

# WALTER NEWALL OF DUMFRIES

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Furniture designed by architects sometimes receives more attention than it deserves. Walter Newall, however, was not an architect who turned to designing furniture in the belief that he could improve upon existing forms. Rather, he began his career as a working cabinet maker whose skill in draughtsmanship, practical intelligence and enterprising character opened the door to successful architectural practice. Newall (1780-1863) lived his entire life in and around Dumfries and his importance for the south-west of Scotland is today gaining wider recognition. The list of churches, villas, town houses and other works ascribed to him has grown considerably since a collection of around 5,000 of his drawings returned to Scotland from Canada in 1991 to be acquired by Dumfries Museum for its Archives Centre. He worked in a variety of styles including an advanced neo-Greek and until this material became available it was assumed that he had trained in London.<sup>1</sup> Newall's early career, however, was not so straightforward.

Investigation into Walter Newall's cabinet making has been prompted by the appearance in the salerooms of furniture bearing his name. Specifically, the following three pieces have been noted:

A mahogany knee hole desk bearing a paper label 'Newall, Hannah & Reid, Cabinet Makers and Upholsterers, Dumfries'.  
Sotheby's, Billingshurst, 19 January 1993, lot 72 (not illustrated).  
Present location unknown.

A mahogany bow-fronted chest of drawers bearing an identical paper label.  
Phillips, Edinburgh, 26 August 2000, lot 745.  
Christie's, London, 4 July 2002, lot 80.  
Now in the collection of Dumfries Museums. (Figure 1)

A mahogany breakfront bookcase with a brass plaque inscribed 'Newall & Reid Fecit, DUMFRIES'.  
Phillips, Edinburgh, 25 August 2001, lot 992.  
Present location unknown. (Figure 2)

There are only five designs for furniture in the Newall archive but affinities with the labelled furniture are evident. There is the corner-cut ebony stringing of the bookcase, figure 5. Such stringing appears on both the Phillips bookcase and the chest of drawers. The chest of drawers and the bookcase also share a chevron marquetry band which may be a signature of south-west Scottish cabinet work of this period. Newall's design for a clock case, figure 6, is in the typically squat west of Scotland tradition. The shading



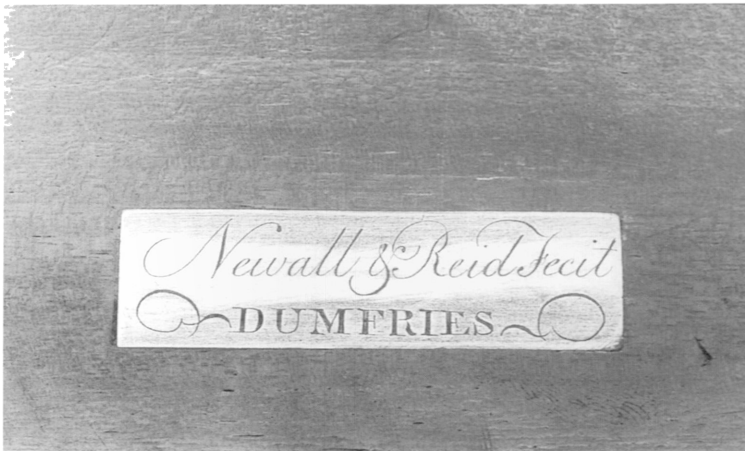
1. Mahogany chest of drawers, Newall, Hannah & Reid, 1807-14.  
*Bonhams, Edinburgh*



2. Label, inside centre drawer  
*Bonhams, Edinburgh*



3. Mahogany bookcase, Newall & Reid, 1807-14.  
*Bonhams, Edinburgh*



4. Inscribed brass plaque.  
*Bonhams, Edinburgh*



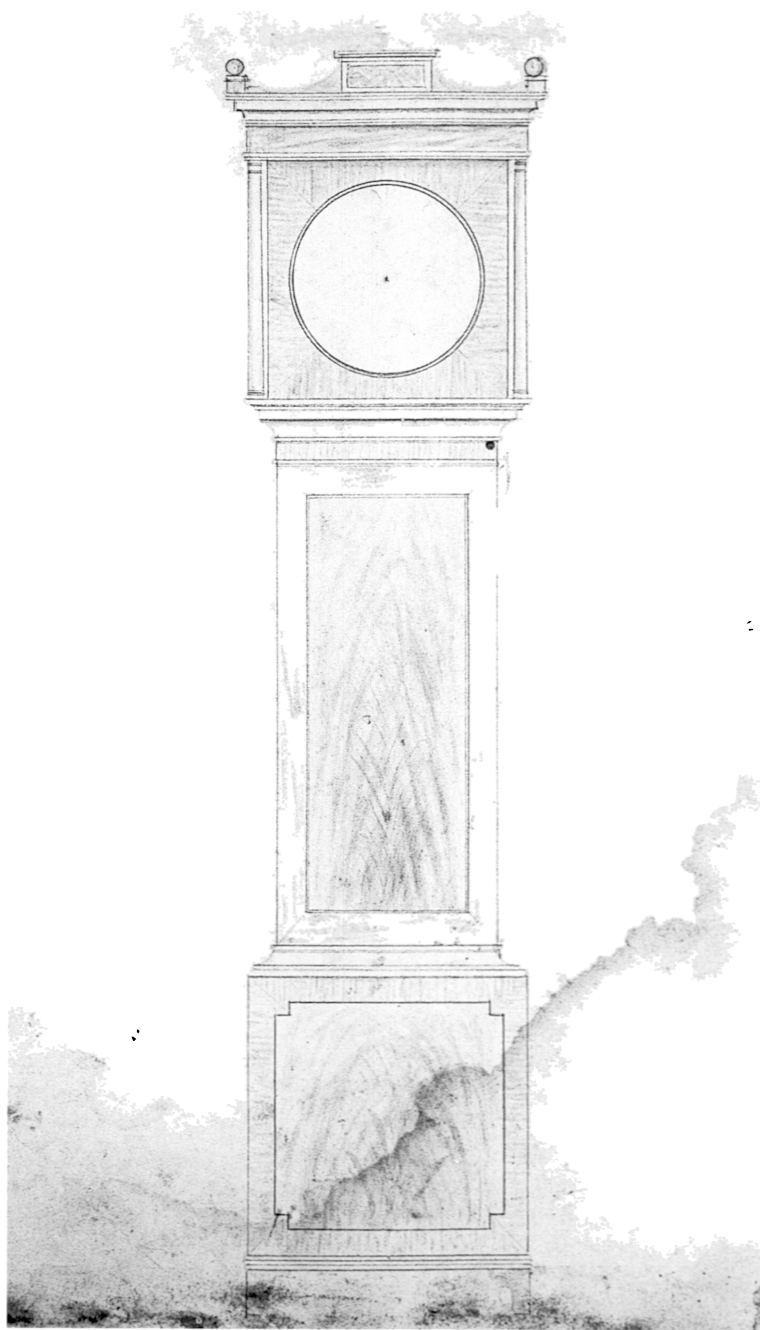
5. Design for a bookcase, Walter Newall, 1805-15.  
*Libraries, Information & Archives, Dumfries & Galloway Council.*

Newall employs in the drawings is reminiscent of that of Thomas Sheraton and it may be that he learned to draw using Sheraton's *Drawing Book* (1791-4) or *Cabinet Dictionary* (1803). Indeed, the vanishing point lines in figure 7 suggest drawing practice as much as practical design. Only one of the drawings, for a sarcophagus wine cooler, figure 8, is dated (1809) and it is presumed that the other three date from around the same time.<sup>2</sup>

Newall was born near New Abbey, 6 miles (10km) south of Dumfries, on 3 April 1780. His father, Robert, was a farmer and Walter was the third of seven sons.<sup>3</sup> We have no record of Walter's schooling or apprenticeship but on 9 December 1806 his name appears in the pages of the Dumfries Weekly Journal. On that day notice was given of the dissolution of the partnership between the cabinet makers John Hannah and John Reid. The circumstances were outlined in the following terms:

*J. Hannah from the increase of business, and a tender state of health he has been in for some years past, begs leave to inform his Friends and the Public, that he has now withdrawn himself from the principal part thereof, to a small department still in the said premises, where he plans to do a little good work to serve some of his best friends and partly to amuse himself, after carrying on the*





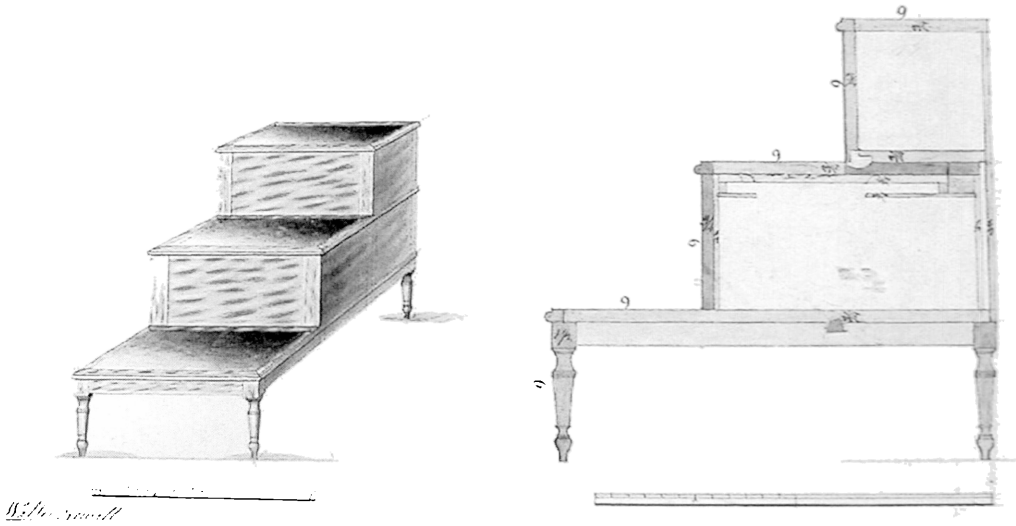
6. Design for a long-case clock, Walter Newall, 1805-15.  
*Libraries, Information & Archives, Dumfries & Galloway Council.*

*said business for nearly 26 years, during a considerable part of which he has been honoured with the principal employment of the first families in this part of the kingdom, whose friendship he will ever respect with gratitude; but now finding himself unable for the arduous task, and wishing his employers to be served to their satisfaction, he begs leave to recommend to them WALTER NEWALL, and JOHN REID his Nephew, and late Partner, in whose favour he has withdrawn, and whose abilities as workmen he is well acquainted with, being both under his direction.<sup>4</sup>*

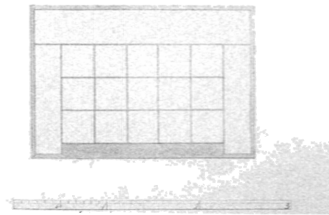
Immediately below this notice came a second short advertisement in the name of John Reid and Walter Newall. John Hannah had first brought himself to the attention of the reading public on 8 December 1789 when he announced that he had 'lately received a large assortment of JAMAICA and SPANISH MAHOGANY' together with 'a quantity of BREADNUTHEART, which is accounted the finest wood Jamaica produces, for bed-posts particularly'. In 1774 Edward Long wrote of bread-nut in his *History of Jamaica* as 'very proper for cabinet-work, and therefore valuable for export'. References to the timber, however, are exceptionally rare.<sup>5</sup> The first indication that Hannah and Reid were in partnership is an advertisement for pianos from 14 May 1805. Hannah alone had announced that he was looking for two journeymen and an apprentice on 12 May 1801. Dumfries Town Council minutes record that John Reid, cabinet maker, the son of Thomas Reid, a breeches maker, was made a burghess on 25 July 1803.<sup>6</sup>

Dumfries had seven trade incorporations including the Squaremen, or workers in wood. Walter Newall was admitted to the Squaremen on 16 December 1807 and he became a burghess of Dumfries, as a cabinet maker, on 18 July 1808.<sup>7</sup> On 19 June 1809 Newall, Hannah and Reid announced that they had 'in addition to their Manufactory in NITH PLACE, taken that Shop in the PLAINSTONES, betwixt Mr McNiel's, Baker, and Mr Waugh's, to render personal application or communications as agreeable as possible'. Their 'employers' were reminded that in addition to cabinet wares and upholstery, the sale and rental of pianos and 'MUSIC of the most fashionable exhibitions' was a speciality. The reappearance of Hannah's name in this advertisement perhaps allows us to date the bookcase in figure 2, signed only *Newall & Reid*, to between 1807 and 1809. (The use of a brass plaque for this 'signature' is curiously intrusive and may indicate that the piece was made for a close friend or relative.) In September 1811 Newall sat on an internal committee of the Squaremen to compile a *Table of reasonable wages to be paid to Journeymen*.<sup>8</sup> Nothing further is mentioned of this committee in the Squaremen's minutes which were not well kept during this period. This would appear, however, to have been one of many similar local agreements entered into through negotiation at around this time and sometimes codified in price books. Alleged improvements to the premises at Nith Place, advertised on 4 May 1812, permitted the closure of the Plainstones shop, at which time the partners had a 'large Stock of CARPETING and HEARTH RUGS' as well as 'ROOM PAPERS'. This was the last notice placed in the Journal by the firm although John Reid advertised a 'Neat Little Cottage to be let furnished' on 6 April 1813.

Newall's career appears to have begun to diversify in July 1811, when he was 31 years old. The Nith Navigation Commission employed him to supervise the execution of



7. Design for bed steps or library steps, Walter Newall, 1805-15.  
*Libraries, Information & Archives, Dumfries & Galloway Council.*



8. Design for a wine cooler, Walter Newall, 1809.  
*Libraries, Information & Archives, Dumfries & Galloway Council.*

designs by James Hollinsworth for improvements to the River Nith.<sup>9</sup> Hannah and Reid had been elected commissioners in February 1811<sup>10</sup> and they perhaps hoped to gain in some way from Newall's involvement in the project. Drawings exist in the Newall archive of the Nith improvements<sup>11</sup> and the Commission minutes report on progress in 1812 and 1813. Previously referred to in these minutes as a *cabinet maker*, in July 1813 Newall is described as an *engineer*. Shortly after however, on 31 January 1814, Newall, Hannah & Reid, 'having failed in their credit and circumstances, and being anxious to do equal justice to all their creditors', petitioned the Court of Session for Sequestration.<sup>12</sup> The cabinet maker James Creighton was elected Trustee at a meeting of the creditors and it was decided that the business should continue to employ men to work on the stock of timber and unfinished goods in order to enhance the value of those assets. An inventory was to be drawn up of the workshop premises but this has not survived and nor do the sequestration papers contain any list of debts owed to the partners. The partners' heritable property was to be 'converted into money' and the details of this were recorded by James Creighton on 14 March 1814. John Hannah was in a position to dispose of two free-standing houses and four tenements although John Reid had only his own dwelling house and Newall's name does not appear at all, presumably because he did not own any heritable property.<sup>13</sup>

The four principal creditors were the merchants John Hair (£117/18/1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>) and David Williamson (£65/11/-) and the architects Thomas Boyd (£235/4/4) and John Milligan (£60/3/7).<sup>14</sup> These men had probably lent money to the partnership either to finance expansion of the business or as part of a speculative building scheme. The following list of smaller creditors gives an indication of the extent of the firm's suppliers, including three other local cabinet makers who had perhaps sold on either small quantities of raw materials or fully finished goods. Some of the debts are in the name of Walter Newall alone but they clearly relate to the operation of the partnership as a whole and it may be that Newall was particularly involved in securing decorative manufactures from England.

John Greggan & James Creighton, cabinet makers, Dumfries.	6/-/-
Robert Kemp, cabinet maker, Dumfries.	29/8/1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
David Costine, cabinet maker, Dumfries.	10/14/9
James Charteris, turner, Dumfries.	13/-/9 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
James Paterson, ironmonger, Dumfries.	49/3/9 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
William Aitken, brassfounder, Dumfries.	15/6/6
George Haugh, whitesmith, Dumfries.	34/5/3
David McLellan, wood merchant, Maxwellton.	10/5/3
James Walker, merchant, as a partner in John Walker & Co. <sup>15</sup>	34/6/10
James & George Ray, <i>horse hair manufacturers</i> , Drayton.	38/19/4
John Laycock & Sons, <i>hair seating manufacturers</i> , Sheffield.	24/6/5
Williams, Coopers & Boyle, paper stainers, West Smithfield.	71/9/2
William Brown, carpet manufacturer, Kilmarnock.	52/15/8
Joseph Newcomb of Lea & Newcomb, Kidderminster.	34/4/-
John Shakespear & Henry Oppenheim, Commercial Road, London.	50/12/-

Joseph Beechley of William Norris & Son, Manchester.	36/16/10
William Dalton of Corry & Dalton, Liverpool.	47/19/5
James Gouldie, Liverpool.	21/3/7
Joseph Schofield, Sheffield. <sup>16</sup>	26/9/10

The appearance of English suppliers is unsurprising as coastal trade with Liverpool was often more practical than overland trade with Edinburgh or Glasgow. In the case of wallpaper in particular, there were virtually no Scottish suppliers. In 1835 the wallpaper tax brought in £135 from English manufacturers for every Pound obtained from Scottish manufacturers.<sup>17</sup>

The downfall of Newall, Hannah and Reid may have arisen from risky speculative building projects or from poor management exacerbated by Walter Newall's concentration upon the Nith project. There are indications that Newall had been eager to progress beyond cabinet making for some time. The first dated architectural design in the Newall archive was drawn in 1810 and an undated scrap of paper with writing in Newall's hand upon both sides is further evidence of the way his mind was working at around that time. The paper contains drafts for advertisements which were clearly intended for the Dumfries Weekly Journal but never placed. The complete text is as follows:

*Cabinet and Upholstery  
Architecture*

*Newall & Reid sensible of the very liberal encouragement they have oft experienced since ~~they commenced~~ commencement of Business beg leave to offer to ~~that~~ their numerous friends and the Public ~~will accept their~~ their most ~~grateful~~ that [illegible crossings out] sincere thanks for the many favours conferred upon them – Also inform them that ~~they~~ every Branch of the upholstery and Cabinet Business is carried on by them in most <sup>new</sup> fashionable and Substantial manner at their ware Room Nith place.*

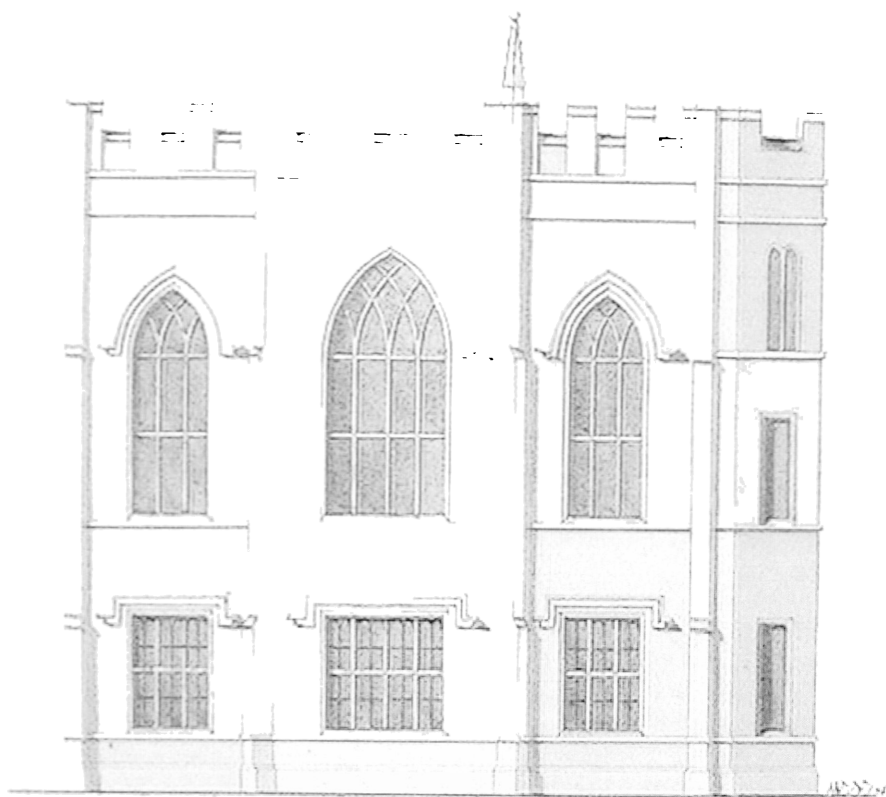
And on the reverse side:

*Architecture*

*Walter Newall induced by the urgent solicitations of many friends informs them and the Public that he ~~intend~~ will furnish Designs, Plans & Elevations of New Buildings of every description and will also undertake to Superintend the Execution of them on the most moderate terms. W. N. assures his friends & the Public that the most unrenmitting attention shall be had [illegible word] design & execution to gain a share Public patronage.<sup>18</sup>*

That Hannah's name does not appear possibly indicates that the drafts were written in around 1807 and it may be that Reid objected to a public solicitation for work which drew Newall away from the firm's business.

The demise of Newall, Hannah & Reid did not bring to an end of the career Walter Newall. The population of Dumfries grew from 7,288 in 1801 to 11,606 in 1831, an



9. Design for Buccleuch Street Church (not executed), Walter Newall, 1815.  
*Libraries, Information & Archives, Dumfries & Galloway Council.*

increase of almost 60 per cent. In 1831 the census recorded a further 3,601 people living in Maxwellton, a burgh of barony on the opposite bank of the Nith, within the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright.<sup>19</sup> There were many opportunities for speculative and commissioned buildings and Newall set out to establish himself as an architect. In 1815 he submitted an entry, figure 9, in the competition to build a church at the corner of Castle Street and Buccleuch Street in Dumfries but the commission went to T.F. Hunt of London. In June 1817 he won a similar competition to design the new church of Buittle, 3 miles (5km) south-east of Castle Douglas. His plans earned him four guineas although John Graham of Castle Douglas was contracted to carry out the building work. Newall persevered and in 1822, aged 42, he embarked on Kirkmahoe parish church, 4 miles (6½ km) north of



10. Design for Moat Brae, George Street, Dumfries (as executed), Walter Newall, 1823.  
*Libraries, Information & Archives, Dumfries & Galloway Council.*

Dumfries, where he took responsibility for everything including the design, the building work and the supply of fixtures.<sup>20</sup> 1822 was the year in which Newall's career began to gain momentum. That summer he purchased from John Clerk Maxwell of Middlebie a plot of land within the Castle Garden area to the north of the town centre. Although he did not commence building on it until 1825, he had been involved in the development of the Castle Garden site since at least 1816 when he carried out survey work for Clerk Maxwell. From around that time he also carried out building work there on behalf of John Ker, the Provost of Dumfries. In a letter to Ker of 3 June 1822, Clerk Maxwell explained that he 'let the lot go cheap' [to Newall] 'to encourage builders to speculate'.<sup>21</sup> Moat Brae, figure 10, designed by Newall in 1823 for a lawyer, Robert Threshie, was typical of the houses which he built in the area.

On 10 August 1819 the Dumfries Weekly Journal announced John Reid's death six days previously. John Hannah's demise, 'very suddenly...in the 70th year of his age', on 29 June 1822 was recorded on 2 July of that year. Walter Newall designed his funerary monument.<sup>22</sup> When on 22 September 1824 Newall, described as *architect*, was elected to the Town Council as a merchant councillor, his cabinet-making days were firmly behind him. He died on 25 December 1863 in possession of a house and farm at Craigend, New Abbey, in addition to 16 properties in Dumfries.<sup>23</sup> Involvement in property speculation by joiners and cabinet makers is a phenomenon familiar to furniture historians. It would appear that John Ker sold on Castle Garden land to Greggan & Creighton during 1822.<sup>24</sup> It was Newall's particular talent for design, however, which distinguished his buildings and led John Claudius Loudon to include in his *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Lodge & Villa Architecture* several designs by this 'most intelligent and experienced architect'.<sup>25</sup>

#### REFERENCES

1. The architectural historian Aonghus MacKechnie wrote in 1988 that *the sophistication of Newall's compositions indicates that he must have been apprenticed to a fairly up-to-date metropolitan architect*. Aonghus MacKechnie 'Walter Newall, Architect in Dumfries' in *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History Society*, vol.LXIII, 1988, p.80.
2. Figure 5: GGD 131 /B3/125; Figure 6: GGD 131 /B3/126A; Figure 7: GGD 131 /B3/127; Figure 8: GGD 131 /N12/99. The fifth drawing, only the lower half of which survives, also depicts a bookcase (GGD 131 /B3/126).
3. Newall's own notes in the archive are confirmed by parochial registers. There were also two daughters. The family were probably quietly respectable and modestly prosperous. Two of the sons died relatively young and of the remaining four, three emigrated to Canada while the other pursued a career in Glasgow.
4. All the following quotations from the four page, single sheet Dumfries Weekly Journal are referenced by date. The only complete run of the newspaper is held at the Ewart Library, Dumfries.
5. Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, 1774, vol.III, pp.837. Long compares bread-nut with pigeon-wood, also known as zebra-wood or rainbow-wood for its striped appearance. *Shrubby* pigeon-wood trees were recommended for veneers while bread-nut was distinguished for its *much larger diameter*, which corroborates Hannah's suggestion that it made good bedposts. Bread-nut is identified by modern authorities as *Brosimum alicastrum*. We are very grateful to Adam Bowett for this information.
6. Dumfries Town Council Minutes, 25 July 1803. Dumfries & Galloway Archives. The council minutes record that Andrew Hannah, cabinet maker and the son of John Hannah, cabinet maker, was made a burgess on 14 February 1815. Andrew had presumably been too young to play a role in the partnership established in 1806. He is recorded as making his essay piece in the Squaremen's minutes on 12 May 1814. (See below.) Although Reid is a common name in south-west Scotland, John Reid may have been related to the cabinet maker Thomas Reid who advertised in the Journal (19 May 1801 and 11 May 1802) and died on 27 April 1827 (death notice 1 May 1827) aged 55 (tombstone, St Michael's



- Churchyard). Thomas Reid, cabinet maker and the son of Francis Reid, merchant, was made a burges on 14 February 1815. He was a member of the Squaremen and sat on the committee to establish journeymen's wage rates in 1811.
7. Squaremen's Reckoning Book, SQ4, 16 December 1807, Ewart Library, Dumfries. Dumfries Town Council Minutes, 18 July 1808, Dumfries & Galloway Archives.
  8. Squaremen's Minute Book, SQ2, 13 September 1811, Ewart Library, Dumfries.
  9. Transcript of the Nith Navigation Commission minutes held at Dumfries & Galloway Archives, RG1/1/2A. James Hollinsworth worked as a civil engineer in both south-west Scotland and south-east England and died in 1828. Sarah Bendall, *Dictionary of Land Surveyors and Local Map Makers of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, 1997, vol.II, p.253.
  10. Meetings of the commissioners were reported in the Dumfries Weekly Journal; see 26 February 1811.
  11. GGD 131/F5/5.
  12. Petition and all documents relating to the case: CS 231/ T1/15, National Archives of Scotland.
  13. There is no mention of Reid's *Neat Little Cottage*.
  14. Hair was probably related to the George Hair listed as a ship owner and timber merchant in Pigot & Co's *National Commercial Directory of the Whole of Scotland*, 1825. Boyd (1753-1822) built the New Bridge across the Nith in 1791-4. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects*. Milligan, who was resident in Maxwellton, is not listed in Colvin; neither Milligan nor Williamson appear under Dumfries in Pigot for 1825.
  15. John Walker was a timber merchant and James Walker a shipowner (Pigot 1825).
  16. James Ray is probably the J.Ray recorded as *hair and chair seating manufacturer* of Atherstone, Warwickshire, in 1796. The village of Fenny Drayton is roughly 2 miles (3km) south-east of Atherstone. G. Beard & C. Gilbert, *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers*, London, 1986. (Hereafter cited as *DEFM*.) Lea and Newcombe were the fifth largest carpet-weaving enterprise, measured in number of looms, in Kidderminster in 1832. L.D. Smith, *Carpet Weavers and Carpet Masters: The Hand Loom Carpet Weavers of Kidderminster, 1780-1850*, Kidderminster, 1986, p.43. Henry Oppenheim is listed as a looking glass manufacturer in London directories between 1817 and 1839 at the same address (King's Street, Commercial Road) but not in connection with John Shakespear. *DEFM*. William Norris & Son were listed in Pigot's 1815 Directory of Manchester as *smallwear manufacturers* (2 Marriots Yard). William Dalton had perhaps entered into a partnership with the William Corry of Preston, a cabinet maker, joiner and builder who married a Mrs Parker of Liverpool in 1801. *DEFM*. James Gouldie is probably the cabinet maker and upholsterer of Ranelagh Street who signed the supplement to the Liverpool Cabinet Makers Book of Prices on behalf of the journeymen in 1805. *DEFM*. Joseph Schofield & Co appear in the Yorkshire County Directory of 1822 as *factors & mfrs of tableknives, razors, nails &c*.
  17. Charles Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers*, London, 1982, p.75, note 83.
  18. GGD 130 /3/17. Dumfries & Galloway Archives.
  19. *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1845. vol.IV, pp.15 & 227. The population of Maxwellton had not been published separately following the 1801 census.
  20. Buccleuch Street Church: GGD 131 /N15/50-59; Buittle Church GGD 131 /N7/7-8; Kirkmahoe Church GGD 131 /N6/11-15, N7/16-20. N8/49 & 51 and B1/80A. Dumfries & Galloway Archives.
  21. Unsorted papers in GGD 56, Dumfries & Galloway Archives.
  22. GGD 13 /N6/31 & 32, Dumfries & Galloway Archives.
  23. James Wolffe, *Walter Newall, Architect in Dumfries*, 1978, typescript in the National Monuments Record of Scotland Library (H2.NEW(P)).
  24. Clerk Maxwell reminds Ker of this in the letter quoted above (he uses the more common spelling of Crichton). James Creighton became a burges on 29 June 1790 and the National Museums of Scotland acquired a worktable by him in 1972 from a descendent of the family (accession number H.KNJ 8).
  25. John Claudius Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Lodge & Villa Architecture*, London, 1837, p.457.