

*Wife who knew the woman interested in the Ferguson Family
was the newspaper notice about Miss Ferguson's
'good society' in Belfast and enjoyed considerable social standing. This boded well for
continuing research.*

According to Landed Gentry Thomas Ferguson died on January 7th 1859 but the exact place of demise was not given. In searching the index to Calendars of Wills and Administrations granted in Ireland in that year I located a reference to the probaton of his will. This allowed me to locate an original copy of the document which contained a wealth of genealogical information. By 1859 Thomas had left Belfast and had settled in Kelston House, Ryde, Isle of Wight. The will, which runs to 27 folios, mentions his son John Stephenson Ferguson II, and another son, Thomas, as well as seven daughters. References also occur to his brothers John Francis Ferguson, Deputy Lieutenant of Co Antrim, who resided in Donegall Place, Belfast, where he died in 1879, and Lieutenant Colonel George Ferguson a resident of Paris. Neither John Francis nor George are listed in Burke's pedigree.

It would appear that Thomas Ferguson had realised most of his business interests in Ulster at about the same time as he settled in England for the value of the Irish portion of his estate was only £1,325.10.0. To give some idea of his financial standing one should perhaps point out that after settling the majority of his estate on his eldest son John Stephenson Ferguson II he left his other son, Thomas, £10,000 and each of his seven daughters the sum of £3,000. Although Thomas was not the last of Miss Ferguson's direct ancestors to have a connection with Belfast, since his son, her great grand-father, John Stephenson Ferguson II was born there, he was the last to have a major involvement with the City. Accordingly, since this article is specifically concerned with the Fergusons of Belfast we shall only trace the pedigree from Thomas (1795-1859) retrospectively.

I had already ascertained from the announcement of his marriage in the *Belfast Newsletter*, that Thomas Ferguson's father John Stephenson Ferguson I (1761-1833) was a resident of Belfast in 1827 and since he died in 1837, according to Burke's, I hoped to locate a reference to his death announced in the same newspaper. The entries for 1837 were examined without success but I did locate a reference to the death of his wife Eleanor which stated that he had predeceased her. Evidently the Landed Gentry pedigree had given her date of death as that of her husband.

Died 29th inst 9 March 1837 at her house in Donegall Place, in her 70th year.
Eleanor, relict of the late John Stephenson Ferguson Esq.
This entry also allowed me to project Eleanor's year of birth as 1768 thereby adding another detail to the known ancestry.

Since I had established that Eleanor Ferguson had died in Belfast it seemed only reasonable to assume that she had been buried in the same city. As the most fashionable burial ground in Belfast at that time was Clifton Street I decided at search the gravestone inscriptions for that cemetery which have been published in part by the North Belfast Historical Society. I was very fortunate and located an inscription which confirmed Eleanor's date of death and provided others for her husband, John Stephenson Ferguson I, March 3, 1833, and sons Lieutenant George, April 30th 1878 75 years, and

2. Will of Thomas Ferguson, 1859, PRONI LPC 1356.

ms. 21490w/ledger

THE FERGUSONS OF BELFAST:
A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE ANCESTRY OF
H.R.H. THE DUCHESS OF YORK
1st gives in

By The Mac Carthy Mor, G.C.L.J., G.C.S.J., K.H.C.J., K.M.L.J., M.A.

Since the official announcement of the engagement and subsequent marriage of Miss Sarah Ferguson and H.R.H. Prince Andrew the National Press has given considerable coverage to the lady's various notable distaff descents but almost totally ignored her nomnominal ancestry. Whilst without any doubt the general public are interested in Miss Ferguson's more aristocratical descents from a purely genealogical standpoint her male line ancestry, while not so exalted, is of great local interest. Unfortunately the pedigree as presently given in Burke's Landed Gentry is misleading and certainly implies that the Fergusons were of Southern-Irish extraction. This is not the case and, as I hope to demonstrate, the family was settled in Belfast for a period of some two centuries during which it participated in almost every aspect of the religious, political, and cultural life of the city.

Burke's Landed Gentry begin their account of the Fergusons' pedigree with James Ferguson, the great-great-great-great grandfather of the Duchess, who is stated to have married in Dundalk in 1761, Miss Jane Stephenson of Killyfaddy, Co Antrim by whom he left issue on his death in 1784 John Stephenson Ferguson I. There is no indication where either James or John was born and, what is worse, the reference to Killyfaddy is completely misleading. Miss Stephenson in fact came from Killyfaddy in the parish of Lisnadill, Co Armagh. Unfortunately this is not the only mistake made in the pedigree in question and with several others complicates my research.

It is not until the third generation of the Burke's pedigree that one finds any reference to the family having a connection with Belfast. According to the entry Thomas Ferguson, son of the above-mentioned John Stephenson Ferguson, was born in 1795 and later lived at Greenville, Co Down and Ballysillan, Co Antrim. Both places are, of course, now suburbs of Belfast. Since these locations were the first given for the family I began my research by concentrating on this area in the hope that Thomas would not prove to be the only Ferguson to have lived there.

Since the pedigree presented in Landed Gentry was compiled by the Ferguson family it seemed safe to assume that the major dates of genealogical importance given therein would, for the most part, be correct. Thus I began the research by examining the Index to Births, marriages and deaths, compiled by the Linenhall Library, announced in the columns of the *Belfast Newsletter*. I immediately located an insertion directly referring to the marriage of Thomas Ferguson which indicate that although he indeed married in Leeds his family lived in Belfast:

On Monday the 12th Ins (February 1827) at St Peter's Church, Leeds Thomas Ferguson Esq., eldest son of J S Ferguson Esq. of Belfast, to Emma, second daughter of Thomas Benyon Esq., New Grange Hall, Leeds.

This entry was obviously of considerable interest in that it specifically stated that Thomas's father, John Stephenson Ferguson I, lived in Belfast. Prior to this discovery I had no idea where he had resided since the Burke's pedigree only stated that he had married in Dublin. Furthermore it was obvious from the use of the designations

1. Burkes Landed Gentry, 17th Edition, Ferguson of Dummer.

*Source of Article
ms. 21490w/12616*

'utter abhorrence and detestation of all foreign interference in the affairs of this kingdom, of the atrocious insurrection now existing, and of all secret cabals and private conspiracies to subvert or new-model the constitution, without the joint consent of King, Lords and Commons in parliament; and that (I) will use (my) utmost endeavours to detect the designs of all seditious and disaffected persons, whether existing under the denomination of United Irishmen or other traitorous association'.

According to Burke John Stephenson Ferguson I was the son of James Ferguson who died in 1784. Neither an exact date nor place of death is given but since we had established that his son John had resided in Belfast at least as early as 1791 it seemed reasonable to assume that James might have died there. A search of the obituaries columns of the *Belfast Newsletter* for 1784 proved very rewarding and I located the following notice:

'Died on Wednesday morning last (22/12/1784) of a fever Dr James Ferguson of this town. The universal regret of his loss is the best eulogy of his many virtues. Every relation in life he supported in a manner becoming and exemplary. As a physician of experience his decease must be severely felt particularly by the poorer classes to which he paid such a degree of disinterested attention during a life of medical practice which strongly indicated that philanthropy and general worth by which his character was eminently distinguished.'

This obituary firmly established that the patriarch of the Ferguson family who heads the pedigree in Burke's had died in Belfast and certainly inferred that he had practiced there for many years. As we soon discovered this was indeed the case.

The pedigree given in Landed Gentry states that Dr James Ferguson married, in 1761, Miss Jane Stephenson of Kirilfyaddy, Co Antrim. Since I had an exact year for the marriage I decided to make a search in the Registry of Deeds, Dublin for a marriage settlement. I was fortunate and eventually located one which enables me to correct the Co Antrim 'address' of Miss Stephenson. In fact the bride came from Kiljlyfaddy, parish of Lisnadill, Co Armagh. The other location is entirely spurious and misleading. I can not refer here to the various clauses of the settlement but should refer to two extremely important genealogical details contained therein. In the document James is stated to be a widower with children surviving from his first marriage (unfortunately the bride's name is not given) and it also refers to a brother George Ferguson.⁵ This reference to a previous marriage, and surviving issue, is not mentioned in Burke's nor is the fact that James had a brother. Both are of importance and, I believe, the reference to George may prove the key to unlocking James' ancestry. I will return to this point in due course.

James Ferguson made a considerable mark on Belfast Society in the late 18th century. Apart from his medical interests, which included serving as a member of the Board of the Belfast Charitable Society and as a physician therein with particular responsibility for 'vagrant children', he also, like his son John Stephenson Ferguson, was involved in the linen industry. In fact so considerable was his interest in the latter

John Francis Sept. 17th 1879. 78 years. The same monument also identified John Stephenson Ferguson as the son of a Doctor Ferguson whose wife had died on January 24th 1804 aged 83 years. Evidently this referred to James Ferguson and his wife Jane Stephenson who headed the pedigree given in Burkes. The editor of the transcriptions also made this identification and referred to Benn's 'History of Belfast' for further information on Dr James Ferguson which I will refer to in due course.

Armed with the exact date of John Stephenson Ferguson's death, it was possible to locate his obituary. Notice in the *Belfast Newsletter*: 'Died March 3 (1833) John S Ferguson Esq., of Donegall Place, Belfast, 72 years.'

His age at death confirmed his year of birth as 1761 but I still had no indication as to his place of birth.

In both the obituaries of John S Ferguson and his wife Eleanor Beggs their residences were given as Donegall Place, Belfast. This avenue was, in the late 18th and early to mid 19th century, perhaps the most fashionable thoroughfare in the town and included the residence of the Marquis of Donegall. By examining Belfast Street Directories I quickly established that John S Ferguson was living in Donegall Place as early as 1819 but unfortunately this was the earliest Directory printed. However by examining the Registry of Deeds Place Names Index for Belfast I eventually located his original lease which was granted in 1791 by Alexander Orr, for 41 years at a rent of £64 per annum.

Since Donegall Place was the most exclusive Belfast residential avenue in the late 18th century it was evident that John S Ferguson must have been a man of considerable substance and, not surprisingly, his money was derived from the linen industry. The street directories list his firm's various office addresses which included premises in the White Linenhall. Further research in the PRONI and the Linenhall Library added additional information to these bare details. As well as linen interests John S Ferguson was also heavily involved in banking and in 1824 purchased 80 shares, at a cost of £8,000³ on the establishment of the Northern Bank. He also owned a bleach green at Ballysillan and a paper mill in Antrim town.

It is hardly surprising, given the fact that the Fergusons were natives of Belfast and members of its presbyterian middle-class elite, that John S Ferguson was heavily involved with local politics as were most of his contemporaries. In January 1792, for instance, he attended a meeting of prominent Belfast citizens and subscribed his signature to a petition lamenting the degrading state of slavery and oppression in which the great majority of our countrymen, the Roman Catholics are held⁴ and requiring the abolition of all anti-Catholic penal legislation. Radical as he may have been in his politics in the early 1790s, his opinions, again like those of his contemporaries, were tempered somewhat by the excesses of the French Revolution and the fear of sectional strife and anarchy in Ireland. He did not become a member of the Society of United Irishmen and indeed in 1798 served as a member of the Yeoman Cavalry of Belfast. On June 18th of that year he set his signature to a petition stating his

5. *Ibid* p. 487.

6. Registry of Deeds, Memorial 212-464-140046.

7. R.W.M. Strain. Belfast & Its Charitable Society, p. 73, p. 98.

3. Northern Bank Centenary Volume, 1824-1924, page 270.

4. Historical Collections relative to the Town of Belfast . . . , 1817, Belfast, p. 363.

Victor's son, a further will abstract deposited in PRONI does¹². It is confirmed in a will pedigree compiled by Sir William Betham¹³. Both of these sources unhesitatingly identify Victor's son as one John Ferguson who was married to a lady who bore the christian name Mary. Neither refers to Dr James and it is evident that if he descended from Victor it can only have been in the relationship of a grandson.

Placing Dr James Ferguson as a grandson of Dr Victor would also help to surmount the obvious obstacle of the missing generation which would otherwise probably mar the pedigree. If, as Benn maintained, Victor served as a surgeon to William III's army one might presume that he was probably born in the 1660s at the latest. In fact Benn can not be correct in stating that Victor only came into Ireland in 1690 for I located a pamphlet written by him and published in 1721¹⁴ in which he makes the categorical statement that 'for the space of above 40 years I have had the opportunity of being intimately acquainted with the most eminent Presbyterian Minister and gentleman in this Kingdom'¹⁵.

This certainly implies that he was already living in Ireland before 1680 and had already reached intellectual maturity and thus was perhaps born as early as the 1650s. If Dr James Ferguson was born circa 1710-20 it seems unlikely that Victor was his father and much more likely that he was his grandfather. Since the Betham will-pedigree and will abstract both make it clear that Victor had an only son, John, James would have to have descended from him.

It is difficult to ascertain whether Dr Victor Ferguson was a native of Belfast or not. Certainly he was widely travelled and states in his pamphlet that 'in my younger days I had an opportunity of seeing some foreign churches particularly the protestant Church of France'¹⁶. Possibly he had served at the Dutch court prior to settling in Ireland and this period of service later gave rise to the William III story. Whatever the truth he was certainly resident in Belfast from ca1680 onwards and very much involved with the Belfast Society which, serving as a Presbyterian theological debating club, was essentially non-subscribing in outlook. Dr Victor's only known publication was on the subject of Non-subscription and he was a close friend of the Reverend James Kirkpatrick who was a prominent seceder. Given this connection it is hardly surprising to find that Victor attended Rosemary Street Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church from which he was buried on October 28th 1723. The burial entry of his son John on March 15 1727 was also located.

If Benn's pedigree is to be reconciled with the surviving evidence, then Dr Victor Ferguson was the father of John Ferguson who in turn was the father of Dr James Ferguson, but one must observe that there appears to be an equally convincing possibility which however disagrees with Benn. In searching for a will abstract relevant to Dr Victor Ferguson, I located two other abstracts which relate to this pedigree. The earliest of these is dated January 29th 1710¹⁷ and was made by one William Ferguson of Belfast, apothecary. In this document William refers to his father George Ferguson, his

12. PRONI, T808/4541.
13. PRONI, T559/21/84.
14. Dr Victor Ferguson, Belfast 1721, pp. 3-5. Pamphlet on Non-Subscription.
15. *Ibid* page 4.
16. *Ibid* page 3.
17. PRONI, T808/4541.

that he received a prize of £300⁸ from the Linen Board for inventing a new process of bleaching linen without using potash. In 1782 he subscribed £100 towards the cost of erecting the 'White Linenhall'⁹ where his son certainly had offices a decade later. There are several references to Dr James Ferguson in the Drennan Letters and he was undoubtedly very active in the radical presbyterian politics of his day. In September 1782 he signed a general invitation, with several other prominent Belfast radicals, including Henry Joy, requesting the inhabitants of the town to meet in order to discuss the resolutions passed by the Volunteer Assembly at Dungannon. Ferguson actually chaired the meeting which resolved unanimously that the citizens of Belfast 'Highly approved of and cordially acceded to and adopted as their own each and every of the wise, just and spirited resolutions of the Volunteer Army of Ulster entered into on the 8th instant at Dungannon'¹⁰. These resolutions included demands for a complete reform of the Irish franchise. As a Presbyterian Dr James Ferguson was also well aware of the effects of the Sacramental Test Act on the professional and political careers of members of his church and is almost certainly to be identified with the James Ferguson who signed a petition of 1775 in Belfast demanding the Repeal of this Act.

Unfortunately the pedigree related in *Burke's Landed Gentry* does not give any idea of when James Ferguson was born nor does his obituary which I located in the *Belfast Newsletter*. Trying to project a year, or rather decade, of birth can be difficult but must be attempted in this case. I have already established that James' 2nd wife, Jane Stephenson, was born in 1721 and it must be considered very unlikely that she was James' senior. On this basis it would seem safe to assume that he was probably born circa 1710-20 but it is not impossible that he was born up to a decade earlier again.

Who was the father of Doctor James Ferguson? This question is very difficult to answer and certainly the evidence is contradictory on this point. In their transcript of the inscription on the Ferguson monument in Clifton Street Cemetery, the North Belfast Historical Society, relying on Benn's 'History of Belfast', positively maintains that he was the son of Dr Victor Ferguson. Turning to Benn we are given to understand that John Francis Ferguson the son of John Stephenson Ferguson I informed the author that his family descended from 'an army surgeon to the forces of William III' who is identified as Dr Victor Ferguson. Underlining this descent Benn continues

'This Dr Victor Ferguson is claimed indeed as the direct ancestor of the late Mr Ferguson. His son was a medical man (i.e. James) but also connected with the linen business in which he made great improvements. He lived in the last century. His son was John S Ferguson'¹¹.

Even although the source for this affiliation of Dr James Ferguson as the son of Dr Victor was, apparently, the family itself, doubt must be expressed as to its accuracy. In support of the theory Benn refers to the will of Dr Victor Ferguson which was dated 1723 and refers to his daughter, and son-in-law Captain James McCullogh, his sister Mrs Corry of Newtown, and to his son, who is unnamed. Benn identifies the son as Dr James Ferguson but this is evidently wrong. Although the abstract Benn relied on did not name

8. Owen, *A History of Belfast*, page 145.
9. *Op. Cit.* Historical Collections relative to the town of Belfast . . . , p. 225.
10. *Ibid* p. 257.
11. Benn, 'History of Belfast', p. 168-169.

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brother John, sister Elizabeth Sinclair, wife Mary Wilson and daughter Elizabeth. He also refers on two separate occasions to his uncle Dr Victor Ferguson of Belfast. Although William is not referred to in Victor's will of 1723, presumably because he had predeceased his uncle, it was witnessed by a John and Agnes Ferguson and I believe the former witness was Victor's nephew and identical with William's brother of this name.

In continuing our search for Ferguson wills I found that the will of John Ferguson, apothecary of Belfast, was made on March 18th 1746 and proved on April 28th 1747^m. This abstract refers to John's wife Agnes, and to his sons George and James and daughters Jane and Mary Isabella. I have already referred above to the fact that in his marriage settlement of 1761 Dr James Ferguson refers to his brother George and thus it may be more than a coincidence that we find sons of these names mentioned in the will of John Ferguson in 1746/7. Furthermore the will refers to George as having married in 1736, which certainly places him in his right age group to be a brother of Dr James Ferguson. If we were to ignore the claim made by Benn that Dr Victor Ferguson was the father of Dr James, which I have shown to be highly unlikely and indeed dubious, then he must either have been the son of Victor's son, John, or of his nephew John. To date no evidence has been discovered to indicate that Victor's son, John, had sons called George and James but there is irrefutable evidence to show that his nephew did. Thus it may never be known for certain whether Dr James Ferguson was a grandson or grand-nephew of Dr Victor Ferguson; but what is abundantly clear is that his family was closely connected with Belfast from at least as early as the 1680s and continued to have business interests therein until the first decades of the present century. As such they may be truly claimed to be a family of Ulster extraction. Accordingly it is most fitting that among those titles bestowed upon their Royal Highnesses by the Crown is that of the Barony of Killyleagh in County Down. Had the Earldom of Belfast not been enjoyed by the Marquis of Donegal it might have been more appropriately granted to the newly created Duke and Duchess of York. In any event the Ulster connection has been clearly recognised.

Much of this article is based on research originally commissioned of the authors by the Belfast Telegraph. The editor is grateful for permission to include this material.

Shortly my wife and I are travelling to Bundaberg to see our new Great ~~grax~~ grandson, his father Steven is a member of our society. We will be following the table shown and would like to meet any of our members who live along the way if they can make the place and time.

16Sept overnight Jerilderie, 17th overnight Parkes, 18th Stopping at Dubbo, overnight Gunnedah, 19th overnight Tenterfield, 20th Kingaroy overnight 21st Bundaberg 24-29 Brisbane, 29th overnight Woolgoolga, 30th overnight Karuah, 1st October to Bowral via Putty road overnight Bowral, 2nd Oct overnight at Holbrook 30ct home. Short detours can be made such as from Goulborn via Canberra to Yass, but as we are travelling a long distance would not like to make long detours. Bill