

I.

SOME NOTES ON THE ACCOUNT-BOOK OF DAME MAGDALEN NICHOLSON, WIDOW OF SIR GILBERT ELLIOT, FIRST BARONET OF STOBS, 1671-1693. BY ALEXANDER O. CURLE, F.S.A. Scot.

Sir Gilbert Elliot married as his second wife, about the year 1661, Magdalen Nicholson, daughter of Sir John Nicholson of Lasswade, of the family from whom Nicholson Street in this city takes its name. On his death, which occurred about the year 1681, he left surviving him his widow and four children: William, only surviving son by his first wife, who succeeded to Stobs and the baronetcy; Gilbert, another William, and a daughter Magdalen, who married Sir Robert Pringle of Stichel in 1688, by his second spouse. In the year 1659 he had purchased from his brother-in-law, Lord Cranstoun, a considerable estate in the south of Roxburghshire, in the valley of the Rule, comprising the properties of Woolie (now Wolflee), Wolfhopelee, Maksydshaw, Catley, Catleyshaw, and Stonedge, in which property his widow was by her marriage-contract liferented, and to it she retired after his death, taking up her residence in the first instance at Woolie. Like so many housekeepers at that period, when money was so scarce, she kept a more or less accurate account of her expenditure, employing for this purpose a small volume bound in parchment, in size $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 3 inches, now in my possession. Previously, but for only a short period, this journal had been used by someone else, perhaps the laird himself, and there are three distinct handwritings in it, but the identity of Magdalen Nicholson's is fully established by comparing a receipt in her own name, one of the last entries in the book, with her signature attached to a trust-deed which she executed for behoof of her creditors in 1690. I see no reason why we should not accept this as a typical country gentleman's establishment in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The family had owned Stobs for a hundred years,

were well connected, and though in good circumstances for those days, were not wealthy. The estate from which the widow drew her liferent is still largely hill land, the lowest part at an elevation of 500 to 600 feet above sea-level, and at that date the rental must have been small. Money was by no means plentiful, as the numerous payments in kind—oats to the shearers and the webster, draught ewes in part payment to the man that pointed the house—and the manner in which the servants received their wages by irregular instalments to account of arrears fully testify; but notwithstanding, the household enjoyed a standard of comfort higher, I think, than has been allotted to people of their class in some descriptions of the social condition of the people about this period. When the accounts were kept in the country it is not easy to tell what was supplied for the table, as the produce of the farm and garden must have largely sufficed; but as the widow apparently spent a part of the winter in Edinburgh, the blanks may be filled in from the accounts kept for these months in town.

The volume commences with “an account of drinkmoney given out in the year 1671”: thus the heading, but in reality it covers the expenditure for two years. This shows to what an extent the family visited, to whom they gave gratuities, and what sums they gave. They moved about considerably, apparently twenty-two visits being paid in the first year—frequently to Craigmillar and Niddrie, several times to Cockpen, also to Darnhall, and Dryden, at all which places there resided relatives of the Nicholson family. From the number of visits paid in the vicinity of Edinburgh it is possible that the baronet had a town-house. The nurses were most frequently “tipped,” from which we may infer that there were children in the party, and the sums which they received varied from £1 9s. Scots to £5 12s.,¹ £2 18s. being the most usual amount. Sums are entered as being “left” at the various houses—£2 18s., £5 12s., or £5 16s. usually.

¹ Except where otherwise stated, all sums of money throughout this article are given in Scots currency.

On two occasions something is given to the gardener, and once a footman received 13s. 4d. The "Seddans men" get £5 12s. for their services, but whether for one or more occasions it does not relate. The amount of the visits for the first year was £169 5s., and the total for the two years amounted to £255 15s. 10d.—no inconsiderable sum in those days.

And now we turn the page and come to another instructive entry, "The number of ye books that was in ye lady's stodi when I furs saw it 3 day of November 1680." Fourteen volumes in all, and a dull collection for a country-house library, or at least for a lady's boudoir, as perhaps the "stodi" was. There is nothing to indicate where this was at—perhaps Woolie.

1. The Annals of ye Old and New Testament.
2. Josephus of the Antiquities.
3. The historie of ye civill wares.
(*"The history of the civill wares of France,"* by H. C. Davilla, translated by Sir C. Cottrell and William Aylesbury. London, 1647-48; folio, 2 parts.)
4. Mr Dee on Spirits. (A well-known work, published in 1659.)
5. Ye historie of ye Reformation in Scotland. (Knox's "History": probably the folio of 1644.)
6. Mr Durham on ye Revelations.
(*"Commentary on Revelations,"* by James Durham, of Glasgow; published in Amsterdam; folio, 1660.)
7. A devin historie on tou Damsels.
(I have been unable to identify this, but the cacography suggests a manuscript work.)
8. An exposition of the laws of Moses.
9. The second part of ye marrow of ecclesiastical history.
(The proper title of this work is "The Marrow of Modern Divinity, the second part; whereunto is added the difference betwixt the law and the gospel. By E. F., author of the first part." London, 1649; 8vo. The author's name was Edward Fisher, and he published the first part in 1645.)
10. Papismus Lucifugus.
(The full title of this work is "Papismus Lucifugus, or a faithful copie of the papers exchanged between Mr John Menzies, Professor of Divinity in the Marischal College, Aberdeen, and Mr Frances

Dempster, Jesuit, otherwise surnamed Rin or Logan"—by John Menzies; printed in Aberdeen in 1668.)

Philip Communes.

3 littill preiching bouks of writ and littill Phisik bouk.¹

The laird was taken seriously ill towards the close of the year 1680, and in December and the early months of the succeeding year ran up a large account with George "Stirlin" for drugs, etc., the prices of which, unfortunately, are not given. As a sample we may take the 20th of December, which runs thus:—

"Item a plaister for ye back
 Mor a plaister for stomackik
 Mor 3 Noduls for Brothes
 Mor a bagg for whit wyne
 Mor the stomackik electuari
 Mor the strengthing opiat
 Al ther cam in on day."

He had further "plaister" for various parts of his body, drugs with curious names, "apozzeme," "immulsions," "cooling siddis," "gargarisms," etc. He was bled, of course, and received more than one "big glas of serrup for the host." The account closes on 19th April 1681, but whether he recovered or succumbed to the treatment or the disease there is nothing to show. His name, however, no more appears in the pages of the journal.

The accounts are very irregularly kept, at first being more of the nature of memoranda; and not until January 1687 did Magdalen Nicholson employ the volume for her daily use, and from that date till January 1693 the accounting is more or less continuous. For a portion of that period she farmed Woolie, and collected the rents from the other farms on the estate. We thus get a glimpse of rural life in the district, as well as an insight into the household economy. In the first place, therefore, I shall draw attention to entries of interest connected with the farming and outdoor life generally, and treat of the housekeeping

¹ I am indebted to Mr Edmond, Librarian of the Signet Library, for kindly assisting me to identify these books.

later on. The live stock on the farm consisted of sheep, cows, and a few cattle, and we read of trafficking with the sheep under the still familiar names of hogs, widders, and dinmonts. The prices are all stated in Scots currency, and it is remarkable how nearly the purchasing power of the pound Scots then approximated to that of the pound sterling at the present date.

“24 Juin—year '90

“Received from Adam Nicol tenant of ye Owliy 48.00.00 for ceb (*i.e.* sib) yous he got 28 yous and should give 46 shillings for ye pis of them”

“the furs of July '90

“I sold to Jams trumbl 10 tups 7 of them at 3 p. and 3 at 4 shilin but I shuld give him bak of it—I have received 18 pond of the tupis”

“the furst of July '90

“Sold to John Mer 44 dimont and gemur and 8 pond sterling to be pay at redmes.”¹

“Oct, 13 day '91

“I caus sel my son's drought lamas alevin of them ther was gotin for them two shilin a pis it comes to 13p. 4s.”

Twenty pounds was given to James “tromble” for a cow, and a “stot” sold at Chester fair realised £16 9s. “13 Sept. 1692 To John Robsin for gresin of 7 yong bist a sumber and 2 oxin a month 10.14.0.”

“24 Aprill, 92 Counting w^t my son he told me that he had got from Adam Nickl 20 yows and lams at 6 and 6 pinc the pis which maks 8.0.0.” This seems to have been a payment to account of rent. On the arable land grew crops of oats, bear, and peas. “May 1692 ther was a stak cosin of oats ther is in it of good oats 4 bouls a half and of hors corin 6 halves and of pis 9 mell half piks”

“ther pis was onder ye oats.”

The following entries illustrate the price of grain :—

“24 of Nov. My son got from Walter Alton 12 bouls oats corin and stra at 7p and 5 shilin ye boul coms to 87.0. Mor my son got from hem 10 bouls at 9p. ye boul corin and stra it comes to 90

“Mor 6 furlets of ot 00 9

“Mor 26 threv of straw at 6 shin ye threv 4.16.”

¹ Roodmas, 14th September O.S.

Harvest was not late in 1690.

"August 13 1690—I began to sher ye barin craft abut 11 o'clock ther was Gordi Bar and his wife—also Miler's son James and his sister Margit—also a wife called hieton—they sher 17 threv and 7 chivis

"Friday 15 there was besid of eberis y^t sher a wansd, ther was Archbald F & Mammy they sher out ye barin croft ther is of chefs 44

"16 Sette. there is bot Gordi Ba and his wife

"18^{ma}. they sher out ye coufold and there was 21 threfs and a stuk and 5 chifs—Gordi Ba and his wife shir y^t day also

"19th they (sher) ye fatland oats and sher 33 threvs gordi ba and his wife, ourself and 4 out of Stonaleg

"Wansday August 20 year 90 they sher out ye eister cowfald ther was 19 thrives and a stouk

"I have sold the crop to Adam Nicol for 800 marks."

There were thus four fields in crop—the barn croft, the cowfold, the fatland, and the eister cowfold; they produced 185 stooks of 12 sheaves each and 9 odd sheaves, estimating the threave at 24 sheaves, or 2 stooks; of the value of 800 merks. These fields were probably inclosures of small area. "21 Ap. 1691 John fish for mindin ye park diks 4.7.0. he wants 5/ he wrought 17 days." This implies a considerable amount of enclosure, as it took nearly three weeks of working days to mend the dykes alone. The haymaking was commenced on 14th July '91, and on 24th Sept. George Lorain and another man were completely paid "for 28 dayis moing to urself and 2 days ye kerk yard." Adam Morris for 15 days he "cut down hay" got six pounds. Seed oats were bought in February and cost 4s. 6d. the boll. Corn being scarce, rents were paid in services and in kind as well as money. Of services, the carriage of coals from the coal heughs is the only one recorded here. This was done on horses' or ponies' backs, and was undertaken at midsummer, when the long summer days and dry roads allowed the journey to "Etal" or "the Merse" (some thirty odd miles distant) and back to be performed under the easiest conditions and in the shortest time. "Jun 20 day I trow year 91 ther cam from ye Mers 5 lod of coals out of tindall."

“Thursday July 2 day -91
 “Stanleg brought coals as fals—
 “Nans Scot tenant there lad in 5 bag of Eitl coal
 “John Mer tenant ther lad in 4 bag of Eitl coal.”

In July 1692 of “small and great” coal the tenants brought 47 loads in all.

Cheese, a commodity no longer made in the district, figures largely in the rents.

“22 of August 1692 I received 6 ston of chis and 12 pon ther was 7 chis—ther was also another chis got in befor what wight it was I kno not I her it was 13p.

“6 Supt. 92 I received 4 ston of chis and 3 quarters ther was 6 chisis. Octobr 11 I got 2 chis and ther was a sto and 4 p. wigh. Oct. 12d^r I got 35 chisis and they weightet 20 ston

“Adam Nicol hes payed hes ken al bot 3 ston and 3 pond 13 Oct.”

Total, 51 cheeses; and as there is no note of the sale of any of them, it seems probable they were all consumed in the household.

Here is an agreement for the let of Woolie :—

“Aprill 26—year 90

“Agreed w^t Andr^w trowmbull for ye Mell of Owlliy from Whetsunday '90 to Whetsunday '91 he should give me 100p-20 & 18 kin fuls. he shuld have 2 kay & a hors hes kay shuld be cped among ye tenants & hes hors should go a nonder yt bres.”¹

The tenants' cows were pastured in common. I do not find any receipts for kain fowls, though they were part of the rents; perhaps they were not considered of sufficient consequence.

Much is said of the lack of growing timber in Scotland at this period, so I think it is worthy of note that, though there are frequent entries for the purchase of nails, no wood was bought, and, on the other hand, four trees were sold to a “beliy in hawik” for £5 2s.

Of miscellaneous employment mentioned, there was the casting of turf at 4s. the day, the pulling of turfs of heather wherewith to thatch the stable roof, and the hewing of broom. In July '91 John Fish “the

¹ ? in under that price.

diker" was paid for "poting on a cep w^t thorins on ye park 6 days." This was probably laying a cope of thorns on the "fail" or turf dyke surrounding the park, serving much the purpose of barbed wire in the present day.

For sport, as we now understand the term, there was little place in the lives of the country folk of those days, and game was secured at any season and by any means possible, to supplement and vary the limited food supply. In April 1690 "puder and lid to shut" was bought for 10s., and a few months later, no doubt preparatory to the run of salmon which takes place in all the Border streams in the autumn, nine pounds were given for a net to fish with—"a man abune Hawick made it." Before the death of the laird, John Ramsay "the fowler" received considerable payments, probably for game supplied, on 13th June 1673, £30, and on 16th August following, £15. On 7th May 1675, £3 was paid to "the fisher." Partridges and moorfowl, which latter would include both grouse and black game, were frequently bought, as also wildfowl, *i.e.* waterfowl. For rabbits £1 16s. was paid for three couple, and a lass who brought a leg of venison received for "drink-money" 4s. Hares or pheasants are never mentioned. Game was chiefly procurable during the spring and early summer, which shows that the pot-hunter was most successful when the severe weather made the birds more easily snared, or their domestic concerns preoccupying their thoughts, found them a readier prey to his hagbut. There was a garden, for which seeds and plants were regularly procured, but, with the solitary exception of a "bid of likes" (presumably a bed of leeks), no names of either are given. The gardener, James Turnbull, was also to some extent a raiser of stock, for he sold to his mistress four wethers in August 1691, and received for them fourteen pounds—a good price—and later on received from her twenty pounds for a cow. Apples were grown, and the surplus supply sold "Monday 13th Oct. '91. The fear of Chester was & I got for Apl's 2p. 0. 8."

The payments to servants appear at irregular intervals, and sometimes for a year or two these items are entirely omitted; it is thus impossible

to state accurately what number of servants were employed on the farm or in the house. There was "James Partis" (Porteous), apparently a steward or head man, whose wages amounted to 35 pounds, besides his "bountith shun" which cost £1 4s. the pair. "Robie Rig his year's fi' and all he culd crev 12 pounds." Janet Turnbull, the byre woman, for a year's fee and bountith shoes received £10 14s. Marion Armstrong, the cook, was paid at the rate of 20 pounds a year. The reason why ten shillings for a silver spoon were kept out of Mary Porteous's wage we can only surmise. The wages of the footman do not appear, but he received £1 16s. for a coat, and a pair of pumps for him cost £1 4s. Each servant received one or more pairs of shoes during the year, and the wages were further supplemented by payment of drinkmoney. There is no mention of the "scog's" wages, but she received her shoes, as also did the lass cowherd and sundry poor folk. The servants' wages were frequently in arrear, and were constantly being paid by instalments to account.

I shall now turn to the housekeeping accounts. In the first place it is worthy of note that all the bread was not baked at home, as is sometimes supposed. "3 Jany '88 To Tam Anslly baxter in Jedburgh for 7 doson of brid hal got thrie months befor 9 . 0 . 0." Besides ordinary bread they purchased rolls when in Edinburgh, and sometimes short-bread. "Oct. 16 '90 Mor a pek of flur bikin short brid and butter to it 1 . 4 . 0," and there is more than one entry for a "kek." Even when at home butter was bought, both fresh and salt, the former at 6s. the pound, the latter at 5s. An entry on 9 April '89 is curious. "Item for 2p. botter 11s. and 2p. of boter ful¹ boter 9 . 6 in all 1 . 0 . 6." Eggs are bought in large quantities throughout the year at a regular price of 1s. 4d. the doz. "Midden" fowls cost 4s. apiece; capons 6s., ducks during the autumn, frequent fare, 3s. 4d. each; and geese £2 16s. for half-a-dozen, which were probably alive. The supply of fish is varied — herrings in small quantities for immediate use,

¹ Foul butter for lubricating is mentioned in Foulis of Ravelstone's Account-Book, published by the Scottish History Society.

and by the hundred apparently for laying in salt; haddocks in the country, so probably smoked; salmon frequently; trout, turbot, and whittings, and oysters occasionally by the hundred. Once only "2 lapsters 6/8," and similarly a pint of mussels.

Ale, not yet supplanted by tea, was the customary beverage at all meals. It appears daily in the accounts when the widow was in Edinburgh, but as she brewed at home, never when there. For its manufacture malt and balm (*i.e.* yeast) were frequently purchased, and on a few occasions small quantities of hops. On 11th June '90 appears an entry, "sent to englon for a pond of hops 12/." In September '91 hops cost 4s. per pound, but on 27th February 1681, 4 lbs cost £2 4s. Much of the ale was bottled, as is evidenced by the purchases of corks and bottles; once only is there an entry for "tipe yeal," presumably tap, or draught ale.

When I understand the family to have been residing in the country, a chapin of brandy or sack, usually the former, was got in twice or thrice a month, the brandy costing 14s. and the sack 18s. the chapin. At rare intervals claret appears, also cannell water (*i.e.* cinnamon water) and sugar drink. Of meat, besides the fowls of various sorts, domesticated and wild, there was beef and mutton in various forms, also veal and bacon. Of fruits there were "oringers and limons," costing £1 16s. the 2 dozen in February 1681, and the former in May £1 10s. a dozen. Apples in the month of February cost £1 16s. for 7 dozen; pears 7s. the hundred in August.¹ "Chris and Nipsis" in July I take to mean cherries and turnips, the latter said to have been used as a table fruit; "gousberis" appear at the end of that month, and on the same occasion 2s. worth of "gilliflours." "A honder chistons²" in December cost 7s. Twelve dozen of "geges" bought in April must surely have been dried plums. There were also raisins, currants, and plumdamas. Of vegetables there were "spenich," onions, peas, and carrots.

¹ Perhaps the Lammas pear or the "green pear of Yair," both of which old Scotch pears ripen early in August.

² *i.e.* Chestnuts.

To illustrate the fare I shall give here a week's account when in Edinburgh—December -91.

11 Thors. I(tem) for motton bris and bak ribs	£0 8 0
Mor a dis of collops	0 9 0
Mor half a honder chistons	0 7 0
Mor for brid—ot (oat) brid	0 3 4
Mor for 3 chapin of yeal	0 3 0
Mor for herin and milk	0 1 0
(Friday) I give for 2 fuls (fowls)	0 13 6
Mor osters and spis and brid to et them	0 3 10
Mor for a p. of resons and a p. of plum ^d	0 10 0
Mor for 2 brid and a forpit salt	0 7 0
Mor for 3 chapins of yeal	0 3 0
12 Set ^d . I. for a leg of motin	0 10 0
Mor for a pis of bef	0 6 0
Mor a per of kinins ¹	0 12 0
Mor half a p. of pudder suker	0 4 6
Mor a pund of barley	0 2 0
Mor a pint and a muchkin	0 2 6
13 Sond. I. for a quar yeal and broth and puir	0 8 0
Mor a p. of milk and winiker muster	0 3 4
14 Mon. I. for half a honder osters	0 12 2
Mor 2 lod of cols	0 10 6
Mor a lof and ot brid and broth	0 7 0
Mor a quart of yeal	0 8 0
Mor a po. of candl.	0 3 6
15 Tus. I. for a per of rabets	0 9 0
Mor a chap of win	0 18 0
Mor a quart of yell	0 4 0
Mor for 2 lapsters	0 6 8
16 W. I. for osters and winiker brandi and spis	0 6 0
Mor yeal 3 ps and tipe yeal	0 4 6
Mor a leg of motin and ot brid	0 12 0
Mor 4 lod of cols	1 12 0

This is by no means either a poor or uninteresting dietary.

An item which figures frequently in the accounts is tobacco, the price of which is never twice the same, varying from 8s. to 12s. per pound.

¹ Kinins—conyngs—rabbits.

There are two entries which are obscure. One on 11th March 1690 for "toubak stiks" costing only 4s. the pound, and the other in April of the previous year for "2 pounds of toubak for stiks 18/." This may have been for roll or bar tobacco, in which case the "for stiks" in the second entry is merely explanatory of the kind of tobacco, and not to signify the use to which it was to be put. Pipes were purchased by the gross at 18s.

For household utensils entries appear but seldom. An egg plate cost £2 18s.; a mustard dish £1; a pewter plate bought at the Rood fair £1 8s.; "loughlighis" (? luggies) 2s. each; cogies and a bread grater, the silver spoon, the value of which was kept out of Mary Porteous's wages, and glasses bought in Newcastle almost complete the list. There is little mention of furnishings: the wrights made three tables; the old settle was put in order; straw was bought for a mat; and the "aris" hangings were scoured by Christian "Pasli" the wauker. There are numerous references to articles of dress, "ferrintin ribons," "pettice of crep," "pinners,"¹ "alamod," "perssion," muslin and calico. Stockings were frequently bought, and sometimes given in charity along with shoes. A napkin was bought for the widow's son William. Two stikit (*i.e.* embroidered) nightcaps cost £2 8s., and "a skin for puches" 5s. Pattens were rather more expensive than shoes, at £1 8s. the pair. The lady's gown, bought at the time of her daughter's wedding to the laird of Stichel, cost £30—an expensive robe. In July 1690, for reasons which are not stated, there was a sudden outburst of extravagance in clothes. "To John Trombl for furnissin and makin of a cot, 6.12.0. Mor 6 ell of pledin to lin a gown to Gilbert, 2.8.0. Mor for 8 ell of flurd (flowered) stuff to be the gown 23.4.0. Mor to Mrs friser Murray for a wiscot to Wilam ye stof I min 16.16/." Gloves are a frequent item of expenditure, alike for the dame, her sons and her daughter. The webster attended at the house and wove the yarns into broadcloth, gray, and plaiding; the wauker fullled the kelt, the harden, and the blankets; and the tailor, on his rounds, stayed for a

¹ Caps with lappets, worn by women of quality.

season and fashioned the cloths into garments. The latter was paid by contract. "The 20 September agreed with barnne falconer for a wholl yeer coming to show all my work ten pond in the year."

There is frequent mention of the employment of the services of a "slitter" (slater), which shows that thatching was by no means universal in the district.

There are a number of entries of a miscellaneous nature. The youngest son, William, was still being educated; a grammar and a French book were bought for him, and he had a French master. "The king's spich" cost eightpence, bought in February 1690—I suppose a declaration of policy by William of Orange. The cost of a link and a boy to bear it was 5s. I may mention that these were cleanly folk and bought soap regularly, an item the omission of which has been noted in the accounts of at least one other family at this period. Finally, the indifferent writing and spelling, the abbreviations following no manner of rule, make the MS. in places extremely difficult, sometimes impossible to decipher; but as it was not written for our edification, it is perhaps ungracious to cavil at its shortcomings.