh trades and was on good terms with the infamous Deacon of the Wrights, William Brodie, who frequented a tavern at the head of Fleshmarket Close. Indeed, Brodie bore witness to the baptism of Drummond's son, also called Gregor, on 13 December 1776.<sup>14</sup>

Drummond sometimes also suffered under the law. He was incarcerated in the Canongate Tolbooth in July 1777 for non-payment of debt, but his imprisonment did not last long as he settled with his creditors.<sup>15</sup> Gradually his star rose within the Incorporation of Fleshers and in 1779–80 he held its key position: Extraordinary Council Deacon representing the trade guild on Edinburgh Town Council. Britain was in turmoil and Gregor, like his father and grandfather, was swept up in the national and local politics of the day.

Things were not going well for the Crown and on 6 April 1780 the MP John Dunning took the opportunity of George III's weakness to introduce two motions in the House of Commons — first that 'the influence of the crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished', and second, 'that it is competent to ... examine into and to correct abuses in the expenditure of the civil list revenues' (i.e. the revenues of the royal household). Both motions were carried and after London had

succumbed to five days of anti-Catholic riots a snap general election was called for 1 September. At that time Sir Lawrence Dundas was sitting MP for Edinburgh. Dundas had acted as a commissary for the army in the 1745 Rebellion, befriended the Duke of Cumberland, and made his fortune from lucrative contracts to supply the army in Germany during the Seven Years War. But Sir Lawrence had powerful opponents, including the Duke of Buccleuch.<sup>16</sup> The Duke and Henry Dundas set up William Miller (later Lord Glenlee) to oppose Sir Lawrence at the election and stirred up the Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh and the members of the Merchant Company, who had previously been staunch supporters of Sir Lawrence, to oppose him.<sup>17</sup>

When Sir Lawrence voted against the King on Dunning's resolution loyal Edinburgh was horrified at his treachery and ousted him at the election. In response the Town Council split, and both factions claimed the right to appoint the new Member of Parliament.<sup>18</sup> Passions ran high and the partisan *Edinburgh Evening Courant* commented: 'A correspondent remarks, that the reception which the Magistrates met with yesterday affords the clearest proof of the sentiments of the City. When those who are supposed to be in the interest of Sir L—— D—— proceeded from the Council-house to Walker's tavern, they were hissed the whole way; while the other party, who went to Fortune's met with loud acclamations of joy'.<sup>19</sup>

The struggle in Edinburgh was not only between George III's friends and unfriends but also to determine the limits of the power of the Trade Incorporations on the Council, all of whom were against Sir Lawrence.<sup>20</sup> In effect there were two rival Councils and two rival MPs. To make matters worse, the pro-Sir Lawrence break-away faction tried to force the City, rather than Westminster, to pay for the disputed election. The good businessmen of Edinburgh were indignant and the fourteen Incorporations placed a notice in the *Courant* on 8 November 1780:<sup>21</sup>

It was ... with no small degree of surprise and astonishment that the citizens of Edinburgh observed, upon the 3d November instant, a motion made and carried by seventeen members of the present disputed council, That a petition, signed by the Chief Magistrate, should be presented to Parliament, to confirm Sir Lawrence Dundas's pretended election in preference to Mr Millar; and what

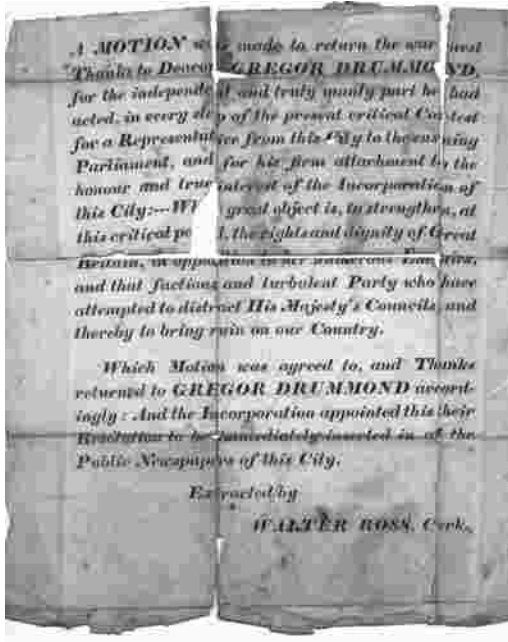


Fig. 2. Handbill thanking Gregor Drummond for his part in the disputes of 1780. (Author's collection.)

was still more ridiculous and absurd, That the expense attending such a measure should be defrayed out of the revenue of the city. A measure so unprecedented, and so unjust, alarmed the citizens at large ... any such delapidation of the city's revenues is illegal and improper.

Gregor Drummond played a significant role in all this and in consequence the Incorporation of Fleshers decided to thank him publicly by inserting a notice in the city's papers (fig. 2):<sup>22</sup>

A MOTION was made to return the warmest Thanks to Deacon GREGOR DRUMMOND, for the independent and truly manly part he had acted, in every step of the present critical Contest for a Representative from the City to the ensuing Parliament, and for his firm attachment to the honour and true interest of the Incorporation of this City: — Whose great object is, to strengthen, at this critical period, the rights and dignity of Great Britain, in opposition to her numerous enemies, and that factious and turbulent Party who have attempted to distract His Majesty's Councils, and thereby to bring ruin on our Country.

Which Motion was agreed to, and Thanks returned to GREGOR DRUMMOND accordingly: And the Incorporation appointed this their Resolution to be immediately inserted in all the Public Newspapers of this City.

Extracted by WALTER ROSS, Clerk

Eventually, the matter of the disputed election was brought before a House of Commons Select Committee and, after Charles Fox had put his weight behind him, Sir Lawrence was returned as MP on 21 March 1781, though he died shortly afterwards.

In August 1780 Gregor Drummond had remarried, this time to the daughter of a maltmill maker, Margaret Tibbets, who bore him another three children.<sup>23</sup> According to the *Edinburgh Directories*, Drummond was trading out of Fleshmarket Close from 1783 right up until his death in 1813. The close, a narrow passageway originally leading down from the High Street to the stinking marshes of the Nor' Loch, where rotting animal remains would be unceremoniously dumped, was gradually becoming a more pleasant place in which to operate with the draining of the loch and the development of the New Town.

Papers from this time describe how Drummond ran a credit book 'agreeable to the practice observed in the Flesh Market of Edinr' for each of the regular customers who called on his stall. In these books he would enter the cost of meat supplied to the customer and would send out an account at the end of each year.<sup>24</sup>

September 1782 saw Drummond back in court where he was found guilty of a riot and breach of the peace and ordered to pay £10 damages and costs. He had forcibly seized a horse in lieu of payment of a stabler's debt and assaulted its owner. In his defence, Drummond declared that he had only given James Duncan 'a push on the Breast with the palm of my hand' but a witness described how Drummond hit the horse's owner with a clenched fist and 'that he damned Mr. Duncan for a Bugger, saying "Are you going to take my horse and take part with a Rogue?"' The accuser claimed that justice was slow because Drummond traded on his reputation within the city: 'It is no wonder that an Accusation of this kind, against a man so well known as Mr. Drummond, at first startled the Justices.'<sup>25</sup>

In court for duping James La Mash, a travelling comedian then playing at Edinburgh's Theatre Royal, into exchanging two good horses for an unseen lame mare, Drummond once again played on his social standing, claiming the outsider was at fault: 'The pursuer is an entire stranger in this country.' Drummond described the transaction as a 'jockey

frolick' that took place late one night in the house of Mr Ward, a Musselburgh vintner.<sup>26</sup> The same court papers reveal how Drummond kept in touch with his MacGregor relations, at one stage 'disposing of the stock of a Farm at the braes of Balquhider which belonged to a Cousine German'.<sup>27</sup> An aside in another court case reveals Drummond himself had an interest in a farm at Livingston.<sup>28</sup>

In 1793 Drummond married, for the third time, one Anne Vallance, who bore him a son named James who brought his total offspring to nine.<sup>29</sup> Business must have been good because by 1801 he also had an interest in a tenement in Canal Street, now buried under the platforms of Waverley Station.<sup>30</sup> Just how good is illustrated by the Earl of Dalkeith's 'Butcher's Book' for 1800. Drummond was supplying him with large quantities of beef, lamb,

mutton, veal, tongues and livers. Indeed, his bill was bigger than that of the Earl's grocer, baker, wine merchant, baker or doctor.<sup>31</sup>

Not much is known about the final years of Gregor Drummond's eventful life. There are several entries in the Edinburgh Sasines concerning the tenement in Canal Street and an inn in Howgate.<sup>32</sup> From the nature of these it would seem that he aided his daughter Isobell Brown during her husband's illness between 1800 and 1810. Another of Drummond's daughters, Annabella, had married John Turnbull, Writer to the Signet, in 1805 and Gregor eventually died at their house at Garngad Hill in Glasgow on 28 October 1813. His death was noted four months later in the same edition of the *Glasgow Herald* which announced the death of the 27 year old Annabella and his grandson, John.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

The author wishes to thank the Duke of Buccleuch for kind permission to quote from family papers deposited at the National Archives of Scotland; Pam McNicol, ex-Edinburgh City Archives, Andrew Bethune and Jimmy Hogg at the Edinburgh Room, Edinburgh Central Library, and George B Clark, Clerk for the Incorporation of Freemen Fleshers of Edinburgh, for their help with his early research; Anthony Lewis for casting a critical eye over a draft of this article; and the Clan Gregor Society for printing an earlier version in the *Clan Gregor Society Newsletter*, No. 61 (Summer 2006).

- 1 General Register Office for Scotland (GROS), Old Parochial Registers (OPR), OPR 361/1, Killin Register of Baptisms.
- 2 See David Stevenson, 'Robert MacGregor, later Campbell [called Rob Roy]' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004).
- 3 National Archives of Scotland (NAS), GD112/2/49/4.
- 4 Confirmation of this move is given by Robert Craigie in a letter to the Marquis of Tweeddale, 2 August 1745: National Library of Scotland (NLS), MS. 7068, ff. 8–9, and the National Archive (Kew), SP54/25/41A.
- 5 James wrote to his relation Duncan Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of Perthshire, on 31 March 1750 confirming that he would have grazing for Campbell's 99 bullocks at Corie Chaorach: NAS, GD170/1208/1.
- 6 See *The Trials of James, Duncan and Robert M'Gregor, three Sons of the celebrated Rob Roy, before the High Court of Justiciary, in the years 1752, 1753 and 1754* (Edinburgh 1818) for details of the abduction and trial; Andrew Lang, *Pickle the Spy* (London 1897), chapter 10, for an account of James Mor's

life in exile; and A. G. M. MacGregor, *The History of Clan Gregor*, 2 vols (Edinburgh 1901), II, chapter 34, for James Mor's later letters to his chief in exile.

- 7 NLS, MS. 3187, ff. 195–196, Letter from Gregor's sister, Malie, to her father in Dunkirk, 22 July 1754. (Greig is a known sept of Clan Gregor, so the Deacon was possibly a MacGregor himself.)
- 8 See *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, 1403–1528* (Edinburgh 1869), pp. 54–56. These rights were also enjoyed by the Duke of Cumberland who had been created a freeman of the Incorporation of Fleshers on 10 April 1746, for his engagement in 'preserving our present happy constitution from popery, slavery, arbitrary, despotick, and tyrannical power' and had not as yet earned for himself the title of 'butcher': see James Hogg, *The Jacobite Relics of Scotland: Being the Songs, Airs, and Legends of the Adherents of the House of Stuart*, 2 vols (Edinburgh 1821), II, p. 374.
- 9 NLS, MS. 3187, f. 162, Unsigned letter, 11 September 1753, probably written by Duncan Campbell, Sheriff Substitute, to James Drummond.
- 10 This venture was the building of a tenement at 31–32 Bridge Street in 1779: Anthony Lewis, 'Additions to Descriptive List of Works and Projects by James Craig', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club (BOEC)*, New Series 5 (2002), p. 114.
- 11 Edinburgh City Archives (ECA), Burgess Roll, SL141/1/14.
- 12 GROS, OPR 685/1/31, Edinburgh Register of Marriages: they were married in the New Kirk on 1 December 1765.
- 13 NAS, CS237/D/3/20, 1774.
- 14 GROS, OPR, 685/1/32–34, Edinburgh Register of Baptisms. Drummond's four other children by Janet Lawson were also

- baptised at the New Kirk: Bland (1 November 1766); James (29 January 1768); Mary (8 February 1769); and Isobell (6 February 1773).
- 15 NAS, CS271/13106. His pursuers were James Walker, vintner in Edinburgh, and Robert Graham at Feddal. For other disputed monetary transactions throughout Drummond's career see NAS, GD178/2/14/23, CS271/2635, CS271/8570, CS271/23294, CS271/35310, CS271/73081 and CS271/73587.
- 16 See Alexander Murdoch, *The People Above: Politics and Administration in Mid-Eighteenth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh 1980), pp. 127–131.
- 17 Drummond would undoubtedly have learned from Greig about the strained relationship the Incorporated Trades had with the Council: see Alexander Heron, *The Rise and Progress of the Company of Merchants of the City of Edinburgh, 1681–1902* (Edinburgh 1903), pp. 109–111.
- 18 An account of these manoeuvres is given in [James Paterson (ed.)], *A Series of Original Portraits ... by the Late John Kay*, 2 vols (Edinburgh 1837–38), I, p. 119n, and II, p. 346. The situation was parodied by Kay in two satires, one of which has Sir Lawrence writing (in hieroglyphs) to the Devil: 'I also consign over to you all the other Deacons for placing their Millar in my Mill and I assure [*sic*] you that I will take care of the Merchant dogs so as to secure them': Iain Gordon Brown, 'John Kay's Satires on Sir Lawrence Dundas', *BOEC*, NS 3 (1994), pp. 123–130.
- 19 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 4 October 1780.
- 20 The Trades had for some time been aggrieved by the procedure that allowed the Council to vet the short-list of candidates for the role of Deacon in each Incorporation: these grievances were reflected in the pamphlet literature of the time. For details of how this worked see Alexander Pennecuik, *An Historical Account of the Blue Blanket: or Crafts-men's Banner* (Edinburgh 1722), reprinted in *An Historical Sketch of the Municipal Constitution of the City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1826).
- 21 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 8 November 1780.
- 22 Handbill in the possession of the author; not traced in contemporary newspapers.
- 23 GROS, OPR 685/1/37, Edinburgh Register of Marriages: they were married in the Old Kirk on 30 August 1780. The children of this marriage were: Thomas (baptised 7 December 1781); Margaret (16 February 1784); and Annabella (16 July 1786): GROS, OPR 685/1/37, Edinburgh Register of Baptisms. Drummond was still being described as Deacon at Thomas's baptism. Interestingly, the name 'Macgrigor' has been inserted after the original entry was written. This may have been Drummond making a statement of his origins for the first time (a bill had been introduced in the House of Commons on 29 November 1774 to repeal the acts of 1633 and 1693 that proscribed the name).
- 24 NAS, CS271/13106, Answers for Gregor Drummond to the bill of suspension offered for George Graham, 1783.
- 25 NAS, CS271/29262, Answers for James Duncan Baker in Portsburgh, 1782.
- 26 NAS, CS291/29348 and CS291/29349, 1786.
- 27 NAS, CS291/29348, Bill of suspension for Gregor Drummond, 1786.
- 28 NAS, CS271/15103, Replies for Gregor Drummond, 1786.
- 29 GROS, OPR 685/1/39, Edinburgh Register of Marriages: they were married in the High Church on 16 September 1793. James was baptised on 17 July 1794 in the High Church, witnessed by James Milligan, vintner, and Andrew Allan, fisher: GROS, OPR685/1/39, Edinburgh Register of Baptisms.
- 30 Canal Street is given as his residential address in the 1799–1800 *Directory*.
- 31 NAS, GD224/17/1/3, Earl of Dalkeith's 'Butchers Book'. The bill for June stood at £40. 14. 10, and the Earl's household's consumption of meat diminished month on month through the summer.
- 32 NAS, Abridgement of Edinburgh Sasines (1801) 8966; (1802) 9452, 9453; (1804) 10386; (1805) 11072; (1806) 11852, 12151; (1807) 12816; (1808) 13499, 13776; (1809) 14279, 14283.
- 33 *Glasgow Herald*, 14 February 1814, page 3, column A.