

## ANCIENT LESSELS FAMILY by JOHN LESSELS

While growing up in New Zealand I would listen to my late father's stories about his ancestors as told to him by his father. The family had a leather bound LESSELS family history book dating back to before the Bonnie Prince Charlie period. This book included sketches and photographs of the some early ancestors. During World War Two the leather bound book disappeared and was never been seen again.

After researching the family history for many years I wrote to the Royal Commission of Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland, National Monuments Records of Scotland in Edinburgh Scotland and imaging my surprise when they sent me a photocopy of the draft typed document of the original family history that my great grandfather John LESSELS (chart 08-09) had researched and written. Copies of the papers had been deposited into their collection by a distant relative residing in Scotland.

The documents confirmed all my findings and included additional information which I was able to share with my father. My father confirmed that the same details were recorded in the lost leather bound book.

I have transcribed the typed document. In the first section it records information about "*The Ancient Family of LESSELS in Fifeshire*" followed by "*The Descendants of the Ancient family of LESSELS*". I have added family details and chart references in closed [bracket] to assist in identifying the different ancestors recorded on my website (refer to top left corner of this document for address). I apologize for any errors or omissions.

### The Ancient Family of LESSELS in Fifeshire

Researched and written by John LESSELS chart 08-09

The Ancient surname of the family of LACELLES, now spelt LESSELS in Fifeshire, is of Flemish origin, being derived from a parish, or commune, and village called LECELLES which was under the rule of Robert Count of Dreux, Earl of Flanders, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but is now portion of France, and was probably called LECELLES from the number of monastic cells or dwellings of the monks and hermits to be found in it.

In this century it was famous for its manufacture of hand made lace, and fine cloth, like the famous walled town of Valenciennes [sic], in the neighbourhood which industry is now defunct in the present century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was renowned for the manufacture of oil, agricultural implements and nails, but in this century it is not renowned for anything. It is now greatly reduced in size and in its number of inhabitants, who now amount to about 400, who are poor, whereas about 50 years ago they numbered 3000.

It boasts of an electric tramway from Valenciennes and a railway, as well as two small factories for making sugar, glass and pottery ware, and there are no signs of old age in the place as the ancient church which was of considerable proportions has been renewed in brick. It is about 8 ½ miles north by west of Valenciennes by St Amand of the Springs.

The above village must not be confounded with the village of Lascelle, in the south of France near Aurillae.

Owing to the similarity in pronunciation of the name of these villages, and the carelessness in spelling them properly when used as surnames, and the absence of dates, it is now impossible to distinguish by Court Rolls or other records the different families from these villages now in England and Scotland whose ancestors came from these place.

For instance the Earl of Harewood in Yorkshire spells his family name LASCELLES, while there are other titled families in Yorkshire who spell their names LASCEL, LASSEL, LASSELS. The first of the Harewood families who was ennobled was a lawyer. This Earldom was created in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the rolls of the Scots Guard in Paris in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the family name is spelt LAISELLE, LAISSELLE, LESSELLE, LESELS, LAISSELLS, LESCELLS and LACAILLE and the learned Canon Ferbes is of opinion these are all corruption's of the original name LECALLES, and are the descendants of Alexander de LECELLES of Priestleys, while these are spelt LASSALLE are probably the descendants of a family settled in Scotland, possessing considerable property at one time prior to the time of Alexander de LESELLES, but this family seem now to be extinct, there being 19 of the name of LECELES, LASCELES, LESELES, from 1200-1279 [sic].

In the Court Rolls of 1278 Alan(?) de LASCELLES is accused of instigating four other to slay Richard Buick [sic] but he produced a Charter of Henry III pardoning him and he is acquitted.

- 1280 Richard de LAS/?CELLES appeared at an Inquisition at Carlisle.
- 1280 John Comyn Earl of Buchan in England who is going to Scotland appoints Ralph de LAS/?CELES, Knighted and Ralf [sic] Peynale his attarenies [sic] for 2 years
- 1292 The Earl of Buchan appoints Sir Ralf de LAS/?CELES and John de Whitewyk his attornies [sic] for a year.
- 1296 August 28<sup>th</sup> Jehan de LAS/?CELES is tenant of the Bishop of St Andrews in Fifeshire.
- 1296 Sir Ralph de LAS/?CELES swears ..... to Prince Edward of England.
- 1296 Alan de LAS/?CELES is sent to Tonbridge Castle, Roxburghshire.
- 1296 William de LAS/?CELES does homage to Prince Edward Ragman Rolls.
- 1297 Alan de LAS/?CELES freed from prison on condition he deliveries his eldest son as hostage to King Edward of England to serve him beyond the seas and elsewhere.
  
- 1302 Inquisition at St Andrews Fife John LAS/?CEL is present.
- 1302 Ralph de LAS/?CALLES adherent of Baliol whose lands were seized.
- 1304 The Earl of Buchan prays King Edward I to grant him the wardship of Ralf, son of Sir de LAS/?CELS who is insane
- 1307 Petition by Wm de LAS/?CELS for the grant of "charm" of land in South Contone lately held of him by Phillip Escot and his wife who are Scots rebels.
- 1318 Wm de LAS/CELS of South Contone asks that the farm he has holds from John Personat a Scotsman be surrendered to him as he has spent so much money on it that if he loses it he will be a beggar for life.
  
- 1335 Johannis LAC/ELS respecting and of Stakkys [sic].
- 1337 Johannis LAC/ELS respecting and of Stakkys [sic].
- 1350-60 In the Advocates Library in Edinburgh there is a Charter granted by William Ramsay Earl of Fife to Margaret de LAS/?CELL, and to John de LAS/?SELL her son, conveying to them all the lands of Rouchlaw and Holdean in Haddingtonshire.  
This Charter is said to be one of the oldest deeds in Scotland, the earlier ones to a great extent, having been destroyed or removed to London by the order of

- Edward I of England when he invaded Scotland and removed the “Stone of Destiny”.
- 1660 A Kirkcaldy ship with a great number of old national records on board was shipwrecked and the records which had been sent away for safety were lost, which accounts for the scarcity of Deeds now to be found.

The Scots Guards (Garde Eccosias) were formed in 884 and for 500 years they were the faithful guards and personal attendants upon the different Kings of France. In this century they numbered 100 men. The Captain of his Guard had precedence over the other guards and when the king was crowned he stood by him, along with 6 other guardsmen who stood at all times beside the King both public and privately. This Guard was taught the art of war and rules of civility, and consisted of the younger sons of landed proprietors in Scotland. They were educated at the most splendid [sic] court in Europe, and each was entitled to an allowance for a squire, a valet, a page, and two yeomen, one of whom was termed Coutolier from the large knife he wore.

In the Roll Calls of this famous Scots Guard in the reign of King Louis XI (who married Margaret a? [half a sentence missing]? King of Scotland in 1346 and died in 1483) Charles VIII, Louis XII and Francis I in the year 1515 appear the following Scottish names: (not of Priestleys)

Johan de LESELLES, Men at Arms, in the year	1465 to 1472.
Guille LAISELLE	1493 to 1496.
Cuille LESSELLE from	1497 to 1501
Cuilleume appears as Man at Arms in	1498 and 1499
Roger LASELS appears as Archer in	1499
Guillaume LESALLE appears as Man at Arms in	1507
Thomas LAISELLE appears as Archer in	1507
George LAISELS, Thomas LESCELLS,	
George LESCELLS all appear as Archers in	1507
Guillauma LASCELLE as Man at Arm	
Whilst Mathien LACSILLE appears in	1516.

In this list it is probable that these called Cuille, Roger, Thomas, George and Mathien belong to the LECELLES or LESSELS family as orthography was not rigid in these days, and the pronunciation [sic] of the letter E would be like AI, the corruption of the name LECELLES or LESSELS into LESSEPS being a case in point. The absence of the name John in this list is accounted for as the heir of the LESSELS family was called John and remained at Priestleys to culture the land whilst his younger brother took service abroad, Radulph [sic] de LASCELLES, Sheriff of Fife in 1250 probably belonged to the family of LASCELLED who settled in Fifeshire in the reign of William the Lion of Scotland about 1165 and possessed much property there.

According to tradition the founder of the LECELLES family in Scotland in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was a priest of royal descent, known at Paris University as Alexander de LECELLES who was born in the village of LECELLES and educated at the Benedictine School there. After becoming proficient in all the subjects taught there such as philosophy, divinity, medicine, law and council, he proceeded to Paris University to acquire more knowledge in Alchemy and astronomy.

Here he became acquainted with a Scotsman of about his own age [Michael Scot] who had also been educated at a Benedictine School at Kirkcaldy and afterwards had studied for a few years at Oxford University (then renowned as the second University of Europe) had

come to Paris University which was (famous as the first University in Europe) to prosecute his studies in Alchemy and astronomy &c.

These two lodged together, prosecuted the same studied together and became inseparable and congenial friends and "fratues-jurats" [sic] or sworn brothers according to a custom of that chivalrous age. Sir Walter Scot [1771-1832] of Abbotsford [Roxburgh County Eastern Scotland] the learned author and poet a acien [sic] of the Scot family calls them "bosom friends".

On completing their studies at the University they bade an affectionate adieu to each other, and left Paris. Alexander returning to his birth place to occupy the position of the village Cure, and Michael proceeding to Spain the favorite residence of magicians to study magic which was taught at Toledo.

About 1285 King Alexander III of Scotland became betrothed to Iolan [sic] (Eirik) the daughter of the Earl of Flanders, and Alexander de LECELLES who was much esteemed in Flanders for his great learning was made Chaplain and accompanied her and her brother to Jedburgh Abbey in Scotland to assist in the marriage service which was to take place there. After the wedding the festivities continued for a week, and the only thing that marred the jollity of the marriage feast was the appearance of a vision of death which all considered foretold the speedy death of either the King or Queen, and next year this was verified, as Alexander III fell from his horse at Kinghorn and was killed on the spot on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1286 regretted by all his subjects. After some time spent in mourning his widow decided to return to her father in Flanders where she afterwards married Arthur Duke of Brittany.

#### ***[Alexander de Lecelles 1285 France to Scotland]***

Alexander de LECELLES, [The 1st Lessels family of Fife] on his arrival at Kinghorn with the King and Queen after their marriage renewed his old friendship with Michael Scot (whose Castle of Balveairis is in the adjoining parish) and had been induced by him to remain in Scotland instead of returning to Flanders with his wife and family, offering him a house and land and the position of personal chaplain if he had so, and as it would be for the mutual pleasure of both, Alexander accepted the offer.

The house and land that Michael ceded to him was a short distance from Balveairis Castle and consisted of a stone house similar to the country houses of this period, one storey high, a barn, byre (cowhouse) pig sty [sic], and a shed for wood and peat. This house possessed two rooms, 'a but and a ben' the largest room being about 20 feet long and 14 ft, wide, the other being smaller.

The land consisted of three acres, sufficient to pasture a cow. For this he was to pay 18 Kamed Hens (counted like the Houden breed of the present day) in perpetuity.

For centuries this small property was known as Priestleys i.e. Priets Meadows and is alluded to in the old ballad of "Ye ladye of Balwearie" which appears to have been written about the time of the Deformation. Others call at Priest-lies as according to tradition, Alexander de LECELLES was looked upon as a magician (like his besem [sic] friend Michael Scot) and in consequence the Abbot of Dunfermline (in whose diocese this land was included) would not permit the perpse [sic] to be buried in the Benediction Cemetery at Kirkcaldy, as he was buried in his own land, and this may be the reason for the uncertainty of the burial place of Michael Scot also. This land is still known as Prestleys.

For some years it formed the Rifle Range of the Kirkcaldy Rifle Volunteers but since 1906 it has formed a portion of the golf links of the Kirkcaldy Gold Club. When the Club House was opened by Mr Munro Ferguson M.P. he mentioned in his speech that although the approaches left something to be desired it was an old characteristic of the Balwearie [sic]

Road for six hundred years or thereabouts when Michael Scot was bothered by his families demon, he gave him the Balwaerie Road to set in order, which would be as interminable as making ropes out of sea sand "They tied off on some whinstone height at the pentacles of Balwearie the home of the LESSELS family for years, and also the ancestors of Count Ferdinand de LESSEPS.

As this property has been occupied by the family of LACELLES or LESSELS for over 500 years during which time it has descended from father to son in the direct line, it is a record that very few landed proprietors can boast of considering the disturbed state of Scotland in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and afterwards. It is also interesting and unusual fact that the heirs have been called John.

Between the years 1288 - 1290 Sir Michael Scot of Balwearie with his chaplain (Alexander de LECELLES) and Sir David Wamys all from Fifeshire, were sent on an Embassy to Norway, to bring over the heir to the Scottish throne "Margaret of Norway" but she sickened and died at Orkney to the great grief of the Scottish nation.

Sir Michael Scot and Alexander de LECELLES are said to have been sent to France on a mission to King Louis IX respecting a quarrel between the Scot and French rights of fishing, and were royally entertained by King Louis.

In the Court Rolls of 1295-96 containing the list of nobles in Scotland who did homage to Edward I of England appears "Sir Michael Scot of Fife".

From the death of Alexander de LECELLES (at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century until 1770 nothing positive has yet been discovered as regards the owner of Priestleys.

In the Privy Council Records at the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the following landowners names appear: (All these names appear from 1592 to 1599.)

Charles LESSELS residing at Pittenweem.  
James LESSELS residing at Kilconguhar Fifeshire.  
Peter LESSELS at Anstruther  
Wm LESSELS at Kirk of Fyvie.

In 1607 at Balwearie near Markinch the following names appear Thomas and John LESLELLIES, which are no doubt corruptions of the family name.

From the above names it may be inferred that the corruption of the name from LECELLES to LESSELS took place prior to 1592.

#### ***[Patrick Lessels & Isobel Watson in Scotland]***

In the Burgh Records of Kirkcaldy the family name only appears twice in 1719 and 1725 on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1719 Baillie Whyt (White) represented that Patrick LESSELLS, Deacon of the Wrights, Mason &c (an important position in the burgh) control "to all justice and human societies and duty as a burgess, put such an indignity as to call him before the Council all at his instance as Deacon of the Trades for an alleged (riot) royat [sic]. The Deacon being present acknowledged the same. The Council having considered the foresaid representation find the same to be one great and one unparalleled indignity done to the Baillie, not only in causing the Libel against the Baillie to be when he was sitting in judgment, but also in declaiming the Provost when he offered to judge the case." This Patrick LESSELS must have been a brave man to contend with the magistrate who were rich and powerful, many of them being men of high rank as Dukes, Earls, Marquises, and Knights,

and he might have had to indulge the usual punishment for this offence viz. standing at the Church door for 3 Sundays in simple apparel bare headed and barefooted during bell ringing and after wards near the pulpit during the sermon with a "myter" [sic] on his head and then kneel before the baillies and crave their pardon and pay the sum of 20 pounds Scottish for disobedience and find caution for good behavior.

April 12<sup>th</sup> 1735 the Council appoints the former Committee for the New School, with the addition of James Thomson and Pat LESSELS to provide materials, agree with workman and do everything necessary towards building a school.

## **The Descendants of the Ancient family of LESSELS**

researched and written by John LESSELS chart 08-09

### ***[Lessels & Gray 1760 Scotland chart 128-129]***

In 1770 a John LESSELS appears as the owner of this property Priestleys where he carried on a business as an Architect. Builder, Engineer, and agricultural implement maker, which is a combination of businesses that was common in the rural districts of Scotland last century, and had a good business.

In the course of time he took his eldest son John into partnership but finding the cares of this business too heavy for him he relinquished the business entirely to his son in 1783, and accepted from Robert Ferguson of Raith the position of Master of Wright or Clerk of Works on Raith Estate as this work was less laborious merely entailing the duty of superintending the workman in the Estate. He died at an advanced age.

### ***[Lessels Cairnie 1783 Scotland chart 64-65]***

The eldest son of the above John, married in 1783 and resided at Dawty Mill (as his father and mother occupied Priestleys) and held this residence (Dawty Mill) under the tenure of giving his services for a month during harvest time or to provide a substitute. Afterwards he gave up his own business, and also accepted a position on the Raith Estate as Landscape Gardner or Forester. In addition to his salary he was allowed, rent free, a farmhouse at Southern town of Abbotshall and free pasture for a cow. On the death of his father he became owner of Priestleys.

At this time the lands of Balwaerie were advertised for sale, and as Mr Ferguson was desirous of buying them if he could also acquire Priestleys Estate which had formed a portion of them in the 13<sup>th</sup> century he offered John LESSELS as an inducement to part with Priestleys to build him a new house on the Raith Estate and grant his mother who was still alive, a life gratuity. Before agreeing to the proposition he consulted with his eldest son John, and it was agreed by both that th? [words missing]? Should be given up to Mr Ferguson, as the house, and auth? [words missing]? Very old and dilapidated, they would require a considerable? [words missing]? To restore them. Accordingly the 'Auld House' the house of so many generations of the LESSELS family, like the Balwearie Estate came into the hands of Mr Wm Ferguson of Raith, after an association of many centuries, during which time cordial relations existed between the owners of these Estates.

In 1804 at the death of John LESSELS on the 15<sup>th</sup> April the house and outbuildings were pulled down, and some large old chestnut trees uprooted, and the ground leveled, and enclosed with the adjoining land, but the place still retains the name Priestleys.

### ***[Lessels Murray 1804 Scotland chart 32-33]***

John LESSELS the eldest son of the above was born at RAITH in 1784, and received the most of his education from his grandmother who was highly educated and intelligent.

In 1800 he was apprenticed to an agricultural implement maker in Kirkcaldy. Towards the end of his apprenticeship Mr Wm. Ferguson of Raith begged him to come to Raith and accept the position of Master Wright, in place of his grandfather who had latterly become very feeble, but as he purposed at the end of his apprenticeship commencing business on his own account he declined Mr Ferguson's kind offer. But Mr Ferguson was anxious to secure his services, and offered to build him a new and comfortable house on the Raith Estate and gave him an annuity on his retirement which inducement led him to reverse his decision and accept the offer.

In 1804 he having married Elizabeth Hamilton MURRAY went to reside with his father-in-law Mr MURRAY in Kirkcaldy until his new home at Raith was ready for his occupation, afterwards called the Heather Lodge.

About the end of November 1810 Mr Wm. Ferguson died and was succeeded by his son and heir Robert Ferguson who lived for several years and on his death Sir Ronald Ferguson succeeded him but only lived 4 months afterwards, and was succeeded by his son Robert Ferguson.

John LESSELS after diligently and honestly serving four lairds of Raith for 37 years he retired with a pension granted to him by Robert Ferguson. During the lives of 3 generations of the LESSELS family, a great friendship existed between them and the Fergusons of Raith, and when the above John LESSELS had retired he was a welcome guest at Raith, and Archerfield.

In 1854 whilst the writer was employed at Windsor Castle as an Architect he was invited with the above (his grand father) to visit Archerfield House where he spent some days sketching in the grounds along with his grandfather. He was highly respected both by the Fergusons, and a large number of friends, owing to his kindly and genial disposition being induced with a fund of wit and humour and fond of singing old Scotch songs and dancing Highland reels up to the age of 75.

Both he and his wife enjoyed good health during their life times and were upright and possessed of their faculties.

After his retirement he settled down in the Links of Kirkcaldy, but had resided for a few years previously in Regent Street Portobello, when his old friend Thomas Ronald, Wine merchant, returned to Kirkcaldy, John LESSELS also returned there where he died 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1865 aged 82, his wife dying two years afterwards aged 81.

#### ***[Lessels Henderson 1829 Scotland chart 16-17]***

The above John LESSELS's eldest son, also called John was born at Heather Lodge on the Estate of Raith 9<sup>th</sup> January 1809 and was educated successively by Edward Irving, afterwards the founder of the Irvings gite Church in London, and by the famed writer Thomas Carlyle, who was then about 25 years of age when he came to Kirkcaldy.

After leaving school he worked as a carpenter under his father's supervision, who gave him thoroughly practical knowledge of building operations. But his aim was to be an artist which both his father and Mr Ferguson disapproved of and advised him to become an architect instead which after much persuasion he was induced to do, accepting a position in the office

of Messrs Burns & Bryce, the well known Architects in Edinburgh who stood first in the profession.

Mr Burns soon after recognising the thoroughly practical knowledge of building operations he possessed made him one of their chief clerks of works.

About this time John LESSELS married the eldest daughter of Robert HENDERSON and Margaret KILGOUR his wife, Manufacturer of linen ticking and bleacher residing at the Plash Mill, West Bridge Kirkcaldy.

In 1833 he was engaged building a house for Sir John Naesmith called Dawick, when his eldest son John was born.

Up till 1846 he was engaged building large houses for the gentry in the South East of Scotland.

In 1846 he commenced business on his own account as an architect and many years had not passed before he attained the first rank as an Architect and Arbitrator, which latter he found to be very lucrative, as his charge was \$20 per day, and was much employed by Corporate bodies because his decision were invariably just and fair.

On the passing of the Edinburgh Improvement Act he and David Cousins were appointed joint Architects to the Trust and as such were called upon to take an important part in improving the Architectural and sanitary conditions of the old town.

In carrying out these improvements he designed Jeffrey Street, which forms a prominent feature in the view from the North Bridge and is much admired. By the Improvement Trust his opinion on any matter under discussion was always received with the greatest deference, as the members had the greatest confidence in the soundness of his decision, which they knew was dictated by most upright motives.

Amongst other works he designed and carried out was;  
St Leonards House, a fine specimen of Scottish Baronial Architecture;  
Messrs Nelson Printing works at Parkside and in Paternoster Row, London (where all the mechanics employed were Scotsmen);  
The pressing plan for the lands of Drumsheugh;  
The Smith Institute Stirling;  
The Palace Hotel Princes Street Edinburgh;  
The handsome Pillared Hope Park;  
Charter Hall;  
Blackadder House;  
The model village at Foulden;  
Besides other buildings in Scotland England and Sweden testify to his good taste and skill.

He was one of the architects chosen to furnish designs of St Mary's Cathedral Edinburgh and it is said that his designs was within one vote of being accepted. The design of Sir Gilbert Scott was chosen.

In his leisure time he continued throughout life to cultivate water colour painting and from time to time he exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy water colour paintings of street views and interiors and exteriors of Churches on the Continent, painted on the spot.



He was some years President of the Edinburgh Photographic Society and his full plate views of the beautiful ceilings in Windsor House were highly commended.

He was also vice-president of the Scottish Society of Arts, besides being an honorary member of various Societies in Belgium, which he frequently visited during the summer holidays, as well as Venice where he was well known.

He was an elder, trustee and useful member of St Bernard's Presbyterian Church, which he had attended regularly since 1846, when he was in Edinburgh.

When Count Ferdinand de LESSEPS the Engineer of the Suez, and Panama Canal was in Edinburgh, as the guest of the University, during their Tercentenary Celebrations, he stated he was proud of having Scotch blood in his veins as the founder of his family went to France from Priestleys in Fifeshire to join the Garde Ecossais, and the Count afterwards called upon John LESSELS, Architect there, and claimed distant kinship, explaining that the name had been corrupted into LESSELS in France.

He was born at Versailles 19<sup>th</sup> November 1805 and died 8<sup>th</sup> December 1894. He stated that his father, mother, grandmother and great grandfather (Martin de LESSEPS) lived to great ages. Martin de LESSEPS was a consul of Louis XV to Russia and was acquainted with Catherine II of Russia intimately.

Count Ferdinand de LESSEPS was the bosom friend of Napoleon III, as well as a kinsman of the Empress Eugenie, and her guide and companion at the opening of the Suez Canal and was with her at the Tulleries and aided the Empress to escape from the mob, who attacked her there.

He married his second wife Gertrude Anna Huberdina NEFKEN of Baardwyk, North Berbant, Holland who died at Duffel Belgium, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1884, leaving no children. By his first wife Mary HENDERSON he had 4 sons and 4 daughters.

In his youth he was a good athlete, and like his father a good marksman with guns made himself, he was also fond of both sea fishing and fishing for trout and salmon, all his rods and tackle including flies being of his own make. He made telescopes, bound his own books, and was a turner in both wood and metal the lathe being made by himself.

He belonged to the Old Kilwinning Lodge of Freemasons.

He was 37 years old before practicing as an Architect and practiced 37 years afterwards, his father serving 37 years also with the Fergusons of Raith whilst the Architect's son John was employed under H.M. Office of Works for 37 years a strange coincidence of dates.

Several of his pupils in his early career as an Architect afterwards became distinguished Architects. His first pupil David McGibben was for some years President of the Edinburgh Architectural Association -----?

Robert Lawson after leaving Mr LESSELS emigrated to New Zealand and was Architect of most of the Churches, Schools etc. in that Colony.

Another pupil Sir Rowand Anderson designed the University Buildings and other important works.

The President of the Edinburgh Architectural Association in his long speech after the death of John LESSELS alluded to the great loss the Association had sustained in the recent death of John LESSELS who was one of the oldest and esteemed members to whom they were greatly indebted for much valuable advice which his long experience enabled him to give them, and his death would create a blank not only in the Association, but also in the profession, as well as in the City, for he was most cordially esteemed by all who knew him not only as an eminent Architect, but as a true and upright citizen.

Mention of the death of John LESSELS was published in several Scotch, English, and Belgium Newspapers, in one of the latter called "Le Preunseur" it is stated that he was an Architect of just merit, a distinguished watercolour artist, and Director of the Works for the Restoration and Embellishment of the City of Edinburgh. This talented man was also a good man in every sense of the word. He counted many friends in Belgium, which he visited frequently, and nobody knew our country better than he did.

He had traveled throughout Europe, and knew Venice as well as Bruges, Saltsbourg, as well as Upres or Louvain, the Hanseatic towns of the north as well as Anvers, and Belgium was the centre of his preference.

"In an account of him in St Bernards Parish Magazine it was stated that he was a liberal supporter its unpaid architect, and the better he was known the more was his life seen to be a beautiful one".

***[Lessels Gillies 1855 England chart 8-9]***

John LESSELS, eldest son of the preceding, was born at Dawick. Peebleshire on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1833.

He was educated at Allanton, Berwickshire, and at the same school in Kirkcaldy where his father had been educated, and afterwards at the Edinburgh Institution where he was "dux" of all his classes for two years until 1848 when he entered his fathers office as an architectural pupil, continuing his education by attending a class for modeling in clay, taught by Gourlay Steel R.S.A. and classes for ornamental drawing at the Royal Scottish Institution as the School of Arts for the higher arithmetic, and mathematics ?onometry [sic] and natural philosophy taught by the learned Professor ?--rge [sic] Lees.

He also attended a class at the Edinburgh University for anatomy but only for a few months, as the noxious smells from the dead bodies upset his system.

He made sketches of the old houses in Edinburgh, which have now been pulled down for many years past. He had also a few lessons in watercolour painting from the late John Winton A.R.S.A. and afterwards his sketches were made in watercolors his first painting of Coatbridge near Edinburgh was exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy Exhibition in 1853 and received a short press notice.

A few years afterwards he exhibited another water colour painting of the Interior of the Chamber Council in Garter Tower Windsor Castle which had a highly favorable criticism in the art reviews, and with the exception of an oil colour printing exhibition at the Art Gallery, Crystal Palace in 1862, he never exhibited more, as he considered it uncharitable to contend with struggling artists, as his profession was that of an architect.

In September 1853 he was appointed Drawing Clerk at Windsor Castle through the flattering testimonial from Professor Lees principal of the School of Arts, who added to his certificate of proficiency the following words "in duty I must add Mr LESSELS is a young man of the most

kindly and amiable disposition" and also to the beautiful Architectural drawings he has submitted which were said to be equal to copperplate.

His duties at Windsor Castle were to make plans, elevations, and models in accordance with the ideas of H.R.H. Prince Albert, for the improvement of the Castle, both externally and internally and to attend during theatrical performance in charge of the Fire Brigade.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1855 he married Margaret GILLIES, his eldest son John being born 13<sup>th</sup> September 1856 but died in 1857 from disordered glands, and on the birth of a second son 18<sup>th</sup> April 1858 he was called John to continue the old precedent.

When at Windsor he made designs for converting the disused theatre into a Mechanics Institute, but this scheme had to be abandoned for want of funds.

He also taught a class for Mathematics and another for drawing for two years at the Institute gratuitously.

During his leisure time and holidays he made measured drawing of all the carvings in wood and stone in St George's Chapel and Cloisters Windsor, also sketches of stained glass at the Old Windsor, and neighborhood.

All then drawings as well as many made in precious years were lost in the wreck of a London and Leith steamboat at Flambore Head.

The funds provided by the Treasury for Windsor Castle Improvements having become exhausted in 1856, he left there and proceeded to Perth opening an Office there in partnership with his father, and had many clients for 2 years until a rival firm of Architects finding that Mr LESSELS and father were charging 5 per cent they had circulars printed and sent to Messrs. LESSELS Clients saying they would undertake architectural works at 2 and half per cent.

The builders also received these letters and informed Mr LESSELS that it was the practice at their rival Architects to get the builders to include in their Estimate 5% and in some cases as much as 10% so that the client had to pay a nominal amount of 2 and half % in addition to the percentage 5% to 10% included in the Builders accounts, and suggested that Messrs, LESSELS should do the same, but as they would not demean themselves to carry on work in such a dishonest way and as their clients, Lord ?Blibank, [sic] Director of Murray's Lunatic Asylum, Col. Richardson Robertson, Sir John Richardson and Messrs. Annan ?Janrie [sic] Coming & Robertson etc. declined to pay more than 2 and half % whilst Messrs. LESSELS felt that they must charge the usual professional fee, viz. 5 per cent, and the result was that the establishment was shut up, to the relief of John LESSELS as he could not conform to the drinking habits which then prevailed.

Architects and Builders being in the habit of meeting each other at different Inns to drink whisky and discuss building matters, which he considered very degrading to a professional man.

On his return to Edinburgh he set up as a general designer and lithographer, and soon acquired a lucrative practice in designing furniture, stained glass windows, and book stamp etc.

Having always has a great desire to emigrate to New Zealand as a pioneer in Architecture and join some relatives and friends, he spent every morning in a builders shop working as a

Carpenter, to learn the trade, and the rest of the day he was engaged designing in his office, he continued the practice for a year, and then proceeded to London to learn the English methods.

He was employed by Messrs. Myers (then at the head of the Trade) and sent to one of their branch works at Windsor where he had the pleasure of making some of the ornamental gothic doors, which he had designed for Windsor Castle in 1855.

At this time he had the offer of an appointment as a professional assistant in H.M. Office of Works in London, but he declined it as he had made every arrangement to proceed to New Zealand and was only waiting for a letter from his friends (who had proceeded him), as to the things he should bring out with him.

Shortly afterwards this letter arrived informing him that the Colony was in a bankrupt state, and nothing was being done in the building line, and the only employment they could find was to herd sheep for the Bishop of New Zealand consequently it would be unwise to emigrate until the advent of better days.

The offer of the Surveyor for the Windsor District being still open he accepted it for a time intending to emigrate to New Zealand when it improved, but the increased in his family compelled him to keep to a certainty and remain a Civil Servant of the Crown.

As a Civil Service Commissioners had than been established he had to pass an Examination in several subjects before the Commissioners, which he did successfully, and was appointed, to the Office of Works in 1860, where he remained until 60 years of age.

The first important work he performed after his appointment was designing the large temporary building, porches staging etc. connected with the marriage of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales and H.R.H. The Princess Alexander on the 10th March 1863 at St George's Chapel Windsor.

The whole of the buildings were decorated, the walls of the Bride's retiring room being covered with expensive lace. For this service he received a letter of thanks from the Lord Chamberlain enclosing \$1 and from the Lords of the Treasury also a letter of thanks enclosing the sum of \$20.

He was also honored with a place alongside the Peeresses to witness the ceremony, and for years afterwards he witnessed all the Royal Weddings and Burial Services that took place at St George's Chapel Windsor Castle until his retirement in 1894.

During his leisure hours he designed buildings, such as;  
Houses at Eton as Dormitories for the scholars;  
Works for Earl Manvers;  
Water coloring painting of the vault of Henry VIII in St George's Chapel for the Dean Wellesley;  
Illuminated on vellum the roll call of the Eton College Volunteer Rifles for HM Queen Victoria, which Corps has been inspected by the late Prince Consort before his death.

He also illuminated on vellum many testimonials etc. one of them being the? Terrier [sic] of the London and South Western Railway Company making perspective drawings for architects and painting them.

He made and carved chairs, benches, bookcases, dressing tables, wardrobe, medicine chest, clock case, picture frames, fishing rods and tackle besides finding time to cultivate his garden.

1871, he was selected out of several architects to proceed to Constantinople in regard to the rebuilding of the British Embassy which had been burnt down in the great fire in Peru the previous year, but as this would have interfered with his private practice which then brought in about \$300 per annum, but on being informed by the First Commissioner he would be paid \$500 per annum when he was engaged upon this work.

He started from London on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1871, but owing to the France-Prussian War being then in progress he could not take the direct route and had to travel to Antwerp, Mayence, Nuremberg, Innsbruck, Brunner Pass to Venice, Trieste, Corfu, Athens and Smyrna arriving in Constantinople in summer weather instead of the cold and snowy weather which had prevailed from the time he had left London.

Whilst he was in Constantinople he was instructed by H.M. Treasury to arrange with the Municipality of Pera to grant them portions of land belonging to the British Government as a free gift, to enable them to widen their streets.

After several interviews, matters were arranged satisfactorily, the Municipality offered to pay for the re-building of the walls and buildings such as the stables and Entrance Lodge and \$4500, which the Treasury accepted.

In recognition of John LESSELS' services he was appointed Surveyor, without pay, of the Embassy Houses at Pera and Therapia, the Consular Buildings, Hospital, Prison, Doctors House, British Post Office, Cemetery at Scutari, and ether British Cemeteries on Bosphereus.

On his return to London he was provided with an office and a staff of draughts men. Owing to his protracted absence in Turkey he lost all his private practice amounting to over \$300 per annum, and much reduced in health, through being ill for a fortnight with country fever, an attack of Asiatic cholera and sunstroke.

In 1871 the walls, Entrance Lodge and stables were commenced from his drawings, and the following year, the restoration of the Embassy Buildings at Pera was commenced, H.M. Treasure having granted \$38,000 for this important work.

In 1873 in addition to his other duties he was appointed Surveyor of the country district at a salary rising from \$500 to \$700 per annum, but had not received no salary for his services at Constantinople, which was to have been \$500 per annum as agreed by the then First Commissioner of Works (Acton Smee Ayeton).

When all the works at Constantinople were finished another Liberal First Commissioner was in power, when Mr LESSELS applied to him for the promised remuneration, which he refused to entertain on the plea that he was not responsible for his predecessor's promises.

Such behavior was characterized by the Secretary (afterwards Lord Redesdale) "as an inhuman and unjust act, in fact a complete robbery," but John LESSELS had to submit to this loss of \$2,500, in addition to the loss of his private practice \$1,500, and the loss of health.

This arrangement continued for some time until he was relieved of the Constantinople work, and his duties were confined to the Country District, which included:

Windsor Castle and Parks	Frogmore House and Grounds;
Military Knights House	Royal Gardens
Hampton Court Place	Parks and Gardens
Banqueting House and Pavilion	Bushy House Upper Lodge
Houses in Bushy Park	Longford River
White Lodge	Richmond Park
Pembroke Lodge	
Thatched House and other buildings in Richmond Park	
Kew Palace	Cambridge House
Herbarium	
Other buildings in Kew Green	Royal Botanic Gardens
Pleasure Grounds in Kew	Broadmead Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

From 1873 the principal works performed by John LESSELS were the restoration of the Curfew and Chancellor of the Garters Towers, two large furniture stores, Gardener's house and greenhouses at the Royal Gardens Windsor, and the New Post Office at Windsor.

Owing to the severe illness from cholera, dysentery and sunstroke contracted at Constantinople as well as the unjust treatment he had received on his return, he was unable to undertake any private work for ten years, and spent his leisure in gardening and photography.

In 1884 he was operated upon for stone in the bladder, which was the size of a walnut, and on his convalescence he went to the Contrexeville Springs in the Vosges Mountains to drink the waters there.

Whilst there he was asked by the Committee to inspect the buildings and report upon their sanitary state, which he did, receiving \$20 for his report, and nothing was charged for the stay of himself and daughter [Laura Eleanor] at the Establishment.

Ten years afterwards he was again operated upon for two stones in the bladder, one being crushed, and the other out, and on his recovery he sent in his letter of resignation, which the Secretary (Sir Henry Primrose) begged him to withdraw and remain five years longer until he was 65 years of age, and if he did so his salary would largely increased and he would also received the decoration of O.B. immediately, and be knighted on his retirement at 65, but John LESSELS declined this offer, as he had grave doubts whether these promises would be carried out, in the event of Mr Primrose being transferred to another Government post, and as matters turned out he was appointed one of the Commissioners of the Excise in about two years afterwards.

John LESSELS was then begged to remain another year longer to assist Mr Primrose in re-arranging the Country District, but as he had then taken a house in Guernsey, (which was then being re-papered and painted etc.), and occupied a house at Wandsworth Common, he would have to pay the rent of one if he remained in office for a year longer, but was willing to do so if he the board paid the rent of this extra house, when Mr Primrose remarked that the treasury would never sanction such an expenditure, John LESSELS then offered to oblige Mr Primrose by staying six months longer, and pay the rent (\$35) himself.

When John LESSELS ultimately left the Office of Works he bade adieu to all his colleagues, who expressed their sorrow for his departure, and from Mr Primrose (Nephew of Lord Roseberry) he received a joint testimonial from the First Commissioner and himself (the first time such a document has been given to anyone on his retiring from office), which read as follows:-

29<sup>th</sup> September 1894

Sir,

*I am directed by the First Commissioner of Her Majesty's etc. to inform you that the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury have awarded to you a pension of \$396.13.4 per annum, which the Paymaster General has received instructions to pay from the 26<sup>th</sup> September 1894 inclusive. In communicating to you this information the First Commissioner desire me to take this opportunity of conveying to you an expression of the Board's great regret at the termination of your service under them. That service has lasted continually for more than 34 years, and during the whole of that period has, as your papers show, earned high appreciation from the Board, and you're Superior Officers. When holding only the position of an Assistant Clerk you were entrusted with the difficulties and responsible duty of preparing the plans for and superintending the erection of the present Embassy House at Constantinople, a building which cost over \$40,000, and which is regarded as admirably fulfilling the important purpose which it serves as the residence of Her Majesty's Ambassador in Turkey. The First Commissioner cannot but think that the skill and labour which you bestowed upon this work were inadequately rewarded by the small salary you then enjoyed, and he regrets that although no fault of your own, steps were not taken at the time for obtaining for your exceptional service than was afforded by your promotion in 1876 to the rank of Surveyor. He fears, however, that it would be impossible now to repair the omission of twenty years ago. Since 1876 your duties have included the care of Windsor Castle, and of Hampton Court Palace, and in connection with these historic buildings you have placed at the service of the Board an archaeological knowledge and discrimination, and an artistic sympathy which have enabled them to deal with questions of maintenance, of alteration, or of restoration in a manner which they believe has met with general approval. They that in respect of such matters, your assistance will be greatly missed. I should wish to add an expression of my own sincere regret, a regret which I know is shared by all the member of the establishment of this office, who have worked with you, at the loss of a colleague with whom it was both an advantage and a pleasure to be associated.*

*I am, Sir, Your obedient servant, (signed.) H.W. Primrose.*

From the above diplomatic letter it will be seen that no notice is taken of the claim John LESSELS made on the completion of the British Embassy Building at Pera for \$2,500, which has been promised to him, but it admits that he was not responsible for the delay in bringing his claim before the notice of the Board.

Sometime afterwards, when Mr A. B.Mitford, the then Secretary, (now Lord Redesdale,) laid the matter before the First Commissioner, strongly supporting it. The First Commissioner used similar objections, and such behavior was characterized by Mr Mitford in an official Minute as "an inhuman and unjust act, and complete robbery. Man's inhumanity to man, makes countless angles mourns."

After his retirement in 1894 he went to reside at Thistlewood, Guernsey, where he devoted himself to gardening and photography.

At this time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, he designed and had published in a Guernsey Newspaper his proposal for restoring the Royal Court House building at a cost of \$38,000, which design was considered to be too ornamental, and after spending several thousand pounds in abortive attempts to get something cheaper it was at last put in the hands of the States architect who made it very plain, but the cost of one half of the building cost altogether over \$42,000, instead of \$38,000 for the whole building.

As something to mark this Jubilee he proposed a drinking fountain at the top of Smith Street with a bust of the Queen on the top, Cottage Homes near the Monument, and a statue of the Queen in the Market place, all of these were considered too novel and artistic, and were not designs of Guernsey man. Afterwards he designed the front of the Guernsey Bank and submitted it at one of the meetings, but the generality of the Shareholders preferred a common brick building.

**THE END**

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