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BABERTON, REDHALL AND DALRY:  
AMBITION, INDISCRETION AND MISFORTUNE  
IN OLD EDINBURGH

J. JOHN BRAND AND MURIEL P. BRAND

**I**N *SURNAMES OF SCOTLAND* we read that 'the Brands of Baberton were an old family in Angus', but how or when they came to be involved with Edinburgh remains obscure.<sup>1</sup> The earliest connection of the Brand family with Baberton appears to have been in the time of James VI. The *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (1845) lists Sir John Brand of Baberton as an eminent man in the parish of Currie at that time, together with the Scotts of Malleny and the Craigs of Riccarton.<sup>2</sup> John Brand appears to have been knighted by James VI on his brief, and only, return to Scotland in 1617, as 'one of the Gentleman Pentioners (*sic*) attending the King into Scotland'.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 1. Baberton House, c.1700. (After illustration by Shiela G. Forman in 'Built by The Master of the King's Works', *Scotsman*, 21 June 1958.)

Baberton House was apparently built on the site of a former tower house, but little is known of its earlier history. In 1622 a charter was granted to Sir James Murray, Master of the King's Work, and to his spouse Catherine Weir, who began to build what became the present house (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> Alexander Brand



Fig. 2. Baberton House, contemporary photograph showing the semi-octagonal addition by the Anderson family in 1765 between the two projecting wings. (Photograph Muriel Brand 2003.)

acquired the property around 1660, and it was subsequently sold again by his grandson, some forty years later, in June 1699, to John Fairholm for £18,338 Scots.<sup>5</sup> The house was modified in 1765 when it was in the possession of the Anderson family, who added the semi-octagonal entrance, filling the courtyard between the two wings (fig. 2). Since that time, various families have held the house and in 1830 it was let for three months to Charles X of France.<sup>6</sup> Baberton House is currently used as offices by Cruden Investments Ltd.

ALEXANDER BRAND OF BABERTON AND  
REDHALL (ALIAS CASTLEBRAND)

The first key figure in the present story is therefore Alexander Brand, merchant, tailor and burghess of Edinburgh who was born about 1611, possibly in South Leith, who died in 1691 and was buried in the

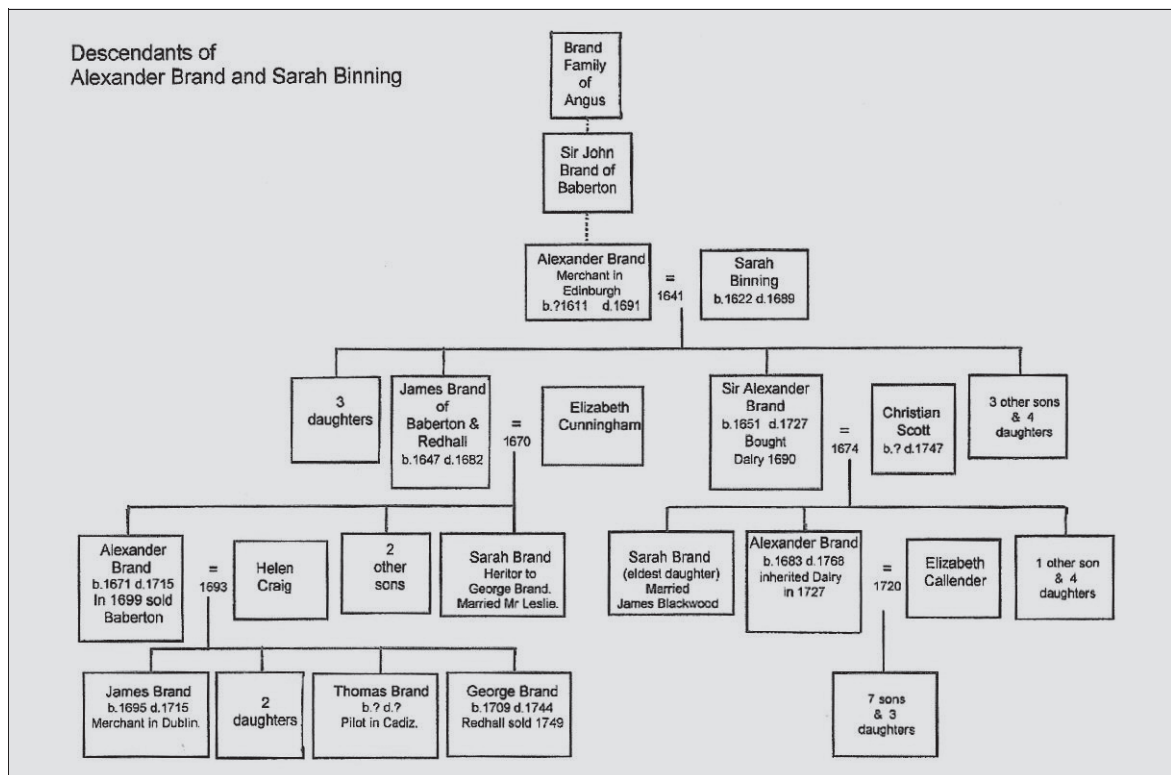


Fig. 3. Family tree of Brands of Baberton, Redhall and Dalry.

Greyfriars Kirkyard (fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> On 6 May 1641 he married Sarah Binning (or Binnie) a well connected lady, and on 24 November 1641 became burgher and guildsman by right of his wife, a daughter of Thomas Bynnie (*sic*), tailor.<sup>8</sup> Their first daughter, Jean, was baptised in June 1642, and there followed two more daughters, Sarah and Margaret, before the eldest son (and later heir) James Brand, was born in 1647. The couple produced some thirteen other children of whom the one most relevant to the present story is Alexander Brand (later of Dalry) born in 1651, about whom more follows below.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, Alexander Brand, the elder, was a prosperous and enterprising individual but, it would appear, somewhat outspoken and not the most tactful or discreet in his comments. His first serious problem seems to have arisen in 1648 when he was deprived of his burgher and guild tickets (and hence effectively of his licence to trade and his livelihood) for 'certane calumnious and falls speiches' against the Lord Provost and Bailies, accusing them of drunkenness, and he was told to 'clos up his booth

doors'.<sup>10</sup> In his defence he stated that he 'had heard the saymne spoken by divers people' (i.e. that it was common knowledge) but as he could not produce evidence of this he was deemed to be 'unworthie of any further freidome within this Burgh'. His burgher and guild tickets were therefore 'riven in his presence' and his name was deleted from 'the Guild Bookes'. Apparently his misdemeanour was to report that the Bailies had not attended to their civic duties after a prolonged drinking session with the Lord Provost on the previous day, which would really not have been surprising since they were reputed to have 'drunken twa and twentie or four and twentie pyntis of wine' on the previous night. The Provost himself had a 'soir fute' that caused him to 'keep the house' which sounds very much as though he had an attack of gout, and was trying to avoid any further trauma to an acutely inflamed toe.

The above incident led to great family hardship and his wife subsequently petitioned for restoration of the family's trading rights. However it was not until two years later, in September 1650, that

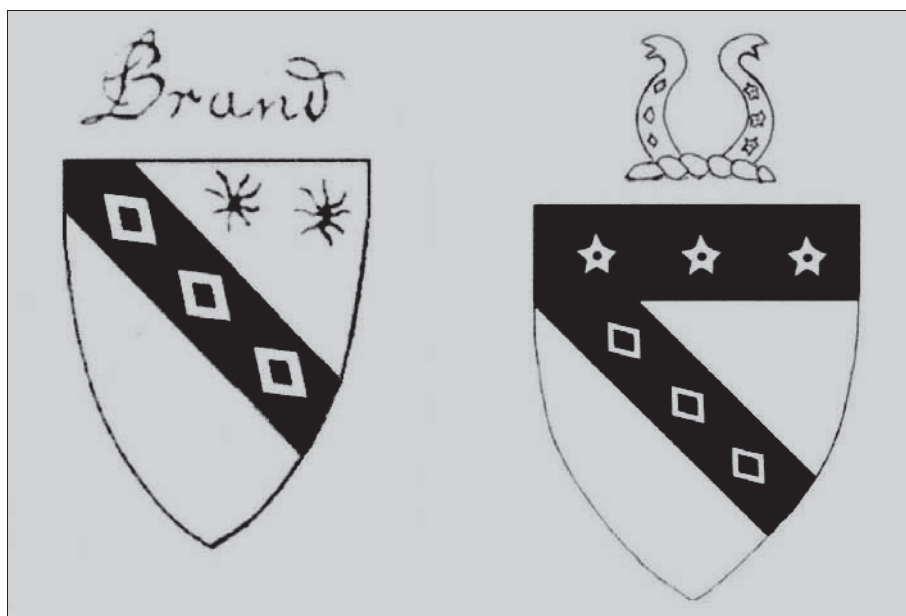


Fig. 4. Shields of Arms: (i) Brand of Scotland; (ii) Alexander Brand of Baberton, 1687. (*R. R. Stodart, Scottish Arms, 1881, vol. I, p. 101.*)

Alexander Brand appeared before the Council and presented to them, very humbly, a petition for restoration of his trading privileges, since he had 'lyen this long tyme out of these ryghts' to his great prejudice, and not until 23 March 1651 that his rights were restored.<sup>11</sup> By 1652 he was involved in the election of a new magistrate, so was obviously back in favour. The next part of the story shows that Alexander Brand was a resilient character who made an astounding recovery from this earlier set-back.

Between 1654 and 1660, there appears a series of sasines relating to lands at Baberton and Redhall.<sup>12</sup> In 1657 a translation 'in favour of Alexander Brand' was made, and a few years after this he also acquired lands at Hailes. The land titles and exchanges at this time are somewhat complex and confusing, but a fact of great and unfortunate significance to the Brand family was that the lands at Redhall and Easter Hailes were formerly owned by Lord Warriston, who sold them because he was being harassed by creditors and needed the money, but unfortunately he did not use the proceeds to settle his debts before his estates were forfeited and he was executed in 1663 on a different count. By 1667 the Brand family must have had some idea that this could cause

problems. They took steps to try to pre-empt any serious consequences for, in that year, they managed to get the acquisition of Redhall and Easter Hailes by Alexander Brand confirmed by Crown Charter.<sup>13</sup> On 4 February 1681 another charter confirmed their ownership by James Brand, the eldest son and heir (see below).<sup>14</sup> This was ratified by Act of Parliament in April 1681, so the lands should have been secure from Warriston's creditors.<sup>15</sup> However, subsequent events showed that this was not to be.

In 1670 Alexander Brand's eldest son, James, had married Elizabeth Cunningham, and in 1679 Alexander Brand, now styled 'of Baberton and Redhall' made over the whole of the lands and heritages, which also included a dwelling house on Castle Hill in Edinburgh, to James, but reserved to himself the life-rent of these properties.<sup>16</sup>

Following the acquisition of Redhall, Alexander Brand thought this property should be known as 'Castlebrand', and began to use this term.<sup>17</sup> In 1687 he registered his arms at the Lyon Office, apparently in response to an edict of 1672 requiring all arms and bearings to be registered or 'matriculated' (fig. 4).<sup>18</sup> Old Scots laws required every landowner to possess a coat of arms, and the Brand family in Angus appears to have used an earlier version in which 'étoiles' were

displayed 'in chief' with a 'vol' as the crest.<sup>19</sup> Alexander's choice of elephants' proboscides instead of a vol for his crest may seem somewhat unusual for a Scottish merchant trader, and might possibly suggest an interest in the African and Indian Trading Company, and possibly the slave trade, but this has not been confirmed.

Sarah Binning, by now referred to as Lady Baberton, died in 1689, followed two years later by her husband, Alexander. He is buried in the Balenton Tomb in Greyfriars Kirkyard.<sup>20</sup> His eldest son and successor, James Brand – the 'Young Laird' of Redhall or Castlebrand – did not enjoy his acquisition for long, and in fact had pre-deceased his father in 1682, dying at the early age of 35. He was in turn succeeded by *his* eldest son, another Alexander who, at the age of 20, became 'of Baberton and Redhall' in 1691, on the death of his grandfather. This 'Young Laird' married Helen Craig of Riccarton, the daughter of a neighbouring landowner, and was, in 1691, named as one of the heritors of Currie.<sup>21</sup> However, in the 1690s the family's financial troubles came home to roost. The earlier forfeiture of Lord Warriston's estates was rescinded and because of the legal situation at this time, this event allowed Warriston's creditors to pursue Alexander Brand, the younger, for his debts. The youthful heritor became hard-pressed financially and, in an attempt to resolve his problems, in June 1699, sold Baberton to John Fairholm. Then Wester Hailes was sold in 1702 to Robert Craig of Riccarton and Easter Hailes to Alexander Burton in 1709. This transaction was made, to use Alexander's own words, 'with the special advice and consent of Helen Craig, my Spouse, and also of Alexander Brand, Merchant in Edinburgh, my Uncle'. The sale in 1699 included 'all and hail the maner place of Babertoun, the Maines of Babertoun, the lands of Whytelaw and the tithes and vicarage of Currie' and 'the seat and seat rounge pertaining to me within the Paroch Kirk of Currie'.<sup>22</sup>

After the sale of Baberton, Alexander and Helen apparently moved to Redhall Castle which was in a somewhat dilapidated state, and had, in fact been used by Cromwell to house prisoners some fifty years earlier. Whereas all their children had, up to this point, been baptised at Currie, subsequent baptisms took place at Colinton. However, Alexander seems to have been able to join in the

duties and pursuits of a country gentleman between 1703 and 1706, and is referred to as 'Ridhall' or 'Castlebrand' and his wife as 'Lady Ridhall' by Sir John Foulis of Ravelston.<sup>23</sup> With the next generation, the Redhall dynasty apparently died out. When James, the eldest son of Alexander and Helen, merchant in Dublin, died in 1728, his sisters Elizabeth and Margaret were served as his heirs, followed later by their brother Thomas who was at that time described as a pilot of the ship *Granada* travelling to Cadiz in 1732.<sup>24</sup> The youngest son, George Brand of Redhall, born in 1709, was the last heritor, but the estate was subsequently sequestrated in 1742 and when George Brand died in 1744, the house too was put up for sale.<sup>25</sup> In the *Caledonian Mercury* of 12 September 1749 we read that 'the lands and estate of Castlebrand, alias Redhall, belonging to the deceased George Brand of Redhall and now to his creditors, are to be set up at £32,062. 9s. 8d. Scots. The Mansion House is mostly surrounded by the Water [of Leith] and has always been reckoned one of the most delightful situations in the country.' However, when it was put up for sale, it was stated that the property was so old and ruinous that it ought not to be valued, but that it should be included with the Mains for the encouragement of purchasers.<sup>26</sup> George Brand was the last male representative of the Brands of Redhall, and in 1749 Sarah Leslie, his aunt, then residing 'in London or Westminster' was described as his heir. The property was bought by a Mr John Davidson of White House, who never lived at Redhall and did not repair the old castle. He only bought the property in order to resell it to the best advantage and thus to lose as little as possible of money he had loaned to the Brands. Eventually it was sold, in 1755, to Mr George Inglis who also never lived in the old castle, but who is credited with the construction of the present house of Redhall.<sup>27</sup>

SIR ALEXANDER BRAND OF DALRY  
(ALIAS BRANDSFIELD)

A younger son of Alexander Brand and Sarah Binning, also named Alexander, was born in 1651 and lived until 1727, being later styled 'Sir Alexander Brand of Brandsfield'.<sup>28</sup> Born four years after his brother James, he, like his father, prospered as a merchant and had widespread trading interests in

Britain, the Low Countries and the Baltic. He married Christian Scott (a daughter of one of the Scotts of Bavelaw) in 1674 and of their several children six survived to adult life.

He is described as a resident in the Tolbooth Kirk Parish in the Edinburgh Poll Tax Returns of 1696, and his recorded career reveals him as an enterprising and colourful man, if not perhaps the most tactful and scrupulous in his business dealings.<sup>29</sup> He became Burgess and Guildsman by right of his father, Alexander Brand of Baberton, and was Baron Baillie of Leith in the same year.<sup>30</sup> He was a Councillor of Edinburgh in 1677 and was elected Captain of the Orange Company of the local militia, the 'Edinburgh Regiment of Ffoot' (*sic*), becoming Major in 1688, and subsequently Colonel.<sup>31</sup> In 1681 he introduced into Scotland the manufacture of stamped leather-gilt hangings which were used as wall decorations at that time (they were previously imported, and very expensive). From 1681 to 1698 he enjoyed a monopoly of these products.<sup>32</sup> There is evidence that his customers did not always pay promptly for their goods or services. In 1691 he sent a reminder to Lady Lithgow requesting payment for '2 gildet skinnes at 28 s. ye peice' and '4 gildet knoups for a bed in trew gold' which had been supplied on 14 August 1684 but not paid for, adding, 'I would not have been soe unjust to demand payment for Goods you never had from me'.<sup>33</sup> Having become Master of the Merchant Company in 1686 (his name appears on the Honours board in the entrance hall of the present Merchants' Hall in Hanover Street) he negotiated a profitable contract with them to provide hangings for the Merchants' Hall in the Cowgate in 1691.<sup>34</sup>

Another insight into his business interests is revealed when in 1691 he was entrusted with 10 Louis d'or (in gold) for the purchase of paintings in Flanders or Holland for the enhancement of Provost Dick's new mansion.<sup>35</sup> These were duly acquired and hung at Prestonfield, together with leather hangings embossed with foliage and flowers, possibly supplied by Sir Alexander himself (these may be the hangings still at Prestonfield House).

A period of civil unrest was experienced in Edinburgh in the autumn of 1688, coinciding with the landing of William of Orange in England. Alexander was sent by the Lord Chancellor on a secret mission to London because, as a merchant, he

could travel easily without arousing suspicion. In London he went to the adherents of the Prince of Orange to assure them of support, in Edinburgh, for William's accession.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 5. Dalry House as it may have appeared in the 17th century. (After a drawing by D. Small in J. Grant, *Old and New Edinburgh*, 1882, vol. II, p. 217, modified in accordance with the description by Malcolm Cant, *Gorgie and Dalry*, 1995, p. 6.)

About 1690 he acquired the house and lands of Dalry Manor from Major Chieslie and took sasine.<sup>37</sup> Following the example of his father, he promptly changed the name of the manor and lands from Dalry to Brandfield House and Brandsfield (fig. 5).<sup>38</sup> He received a knighthood – presumably in recognition of his services to the Crown – about 1690, and evidence for this is to be found in the still surviving receipt for a fee from the 'Snadoun Herald' where he is referred to as 'Sir Alexander Brand of Brandsfield'.<sup>39</sup> The new name of the house did not survive his ownership, but that of the lands did. Interestingly enough, the name persists to this day in a not very imposing and much shortened street, Brandfield Street.

A fascinating glimpse of domestic life at Brandsfield (Dalry) in 1705 is given in the diary of an English visitor, Joseph Taylor of the Inner Temple.<sup>40</sup> 'It being a pleasant walk and a fine day,' he visited Sir Alexander and noted that the gardens were very neat and 'encompast with a pretty Grove of trees' (apparently commemorated in the present

Grove Street in this area). While walking in the gardens, the gentlemen encountered Sir Alexander's daughters mending their father's breeches. This seems to have embarrassed the genteel English visitors, but not so the proud father, who introduced them to the girls. The visitors were later entertained to 'excellent Champaign and Burgundy'. The young ladies then appeared, 'dressed to the best advantage', and sang a song of Purcell's, but 'with a Scotch Tone and Pronunciation', so the English visitors had 'much ado to forbear laughing'. Sir Alexander taught them a 'Scotch health call'd Duck and Dorecth' (*sic*).

Sir Alexander's life was not without its problems for, in 1693, together with Sir Thomas Kennedy, the Provost of Edinburgh, and Sir William Binning, his uncle by marriage, he entered into a contract with the Government to supply 5000 fire-locks (muskets) at £1 each. He later stated that he had had to pay £1. 6s. for them, and with a view to obtaining the balance of £1500, he was alleged to have tried to bribe members of the Privy Council. This was discovered and he was fined £500.<sup>41</sup> In 1706 he was involved in a Process of Scandal against James Marshall, writer in Edinburgh, who called Catherine Binning (the relict of Lawrence Scott of Bavelaw and the complainant's mother-in-law) 'a witch'.<sup>42</sup> This was, of course, a very serious allegation in those times and could have had dire consequences. Prolonged litigation and hazardous enterprises brought Sir Alexander to the verge of ruin and he was forced to set up a raffle to raise money, offering his house and park as the prize. Pressed by his creditor, he made two further attempts, in 1710 and 1711, to sell the house and lands. Some of the lands were sold in 1711 to John Watson, a merchant in Edinburgh, and finally, in November 1714, a purchaser for the house and lands was found in Sir James Nicholson. Thus, Sir Alexander had owned the manor house for about a quarter of a century, and was then permitted to feu a large part of the estate.<sup>43</sup> The old house was much altered in the 18th and 19th centuries and was incorporated into a terraced tenement street in 1877 (fig. 6). Latterly a day-centre for the elderly, it has now been converted into apartments.<sup>44</sup>

He appears to have spent some part of his later years in London, and at one time had an address there – 'Exchange, off The Strand' – but was obviously still in close contact with Scotland. In

October 1724 we find him making a bond to the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in Orkney, of which he was formerly a Steward, to help maintain a schoolmaster at Kirkwall 'for teaching to read, write, arithmetick [*sic*] and the common Scots tunes sung in our churches'.<sup>45</sup> Also in later life he turned his hand to composing verse, with a volume entitled *A True Collection of Poems* to honour the birthdays of the Royal Family. This contains biographical references to his own career and business projects, and also to his professed knowledge of both Russian and Polish.<sup>46</sup>

Brand, the oldest bard in life  
Marry'd fifty years t'a wife,  
For all their languages I understand  
Before I was *Sir Alexander Brand*  
I learned to speak at Danzig and at Thorn.

In a letter from his 'fond wif' dated April 1727, he is brought up to date with family news and financial problems and she also bade him 'mek hist hame for the advanteg of your family'.<sup>47</sup> This, unfortunately, he was unable to do and he actually died in London in October 1727. His funeral was at St Martin in the Fields and the Burial Account Book shows that £3. 3s. 8d. was paid for 'prayers, candle and stone'.<sup>48</sup>

Sir Alexander was succeeded to the title of Brandsfield by his elder son, also named Alexander (1683–1768), who had been managing his father's business affairs in Edinburgh while the latter was absent in London. He seems to have spent most of



Fig. 6. Dalry House today: the second (right-hand) tower is part of an early 18th century extension. (Photograph Muriel Brand 2003.)

his life living in St Cuthbert's Parish quite near the remaining parts of the Dalry estate, at least until about 1740.<sup>49</sup> He had married Elizabeth, daughter of David Callander, writer in Edinburgh, in about 1720, and they had a large family. After the death of Sir Alexander, an advertisement in the *Caledonian Mercury* of 27 October 1729 tells us that the lands of Dalry were offered for sale, as were also the third and fourth storeys of 'a great Stone Tenement in the Castlehill', then in life rent to Christian Scott, his relict.<sup>50</sup> After this sale Alexander Junior was apparently able to pay off the family debts and remain owner of the eastern parts of the lands of

Dalry, which he subsequently feued to David Gilchrist in 1739.

Alexander was in due course served as heir to his mother, Christian Scott, who died in 1747. He is described as the 'Armigerous Bearer of these Presents' in the appropriate volume of the *Service of Heirs* and had presumably inherited and adopted the armorial bearings of his grandfather, since no new matriculation has been found. He himself died in 1768, age 85, 'of old age', and was buried in St Cuthbert's Churchyard and the burial record states that he 'lies two feet west from the back of Alexander Patterson's tomb'.<sup>51</sup>

NOTES AND REFERENCES

The research for this paper was prompted by the strong family tradition of descent from the Brands of Baberton, which was recorded in outline at least 150 years ago by John Alexander Brand (1829–1901), a solicitor at the Guildhall, City of London. Born some 60 years after the death of Alexander Brand of Brandsfield, Junior, he clearly regarded himself as armigerous, and has handed down to the present generation the tradition of use of the crest and shield of arms as registered to Alexander Brand of Baberton in 1687. His grandfather, Alexander Brand (d. 1839), was born in the early 1750s when the Edinburgh trading connection was still active. At the time of writing the exact link remains obscure. See also J. John Brand and Muriel P. Brand, 'Baberton, Redhall and Dalry', *Scottish Genealogist*, LVI, no. 1 (March 2009), pp. 18–28.

We thank the staff of the National Archives of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and the Edinburgh Central Public Library, George IV Bridge, who helped in our research.

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- 15 *Acts of Parliament*, VIII, 322, 6 September 1681.
- 16 Disposition of 21 July 1679, in Tweedie, 'Brand Family', p. 2, para 5.
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- 20 *Greyfriars Burial Ground* (note 7).
- 21 *NSAS* (note 2), p. 548.
- 22 See note 5.
- 23 See note 12. *The Account Book of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston, 1671–1707* (SHS, Edinburgh 1894), pp. 321, 331, 351.
- 24 'The Brands of Redhall', in J. Inglis, *Inglis of Auchindinny and Redhall* (Edinburgh 1914), p. 129.
- 25 He died, age 35, probably of pulmonary tuberculosis. In a letter to a creditor, Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, he apologised that his payment was 'too little, too late' because of his old trouble, 'spitting of blood': NASGD 18/5699, 1728.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 John Gifford, Colin McWilliam and David Walker, *Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh* (Harmondsworth 1984), pp. 536–537. At the time of writing Redhall House has become offices used by the City of Edinburgh.
- 28 An account of Brand was included in John Smith, 'Dalry House: Its Lands and Owners', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, 20 (1935), pp. 29–39.
- 29 NAS, Sir Alexander Brand and Family, Collected Papers, RH 15/53/21; Smith, 'Dalry House', pp. 31–32.
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- 43 Smith, 'Dalry House', pp. 33–35.
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- 46 Sir Alexander Brand of Brandsfield, *A True Collection of Poems ... (1724–27)*, British Library, 1505/98. 'Thorn' was Torun, on the Vistula, Poland.
- 47 NAS, Collected Papers, RH 15/53/5.
- 48 Westminster Central Library, London, Burial Account Book, St Martin's Church Wardens' Accounts, October 1727.
- 49 NAS, Collected Papers, RH 15/53/6, and whom we find renting a house in Castle Barns in 1723.
- 50 Smith, 'Dalry House', pp. 38–39. In 1752 Alexander's sister Sarah Blackwood is recorded trading at Brand's Land, Castle Hill south: J. Gilhooley, *A Directory of Edinburgh in 1752* (Edinburgh 1988), pp. 8, 58.
- 51 IGI, OPR, Edinburgh, St Cuthbert's Burial Records, 30 April 1768.