

Musselburgh lady publishes extraordinary family history

Families who have lived in Musselburgh and Fisherrow have remarkable stories to tell. This is certainly the case of the Hall family, timber merchants based around Fisherrow Harbour. The posthumous publication of ***Hall Windows*** by **Lindsay Crofts** allows the story to be accessible to all. The story is narrated by Helen Hall, the spinster daughter of Alexander Hall and Ann Burn Fisherrow timber merchants, who lived at Bush House formerly on New Street. Helen lived in a flat in London Street in Edinburgh's New Town where she reminisces about the extended families and all of those who married into it, and others who came to benefit from their contact with them.

The front cover was produced by Flora McKenzie, Lindsay's niece, who now lives in New Zealand, daughter of farmers Felicity and Calum, on North Island. Helen looks out of the window into the wider world, embracing Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh's New Town, Dumfries town and Dumfriesshire, and further afield to St Kitts in the Caribbean, and perhaps most remarkable of all Sierra Leone in West Africa.

The story spans the period from the 1720s to the 1890s. In her Preface Lindsay, writing in 2020, makes it clear that "history was always a closed book to me...and then a few years ago I found the end of a piece of wool - a box of family papers - and was able to disentangle the story of an ordinary family, their ups and downs, their stars and also-rans and I finally got that history thing".

Lindsay has pieced together the dramas and disappointments of her antecedents revealed in letters and documents expanding to take in the impact of global events. Through Helen Hall's narration, we learn of connections across Scotland and the world. There were timber traders in Fisherrow who joined forces through the marriage of Helen's brother Bob to Ann Mitchell, the daughter of their former rivals the Mitchells. Two generations before Ann's grandfather, a peripatetic Exciseman took, a posting in Dumfries where he trained Robert Burns, who in turn wrote a poem in thanks to him. Even further back, John Anderson, an Episcopal priest trained in Aberdeen ended up marrying a sugar planter heiress in St Kitts and made a bequest which is still paid to Lindsay's elder brother, albeit a miniscule amount. Helen's uncle and family moved to Edinburgh and became merchants and civic leaders. Most extraordinary was the marriage of her sister Charlotte to a mixed-race son of a Dumfriesshire sugar planter and his maid. He trained as a doctor in Edinburgh and subsequently became Surgeon General and Governor General of Sierra Leone.

Opening a window into each member of the family's life, Lindsay Crofts has created a family history with a difference. No wonder the subtitle of the book is *The Life and times of an Extraordinary Scots Family*.

Lindsay Crofts was the daughter of Donald Manson and Isabel Hall was born in Musselburgh and lived there most of her life. Hence the connection to the Hall family was on her mother's side. She was educated at Musselburgh Grammar where she became Head Girl. She studies for a Bachelor of education degree at Edinburgh University and taught briefly at her old school. She spent the rest of her career in what is now called the Scottish Government, specialising in housing and homelessness. She also held senior administrative positions as Private Secretary to the Head of the Scottish Development Department, as Secretary to the top Management Group, an on secondment as Personal Assistant to the Chair and Chief Executive of Scottish Natural Heritage. Sadly, she died in March 2021 after a long battle secondary breast cancer.

Produced by Birlinn and being privately marketed by the author's widower, it is available on payment of a donation of at least £10 to the outstanding charity, Mary's Meals <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/RogerCrofts>. Copies can be obtained from Roger Crofts 07803 595267, roger.dodin@btinternet.com.



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HALL WINDOWS

*The Life and Times of an
Extraordinary Scots Family*

Lindsay Crofts