

SECOND TIME: A Companion to TIME PIECE



Published 2019

SECOND TIME

presents fresh and updated research on the clocks and clockmakers associated with Kilwinning, along with a compendium of Kilwinning made clocks with colour photographs

This document was first published 2024 and will be updated regularly as new clocks come to light

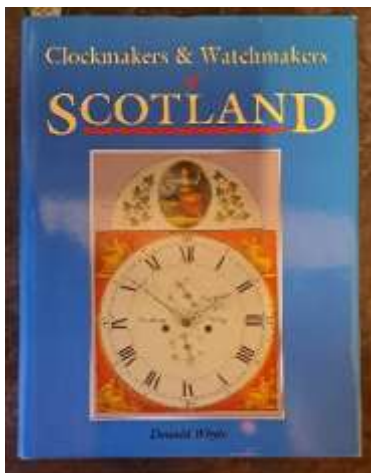
Heather Upfield
Issue III
April 2026

TIME PIECE (2019) and SECOND TIME: A COMPANION TO TIME PIECE (first edition published 2024)

In December 2019, my booklet entitled *Time Piece, a history of James Blair and the clocks, clock & watchmakers of Kilwinning, 1719-2019*, was published by Kilwinning Heritage and launched at an event at Nethermains Community Centre, in January 2020. It sold out in the first year and was subsequently reprinted.

My initial research back in the Spring of 2019, was to find out more about James Blair, maker of the clock in the Abbey Tower. There didn't seem to be much documentation in Kilwinning Heritage records. I was also fascinated by the original James Blair clock dial, an exhibit on the ground floor of the Abbey Tower Heritage Centre. I recall one exceptionally windy afternoon, with the rain coming down in sheets, when I was on volunteer guide duty at the Abbey Tower, along with Anje Jay and some others. As we were unlikely to get any visitors, I decided to examine the dial along with Anje, and we even went so far as to take it down off the wall!

From these small beginnings, I began to gather more information about James Blair and his clocks, assisted by Jeni Park of Kilwinning Heritage, Internet searches, and Public Records.



The next critical stage was discovering, and subsequently buying, Donald Whyte's comprehensive compendium of around 8000 workers in the clock and watch making trade in Scotland, from 1453 to 1900¹.

I was delighted to find an entry for James Blair, Kilwinning and a photo of one of his clocks. Knowing that Andrew Johnston and his son and grandson had been notable 19thc/20thC Clock and watchmakers in Kilwinning, I also checked for them, and again was pleased to see they were mentioned.

It then occurred to me that there might be other Kilwinning clockmakers listed. However, there is no index, as all the entries are listed alphabetically in the text. The only solution was to read through every single entry, over 300 pages, and note any that mentioned a clockmaker and Kilwinning! As I could only do three letters of the alphabet per day (before getting blurred vision) this took me a full week! But it paid off, because I uncovered a further five other clockmakers: James Stirrat, David Loudon, William Allan, Hugh Millar, William Torry, plus clockmaker apprentices. A newspaper article from *Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald* in 1882 revealed yet another: James Gibson. The original project was now growing legs!

Time Piece went on to mention all the clockmakers, watchmakers, and apprentices that turned up in searches. It then went on to include the four town bells; the clocks in two other Kilwinning buildings: the Mansefield Church and Eglinton Ironworks Institute; Kilwinning station clock; and concluding with Lord Eglinton's clock. My main focus with *Time Piece* had been James Blair, and at the time I didn't delve too deeply into the backgrounds and histories of the other clockmakers. I also found "a tangle of James Blairs" which at the time I couldn't solve.

Over the years since publication, Kilwinning Heritage has been notified of a number of Kilwinning made clocks, by their owners in the UK and North America. 2024 seemed like a good time to revisit the clockmakers. Hence the publication of *Second Time: a Companion to Time Piece* which expands the histories of all the clockmakers listed and records the beautiful clocks that have been shared with us over the last few years. And yes, "the tangle of James Blairs" has now been resolved!



PUBLIC RECORD UPDATES ON THE CLOCKMAKERS SINCE 2019, IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

WILLIAM ALLAN

Whyte² records William Allan trading in Kilwinning 1825-1850, and he is also in Pigot's 1825. However, the discovery of a William Allan Kilwinning longcase clock in Canada, dated around 1815, puts his trading in Kilwinning much earlier.

¹ Whyte, D (2005). *Clockmakers & Watchmakers of Scotland*, Mayfield Books, Ashbourne, Derbyshire

² Whyte 2005 p29 and Pigot's 1825 p244

He appears again in Kilwinning Census of 1841 ³as living in Main Street, Kilwinning, aged 60 (born c1781) with his wife Agnes aged 45 and their four children: Elizabeth (25), Isabella (20) Needleworker, Robert (15) Cotton worker, and Charles (12). Interestingly, there is a mark for William Allan in the Birth Column indicating “Whether Foreign or whether born in England or Ireland”. So not a Scot, then!

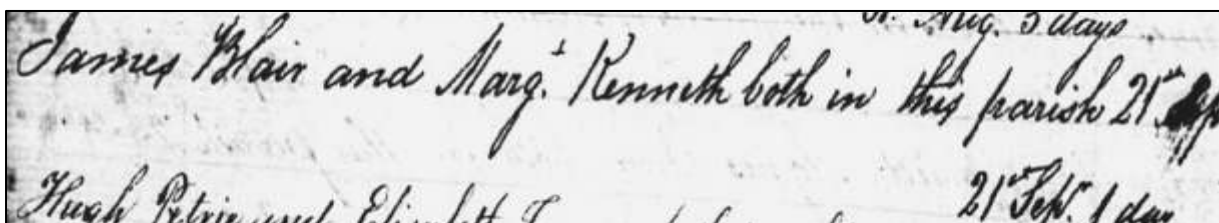
The chances of finding his birth details are slim. Whyte suggests that William possibly died in 1850, as there is an entry for a Clockmaker in Ayr Directory for Kilwinning of 1851, under the name of Mrs Allan only. I have found no death records for William Allan anywhere in Ayrshire.

JAMES BLAIR – UNRAVELLING THE MARRIAGE CONUNDRUM AND TANGLE OF BLAIRS FROM TIME PIECE

Fresh research in February 2026 resolved the conundrum of who officiated at the marriage of James Blair to Jean Small on 22 October 1802. Records show that the Minister Rev William Ritchie left Kilwinning for a post in Glasgow at the beginning of October 1802, while the next incumbent Minister Rev James Steven, did not take up the post till April 1803. I am grateful to Kilwinning Abbey Church, who searched their records and were able to confirm that Minister William Ritchie had officiated at the marriage. And a very eminent cleric was William Ritchie. He is the only Minister from Kilwinning, ever to have been elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, back in 1801.

Having hit a dead-end while writing *Time Piece*, it was a relief to make sense of and resolve the “tangle of James Blairs”!

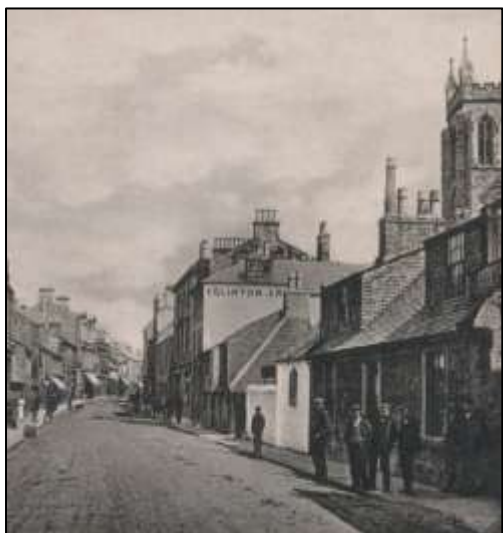
After the death of his first wife, Jean Small, in 1827, and the death of their son James in 1832, James Blair married again in 1833.



The Marriage Lines for Kilwinning Parish, 21 September 1833, read:

“James Blair and Marg^t [Margaret] Kenneth both in this parish 21 Sept. 1 Day” [presumably 1 Day’s notice].⁴

James Blair was last known to be trading as a Clockmaker in 1836/37. However, he left the clockmaking trade and it appears he used his experience as a grocer (*Pigot’s 1825*)⁵ to take over the running of the Eglinton Arms in Main Street [pictured below⁶].



By the time of the 1841 Census, he is living there with his two youngest children Archibald (Apprentice clockmaker) and Ann, and his new wife Margaret⁷.

James Blair is known to have died in 1850, from the inscription on his gravestone, which includes his first wife Jean Small and other family members. It is not known what became of his second wife after James’ death.

I have been notified of several James Blair longcase clocks by their owners, over the last five years.

³ Scotland’s People Census 1841

⁴ Scotland’s People, Marriage Records 1833

⁵ *Pigot’s 1825*, page 244

⁶ Photograph courtesy North Ayrshire Heritage

⁷ Scotland’s People Census 1841

JAMES GIBSON

Whyte does not record James Gibson, Kilwinning. Unsurprisingly, he does not appear in either Pigot's 1825 or 1837, as records show he was born in 1836! However, newspaper reports of the time, show that he was definitely in business in Kilwinning from around 1867 till he sold his business in 1882.

The Kilwinning Census for 1871 shows him living in Main Street, age 35 (born 1836 in Newarthill, Lanarkshire), along with his wife Mary (35, born Denny, Stirlingshire) and their five children, Isabella (14, born Coatbridge, Lanarkshire), John (12, born Coatbridge), Mary (7, born Glasgow), James (3, born Kilwinning) and Robert (1, born Kilwinning).

ANDREW JOHNSTON

No extra historical and genealogical information to add to the Andrew Johnston dynasty.



The three generations of Andrew Johnston Clock & Watchmaker, all traded consecutively at 157 Main Street, Kilwinning, for around one hundred years.

This photo⁸ is from the 1950s/60s. The family business is shown second on the left, between *Crawford the Photographer* and *Janet Craig Hairdresser*.

By this time, the shop was owned by next-in-line Andrew Johnston (3) and had diversified into watch repairs, jewellery and fancy goods.

The Abbey Tower shows a clean, white painted dial, which was carried out when Andrew Johnston (3) was repairing the clock in 1950.

After this row was demolished in the 1970s, Andrew Johnston (3) traded in new premises in Almswall Road.

DAVID LOUDON

This clockmaker has proved to be more enigmatic. According to Whyte⁹, he was known to be trading in Kilwinning around 1853. He is listed in Census 1841¹⁰ in Main Street, Kilwinning age 25, with his wife Janet age 26 and their daughter Grace, age 5. However, none of them show up in previous or subsequent years.

1	David Loudon	25	Watch m	yes
	Janet do	26		yes
	Grace do	5		yes

At the end of 2024, a fresh search of public records came up with a new finding for the enigmatic David Loudon. According to the listing of Sheriff Court records for the 1800s in Ayrshire¹¹, there are two entries for David Loudon: 10 September 1850, David Blair Loudon, Watchmaker, Kilmarnock Police Cells, convicted of Theft and Breach of Trust and Embezzlement.

11 March 1852, David Blair Loudon, Watchmaker, Kilwinning, convicted of Theft and Breach of Trust and Embezzlement and Previous Conviction.

So this gives a better understanding of why there is so little information to be found about David Loudon. I have no doubt in my mind that following the 1852 conviction, he and his family would have been drummed out of Kilwinning. For good.

⁸ Photograph courtesy Kilwinning Heritage

⁹ Whyte 2005 p173 for all Loudon references

¹⁰ Scotland's People, Census 1841

¹¹ Old Scottish Genealogy and Family History online

Whyte has a listing for a John Loudon, Clockmaker, trading in Irvine around 1820, who might possibly have been his father, but there is no evidence for John in subsequent Census information. Also interesting, is Whyte's record of "D & J Loudon, Clock and watchmakers, Maybole", around 1880. Could this have been David and his wife Janet? I am still working on chasing this down.

I have not been able to find records of any David Loudon, Kilwinning clocks.

HUGH MILLAR AND JOHN MILLAR

The following information has been provided by Caroline Farquhar, who contacted Kilwinning Heritage in May 2024 about a Kilwinning made longcase clock she had recently inherited. The signature on the clockface is **John Millar, Kilwinning**. This is a completely unknown Kilwinning clockmaker, who doesn't appear in Whyte. Who was he? What is his story? Caroline had done extensive research herself and her subsequent messages to me gave us a mine of information and one or two surprises! Massive thanks to Caroline for sharing so much information with us.

Hugh Millar was very much a mystery man, and originally I had difficulty in finding out any information about him. However, Caroline's research shows that Hugh Millar was the father of John Millar. Whyte records Hugh Millar trading in Kilwinning 1845-1860. He also records a known Hugh Millar, Stewarton longcase clock.¹² (I have identified two more) and we have proof that he made the turret clock for Mansefield Church, Kilwinning in 1860. However, Whyte does not mention John Millar and web searches drew a blank.

All references, quotes and citations in this section, are from Caroline's research, as sent to me¹³ or where acknowledged.

Caroline established that there had been confusion in the spelling of the surname, which sometimes appears as Millar, and sometimes Miller, and also in the primary trade of both Hugh Millar and John. It appears they were Father and Son and principally Ironmongers!

Hugh Millar was born in Stewarton on 15 January 1808 and is listed in Census for 1841, living in Main Street, Stewarton, with his wife Margaret and babe in arms Jessie. His trade is listed as Ironmonger. In the Census for 1851, the family is still living in Main Street, Stewarton, along with daughter Janet (7) and John (5). Hugh is still listed as Ironmonger. The ages of children in 19thC Census records are unreliable, as there is evidence that John was born 20 August 1846. It appears baby Jessie might have died, or her name was changed to Janet later.

An article from *Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald*, dated 17 June 1854, reports on a farewell celebration for Mr Robert Blair at Eglinton Ironworks. He and his wife were each presented with a commemorative watch and chain, with the article adding "the watches which were of exquisite workmanship were furnished by Mr Hugh Millar Kilwinning".

A notice declaring Ayrshire Bankrupts in *Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald* 21 August 1858, names "Hugh Millar, Ironmonger, Plumber & Gasfitter, Dalry and Kilwinning". A meeting of creditors to be held 14 August at George Hotel, Kilmarnock.



By the Census of 1861, Hugh and Margaret were living in Abbey Gate Street, Kilwinning [pictured¹⁴], with Janet (17), John (15) and Robert (9). Hugh is listed as "Ironmonger, nail manufacturer, plumber, tinsmith &c". By this time, Hugh had made the turret clock for Mansefield Church in 1860.

Hugh died intestate, in Kilwinning 24 December 1865. A legal document dated 1 February 1866, shows his estate being wound-up. The document lists around 160 clients who had not paid their bills, amounting to around £500.

¹² Whyte 2005 p206

¹³ Author email communication with Caroline Farquhar, 18 May 2024

¹⁴ Photograph courtesy of North Ayrshire Heritage

Debtors came from all cross Ayrshire, including the Free Church Kilwinning; Mr Bicket, Flesher, Kilwinning, who owed a modest £2 (around £300 in today's money); and the 14th Earl of Eglinton, who owed £86/6s/6d (around £13,000 in today's money). It's recorded that the Earl paid his bill in instalments on 14th, 15th and 17th January 1866. The inheritors of his estate are named as his daughter Janet, and youngest son Robert.

In the Census of 1871, Margaret Millar (widow) is still living in Abbey Gate Street, Kilwinning, with John (unmarried, age 25), Ironmonger employing 12 men and 3 boys in Stevenston, and Robert (unmarried, age 19) working alongside his brother as Ironmonger Shop man.

John's business continued to thrive, and with his brother Robert, he expanded the Stevenston business into Kilwinning and Dalry, which is reported in newspaper items of the time. The *Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald*, 8 February 1868, carried an advert from John Millar, announcing he is now producing Oil Gas, "by this method a superior light is produced at little cost".

An outstanding find by Jeni Park of Kilwinning Heritage, is this document from Kilwinning Community Archive¹⁵. It is an Invoice from 1876, regarding the Affairs of the Late William Lamont Esq, which carries the Letterhead of Brothers John and Robert Millar, of Abbey Place, Kilwinning and New Street, Dalry.



The trades listed are: **Plumbers, Gasfitters, Watch & Clockmakers, Jewellers &c**, which is the first incontrovertible evidence yet found for John Millar making clocks. Along with the genealogical evidence, this confirms John Millar and Hugh Millar as our Kilwinning Clockmakers.

John's death on 26 August 1876, aged 31, is reported in *Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald* on 2 September 1876. His Will & Testament (1877) shows that his property, stocks & shares, insurance and assets were valued at £1,500, which amounts to around £223,000 in today's money. His beneficiaries are his sister Janet and brother Robert.

So, how does all this square with Hugh Millar and John Millar clockmakers? Throughout his life Hugh Millar was principally an Ironmonger, as was John. Can tinsmiths and ironmongers make clock movements? Given that the parts of the clock would be supplied by a local brass foundry and other local tradesmen, then it is highly likely that someone with competence could assemble them into a working clock.

DR CHARLES AULD'S LAMP



An unexpected find from Caroline Farquhar was an intriguing newspaper article in *The Irvine Times* 15 August 1969, reporting on the recent discovery of Dr Auld's Lamp¹⁶, which had once hung over the door of his practice in Howgate, Kilwinning.

The article continues: "the maker of such a superb piece of workmanship is presumed to be John Millar whose premises were situated in Abbey Place" and goes on: "Millar must have been a Jack of all Trades" and quotes his advert from 1868 where, like his later letter-head, he describes himself as "Nail manufacturer, plumber, gas fitter, tinsmith, clock-maker and jeweller".

Did John Miller make it? And was it powered by John's Oil Gas?

¹⁵ "The Frew Collection", an archive of thousands of documents, donated to Kilwinning Heritage by local business man James Frew, being processed by Kilwinning Heritage Archivist, Jeni Park and her team of volunteers

¹⁶ Photograph Kilwinning Heritage

Although Dr Charles Auld was Kilwinning born, he first appears in Census 1871¹⁷, as General Practitioner, living and practising at Quality Row, Carnwath, Lanarkshire. With him are his wife Agnes and daughter Mary (4 months), born in Carnwath.

He next appears in Census 1881¹⁸, as Dr of Medicine, Glasgow University, General Practitioner, living and practising at Homewood Villa, 23 Howgate, Kilwinning [pictured below]¹⁹ Also listed, are his wife Agnes, daughter Mary, and four further children all born in Kilwinning. The eldest of the Kilwinning children is Agnes, aged 7, so the family must have been in Kilwinning at least since 1874.



Hugh Millar is known to have died in December 1865 and John Millar is known to have died in August 1876. It's possible that Dr Auld commissioned the lamp from either man (he didn't have to be living in Kilwinning to do so). Alternatively, the lamp was made by someone else entirely. It's an interesting puzzle!

Dr Auld's Lamp is now on display in the Abbey Tower Heritage Centre, Kilwinning. Sadly, after inspection by Jeni Park of Kilwinning Heritage, no maker's marks were found. In 2022, Kilwinning Heritage was contacted by Bill Parlee, of British Columbia, Canada, who is a great-grandson of Dr Auld. Bill's grandmother was Mary Auld, born Carnwath. Bill is

delighted that the lamp has survived and is being well cared for.

JAMES STIRRAT

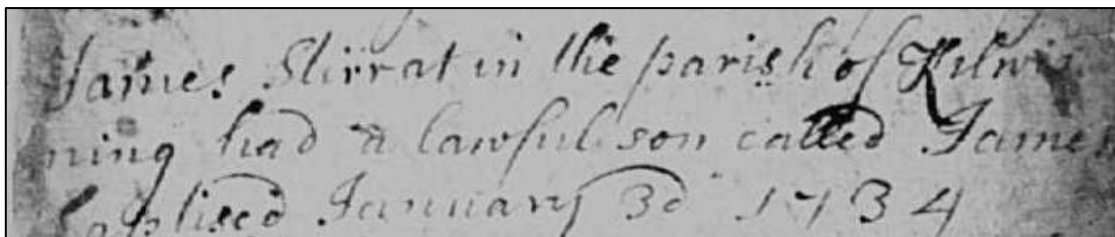
Whyte²⁰ records James Stirrat trading in Kilwinning between 1777-1790 and reports a known brass dial longcase clock of 1780. New information communicated to Kilwinning Heritage, has uncovered a much earlier trading date of 1767-1790, from a James Stirrat clock now in Nevada USA!

Whyte records James' birth around 1734. There are no entries in Kilwinning Parish Birth records in the years before and after 1734, but there are two other possible entries in Ayrshire Birth Records 1734²¹:

(1) Parish of Dalry: "James Stirrat in the Parish of Kilwinning had a lawful son called James baptised January 30 1734" and

(2) Parish of Beith: "James son Caulf [calfed, or born] to John Stirrat in Netherland [near Beith] born June 13 baptised the 16".

My instincts tell me that the Parish of Dalry Birth Record is the relevant one:



It is apparent from later records of the Secession Church, that there was a lot of interaction between the Stirrats of Kilwinning and those of Dalry, which is only four miles away²².

¹⁷ Scotlands People, accessed 09 June 2024

¹⁸ Scotlands People, accessed 09 June 2024

¹⁹ Photograph North Ayrshire Heritage

²⁰ Whyte 2005 p283

²¹ Scotland's People, Birth Records

²² Kerr, J *Antiburghers to the end* Secession Church Baptismal Register

Because of the lack of punctuation in these early birth records, it's difficult to know if James was born in Kilwinning to Dalry parents, when parents were visiting Kilwinning; or whether James was born in Dalry, to Kilwinning parents, when parents were visiting Dalry. Whatever the story, the infant has been baptised and registered in the Parish of Dalry.

WILLIAM JOHN TORRY

William Torry made a name for himself in Kilwinning primarily through his connection with the Illuminated Clock of Mansefield Church. He regularly appears in the Minutes of Kilwinning Town Council meetings, (*published in Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald*), initially as a member and later as an individual Kilwinning resident. He is noted in committee meetings for his attempts to control the clock repair trade in Kilwinning and making sure he got paid the going rate for work done!²³



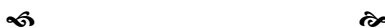
In the 1891 Census, he is shown to be living modestly with his wife at Bridgend: Residence: Segton Cottage, Number 2. Profession: Jeweller. Age: 34 (Possible year of birth around 1857). Place of birth: Stonehaven, Kincardineshire, Wife: Agnes, age 26, born Aberdeen. Ten years later, his fortunes have changed considerably. By the Census of 1901, he had been running the old James Gibson business for a number of years and was also employed to manage the Illuminated Clock in Mansefield Church. He is also now living with his wife and daughter in a substantial house at the back of Mansefield Church [pictured].²⁴

Census 1901 and 1911 give the same information aside from age of his daughter: Residence: Dunottar, 10 Almswall Road. The house seems to have been informally named 'Dunottar', and it is likely it's a nod to William's birthplace in Stonehaven, which is not far from Dunottar Castle. Profession: Jeweller (employed), Wife: Agnes, Daughter: Mabel, age 7, Scholar, born in

Kilwinning (age 17 in 1911).

Note: His father was William Alexander Torry, born Stonehaven, Kincardineshire around 1842. Listed as Watchmaker at Castle Douglas 1860-1890; Widower in 1881, aged 39.

In April 2025 I was notified of part of a William Torry longcase clock, which has never left Kilwinning! The owner told me that only the dial and bell mechanism have survived, and were discovered when a loft was cleared after a family bereavement. The dial is in a poor condition, but the name **W J Torry Kilwinning** is clearly scribed across the centre of the dial. This is the only William Torry clock I have found.



Time Piece (2019), published by Kilwinning Heritage, available from www.kilwinningheritage.org.uk/shop

A search of the library in the *National Association of Watch & Clockmakers, in USA* in January 2024, did not produce any records of Kilwinning made clocks²⁵. The library of *Antiquarian Horological Society* in UK, holds a copy of *Time Piece*.

Massive thanks to every clock owner who has shared their wonderful clock pictures and stories. It's a privilege to include them here.

Heather Upfield is a member of *Kilwinning Heritage*

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© Issue III, Heather Upfield, 10 March 2026

THE COMPENDIUM

The next section comprises a Compendium of all the clocks mentioned in *Time Piece*, in addition to the many clocks at home and abroad, which have been notified to Kilwinning Heritage by their owners. There are also other examples from recent Auction and Sale Houses and clocks from outwith Kilwinning, where relevant. It features an example of a longcase clock made by every Kilwinning Clockmaker: William Allan, James Blair, James Gibson, Andrew Johnston (Senior), Hugh Millar, John Millar, James Stirrat and William Torry. The only missing clockmaker is David Loudon. It also includes examples of clocks by Allan Fowlds and his son James Fowlds, clockmakers, Kilmarnock, who were associated with the Earl of Eglinton and James Blair, Kilwinning

²³ *Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald* 18 March 1904

²⁴ Photograph Heather Upfield

²⁵ Email Correspondence with NAWC Library & Records office, 2 January 2024

**A COMPENDIUM OF CLOCKS AND CLOCKMAKERS ASSOCIATED WITH KILWINNING
FROM TIME PIECE IN 2019, TO DATE**

THE FIVE CLOCKS THAT WERE FEATURED IN *TIME PIECE* (2019)

JAMES BLAIR, KILWINNING



Owned by William West,
South of Emglisd

JAMES BLAIR, KILWINNING. ABBEY TOWER



HUGH MILLAR, KILWINNING. MANSEFIELD CHURCH (now Rainbow Nursery)



Since *Time Piece*, one of
the three dials has been
removed

R & W SORLEY, GLASGOW. EGLINTON IRONWORKS INSTITUTE (Now Nethermains Community Centre)



SUBSEQUENT CLOCKS IN ORDER OF NOTIFICATION TO KILWINNING HERITAGE AND FROM WEBSITES

1.



In Spring 2021, I gave a Kilwinning Heritage Zoom talk entitled "Extra Time". As it was an evening event from 7pm-8pm, it was possible for Paul and Andrea to join us from Canada, where it was 12 noon till 1pm. At the end of the session, we had the marvellous experience of Paul kindly showing us the clock *in situ*, and actually hearing it chime!

WILLIAM ALLAN

Notified to us by Andrea Mills (née Burrill) & her husband Paul, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 2020

This treasured family heirloom has been in Andrea's family for around 200 years. It was originally transported to Quebec around 1815 by her Hislop ancestors who were from Lilliesleaf, southeast of Selkirk, Roxburghshire. This puts William Allan's working life in Kilwinning much earlier than Whyte has stated (1825). The clock was passed down through the generations, until eventually it came to Andrea's father Alfred Burrill. Andrea grew up with the clock in the family home and eventually she inherited the clock and it was moved to Vancouver. There is, however, a Burrill family mystery of how the Hislop ancestors came to be in possession of a Kilwinning made clock in the Borders in the early 19th century!

Four corners: The Four Seasons

Arch: Harvest scene with a farmer and his wife, with a plough above a sheaf of corn. The text "Speed the Plough" (above the sheaf) and "In God is our Hope" (below).

The signature reads **WILL^M ALLAN KILWINNING** across the centre of the dial.



2.

**STABLE CLOCK
Eglinton Castle**



In a deplorable condition now, missing one hand, and most of the gold numerals and black paintwork on the dial. Photo taken in 2021, before it degrades further and disappears for ever.

The stable and carriage block appears on John Ainslie's Eglinton Estate Map, 1790 (*Eglinton Country Park on Facebook 6 May 2020*). The clock was no doubt made at the time of its building. At some point the clock movement and bell were removed and scrapped. Latterly, the stable block was purchased and converted into residences around the stable yard. Restoring the clock dial was apparently not included in the upgrade. There are seemingly no existing records about the clock and clockmaker.

3.

JAMES STIRRAT



Notified to us by Eric Anderson of Carson County, Nevada, USA, in July 2021. This James Stirrat brass dial longcase clock has been in Eric's family for generations and significantly alters the record of the Clock and Watchmakers of Kilwinning.

It is absolutely beautiful and survived the journey from Belfast across to Canada, initially, in April 1912 - the day after the sinking of Titanic. Eric reports that a relative saw Titanic's red paint on the offending iceberg as they sailed past.

The arch is engraved **James Stirrat, Kilwinning 1767** - a full ten years earlier than Whyte records him trading in Kilwinning and the earliest known Kilwinning made clock to date!



It stands around 7' tall, and the dial is 9" in diameter. The case is made of mahogany. It has two swan neck pediments, in typical Scottish style. According to Eric the bell is not in good working order, and the brass fittings on top of the case are a later addition, as the originals had been lost.

It was a pleasure to meet Eric and Judy Anderson in the summer of 2022, when they were on a walking holiday in Scotland and made a special journey to Kilwinning to see where the clock came from. We had some fun! As they have a tradition in their family of giving clocks pet names, I suggested that the James Stirrat clock should be called Jimmy, in true Scottish style!

4.

JAMES GIBSON



Notified to us by Andy Morrison, in the south of England. Messenger correspondence 27 July 2021

Four corners: The Four Continents - Asia, Africa, America and Europe represented by Great Britain, with a Red Ensign on the aft of a ship.
Arch: Britain's maritime trading links, with kegs of Sugar, Cotton and Fruit

Signature **JA^S GIBSON KILWINNING** across the centre of the dial
Under restoration

5.



JAMES BLAIR

Notified to us by Giles Pearson, Moray, in Scotland. Email correspondence 29 August 2021

Very early Drum-head Longcase clock 1810-1820

James Blair, Kilwinning signature too faint to reproduce here

6.



ANDREW JOHNSTON

Notified to us by Paul Brook-Nolan in East Midlands, England. Email correspondence from 09 July 2022. He farms traditionally with shire horses and chose this clock as it depicts horses at the plough.

Longcase clock dated 1870. This is likely to have been made by the senior member of the three generations of Andrew Johnstons in Kilwinning, who were trading at 157 Main Street.

Four corners: Four Seasons

Arch: Roberts Burns at a horse driven plough (authentic 18thC plough according to Paul) accompanied by his Muse Coila.

Signature **A JOHNSTONE Kilwinning** across the centre of the dial (it was not unusual for the artist who painted the dial, to mis-spell names).



Paul working a three Shire horse-in-line plough, October 2023

7.

**STABLE CLOCK
Montgreenan**

The stableblock is on private land and in no way accessible to the public.

In August 2022, I was privileged to be permitted by the delightful owners, to view the clock and clock movement, and also hear the clock chime.

In comparison with the stable clock at Eglinton, the Montgreenan clock is in outstanding condition.

The setting dial shows it to have been made by **Robert & William Sorley**, Glasgow, 1902. It was the same clockmakers who made the clock for Eglinton Ironworks Institute in 1901, and I imagine a conversation between the owners of Eglinton Ironworks and Montgreenan Stables discussing clockmakers at the turn of the century!

Aside from my perilous climb up to the clock floor of Mansefield Church, (nobly assisted by James Frew, the building owner), this must be the most terrifying climb I've made in Kilwinning clock research!

The foot and hand holds were a nightmare, and getting from them across to the movement (which was on a little platform to the left of the ladder) had to be managed using the 'lift and sit' technique. The owner climbed up ahead of me and sat on the clock platform. When I neared the top, he leaned over and got his hands under my armpits, and on 1,2,3 lifted me and hoisted me onto the clock platform next to him!

The journey was worth it, as the clock movement has been lovingly cared for throughout its history, and aside from a little dust on the cogs, it was in perfect condition. The new owners of the property are dedicated to maintaining it in this pristine condition.

A Kilwinning resident told me that the stable bell was rung if there was a fire anywhere on the Montgreenan property.



8.

JAMES STIRRAT

Notified to us by George Jamieson, south of England, inherited from his father (ex Lochwinnoch). Email correspondence 25 June 2023.

Longcase clock, Brass face, 18thC undated

The Arch is engraved "**J Stirrat Kilwinning**" [*compare with number 13*]



9.



JAMES GIBSON

Notified to us by Verna Neilson, Hudson, New York State, USA. Email correspondence 15/16 August 2023

Four corners: The Four post-1800 Nations of Great Britain – England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales

Arch: a romantic assignation by boat

Signature **JA^s GIBSON KILWINNING** across the centre of the dial

Verna wrote: "My husband gave this clock to me over 25 years ago after I had admired it in one of the local antique shops in Hudson, NY. The name of the store was The Irish Princess but has since closed. I do not remember the name of the shopkeeper, but I believe she was indeed Irish".

10.



Original transit label



Pendulum: Exquisite detail of fruit in a bowl with foliage.

JAMES BLAIR

Notified to us by Brett and Sandra Hamm, Canada. Email correspondence 27 December 2023/January 2024

Longcase clock in Stonewall, Province of Manitoba, Canada. A treasured family heirloom. Current owner Sandra Hamm, née Steel, who was given the clock by her parents. Her son Brett, in Alberta Canada, revealed that the clock had been purchased by their Steel ancestors from Kilwinning, in the 1820s-1830s. They would certainly have known James Blair.

It eventually found its way to Glasgow in the latter part of the 19thC, with a later generation of Steels. When members of the Glasgow family, John and Catherine Steel (known familiarly as Ian and Rena) and their daughters Sandra and Anne, emigrated to Kelowna in British Columbia, Canada in 1967, they took the clock with them. And that is where it had been until around 2014. Hidden inside the case, Brett discovered the original shipping tag for Vancouver (from whence the clock was transported by road to Kelowna) and a page from an advert for Glasgow International Exhibition 1901!

Four Corners: The Four Continents – Europe represented by Great Britain, with a Red Ensign on the aft of a ship, Asia, Africa and America

Arch: A Scottish rural idyll with lovers and sheep.

Signature **JA^s BLAIR Kilwinning** across the centre of the dial

It was a real delight to be able to confirm with Brett in 2026, that his ancestor John Connell, stonemason in Dalgarven, was the builder of the Abbey Tower in 1814! It is not certain whether it was John Connell senior, or his son John Connell junior, as they had a family business which included John jr's brother Matthew. It is highly likely all three would have been involved on site on such a prestigious project!



11.



HUGH MILLAR, Stewarton

Email correspondence January 2024

Having been unable to find any Hugh Millar, Kilwinning longcase clocks, I recalled that Whyte records a Hugh Millar, Stewarton clock.

After an online search, I was pleased to make contact with the owner of a Hugh Millar, Stewarton clock. I have included it here, as he had connections with Kilwinning, and deserves to be represented.

Four corners: The Four Seasons

Arch: 'Death of the Stag' with deer, hunters and dog.

Signature **H MILLAR STEWARTON** across the centre of the dial

The owner, from Stewarton, wishes to remain anonymous but has been looking after the clock since the 1950s.



12.



JAMES BLAIR

Web search, February 2024

Owner unknown.

An outstanding James Blair clock, unlike anything we usually see. Possibly made around 1820.

Gold leaf design and foliage on the arch and gold leaf fans in the four corners.

Wonderfully delicate and exquisite hands.

Signature **JAMES BLAIR KILWINNING** across the centre of the dial

It was not made for the average local farmhouse. It could quite easily have been made for a member of the Earl of Eglinton's family, or the like.



Sold by

Lofthouse Antiques, Abbott's Bromley, Staffordshire in 2023

www.lofthouseantiques.com/grandfatherclockcollection/p/grandfather-clock-by-james-blair-of-kilwinning-airshire-scottish-8-day

Accessed 10 January 2024

13.



JAMES STIRRAT

Web search, February 2024

Owner unknown.

Another superb James Stirrat enamelled clock, sold by McTear’s of Glasgow. Their assessment is Georgian (King George III ascended throne 1760).

The signature and decoration in the arch very similar to the James Stirrat clock at number 8. Possibly made by the same craftsman and engraver.

Arch: Signature **J Stirrat Kilwinning**



Sold by McTear’s of Glasgow in 2021

www.mctears.co.uk/auction/lot/lot-1126---a-george-iii-pine-longcase-clock/?lot=214637&so=4&st=&sto=0&au=1136&ef=&et=&ic=False&sd=1&pp=96&pn=1&g=1

Accessed 12 February 2024

14.



JOHN MILLAR

Email correspondence with Caroline Farquhar, in the South of England, May 2024. She inherited this family heirloom following the death of her aunt in Glasgow. Her ancestors come from Ayrshire and two branches have local roots from a marriage between the Farquhar and Fleming families. The Fleming family are known to have lived at Montgreenan Bridge End and the Farquhar family in Kilwinning. John Farquhar (1825-1903) is likely to have been the first or second owner of the clock [pictured, courtesy of Caroline Farquhar]. He became Gamekeeper to the Earl of Eglinton.

Four corners: The Four Continents, with Europe represented by Great Britain, with a red ensign on the aft of a ship

Arch: captioned “The Lady of the Lake”, inspired by the poem by Sir Walter Scott

John Farquhar



Signature **JOHN MILLAR KILWINNING** across the centre of the dial



15.

JOHN MILLAR

Online search 16 June 2024



Unknown owner. Sold at auction by Lyon & Turnbull, Edinburgh. Described as William IV longcase clock, though cases were re-purposed, and it's possibly not the clock's original case.

Four corners: The Four Seasons

Arch, The Lady of the Lake. Note that this illustration is almost identical to that in the John Millar clock owned by Caroline Farquhar.

Signature **JOHN MILLAR KILWINNING** across the centre of the dial



Sold by Lyon & Turnbull, Edinburgh, 31 August 2022

www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/scottish-william-iv-mahogany-longcase-clock-john--214-c-3d046e5bc7

Accessed 16 June 2024

THE LADY OF THE LAKE

The John Millar Kilwinning clocks both have an almost identical image of The Lady of the Lake in the arch. It also appears in the arch of a William Morton, Cambusnethan clock (Whyte p219).



Research has found that in 1811, Scott's poem was published with a set of six engravings, from paintings by Richard Cook RA (1784-1857).

They were also sold as individual illustrations. Without doubt, the artist who painted the clock arches had seen these illustrations.

Illustration: <https://www.rulon.com/pages/books/67021/walter-scott/the-lady-of-the-lake-a-poem-illustrated-with-engravings-from-paintings-by-richard-cook>
Accessed 12 May 2025

16.

JAMES BLAIR



I was notified about this James Blair, Kilwinning clock by email in December 2024. It is in North Carolina, USA. In my opinion, it is a very early example of James Blair's work, prior to 1820. The current owner (S.B) came by it by chance and is in the process of doing some restoration work. It has functioning weights, but no pendulum, so the hands don't move and it has no chime.

S.B asked me for advice about replacing the pendulum, but I am no expert on the workings of the mechanism. However, the good people in Manitoba (Sandy and Brett Hamm) have a fully functioning James Blair clock (Number 10 in this text). I thus asked them if they could measure and weigh the pendulum of their clock, which they were delighted to do. There then followed a happy conversation between Manitoba, North Carolina and Kilwinning, as photos and measurements flowed back and forth between us all. Enough information has made it possible for S.B to source a new pendulum, so eventually the clock will once again work, and have a chime.

The break arch carries an illustration of an agrarian scene with a Post Mill, the Miller, and farmers bringing their corn.

The four spandrels depict the four stages of growing the corn: ploughing the furrow, scattering the seed, harvesting, and finally the granary.

Signature **Jas Blair, Kilwinning** across the centre of the dial.



17.

WILLIAM J TORRY

The history of this clock fragment is completely unknown. Only a damaged clockface and the bell mechanism on the rear have survived. I was notified about it by email in April 2025 from JM from the Blacklands, Kilwinning and I was delighted to hear from her. She told me that the dial and bell were in the custody of her uncle (in the Blacklands). It appears to have been discovered at JM's grandfather's house, also in the Blacklands, after his passing some years ago. It is now a treasured family heirloom.



Bell mechanism on the back of the dial

There are many questions about its provenance and the whereabouts of the case, movement and pendulum, but with the passage of time and lack of information, they will never be answered. However, it has great significance for Kilwinning, in that it is the only W J Torry longcase clock that I have discovered. It's likely to have been made in the 19thC. I like to imagine that it was made when William Torry was living in Almswall Road, and that the clock travelled down Nethermains Road to the Blacklands and stayed there!

The break arch shows an agrarian scene with a ploughman and two draft horses with an authentic 18thC plough. My initial thought was that it was a nod to Robert Burns, which is a common theme. I was pleased to see that on closer examination, below the plough, there is a faint line of text which reads "Burns at the Plough".



Damaged dial, with one hand surviving

The four corners are depictions of the 4 countries of Britain till 1922: top left England, with a representation of Britannia and a lion; top right Scotland, with a woman in plaid with a unicorn; bottom right Ireland, a woman with an Irish harp; and bottom left Wales, with a woman bearing a hat with the 3 feather symbol of the Prince of Wales.

In spite of the damage to the dial, the signature **W.J. TORRY. KILWINNING.** is clearly visible across the centre.



18.



**ALLAN FOWLDS, KILMARNOCK
(Saleroom)**

Allan Fowlds is mentioned in 'Time Piece', as a clock made by him belonged to the Earl of Eglinton. It was listed in the Auction catalogue of 1925, when Eglinton Castle was abandoned and the contents were sold.

Allan was famed for his silvered dial clocks, and this is a fine example from the 18thC. It is likely that the Earl of Eglinton's clock looked much the same.



Signature **Allan Fowlds KILMARNOCK** in arch

Antiques Atlas, Chalfont St Giles, 2026
www.antiques-atlas.com . Accessed 08 March 2026

19.



**JAMES FOWLDS, KILMARNOCK
(Saleroom)**

Allan Fowlds had three sons: James, Allan junior and John. James Fowlds is significant to the story of Kilwinning clocks and clockmakers, as James Blair was apprenticed to him for four years, in 1796.



The Break arch bears an image of King George IV, flanked by an Admiral and a General.

The spandrels are illustrated with symbolic images of Hope, Plenty, Peace and Commerce

Signature **Js FOWLDS Kilmarnock** across centre of dial

Halls Auction, Shrewsbury, 2014 fineart.hallsgb.com/ Accessed 08 March 2026

20.



JAMES BLAIR

In February 2026, Kilwinning Heritage was contacted by Elaine Jeeks, informing us she had a James Blair longcase clock. It is a family heirloom and is now with her in the south of France.

In our emails to and fro, she told me that she had been raised on High Road, Stevenston, with her grandparents living next door. The clock had been passed down through the family and as a child, the clock was owned by her grandmother. She told me, with pride, that her grandmother used to make wedding dresses. When her grandmother passed away, Elaine was the sole inheritor and eventually she and her family moved to France with the clock.

The clock itself, had been in a house fire, probably around the turn of the 20thC, and although the mahogany case was not affected, the dial had been blackened by smoke and the images damaged. At the time, the family were recommended not to attempt to have it cleaned, but with modern 21stC cleaning techniques, it might be possible. However, the fire is part of the clock's history, and maybe it should stay as it is...

I would estimate that this is an early example of James Blair's work, possibly around 1820. The break arch appears to show a woman reclining beside a wooded loch or river, with two figures, which could be cherubs. It is possibly an allegorical story or from a poem. The spandrels appear to show the Four Seasons.



The signature **JAS BLAIR KILWINNING** across the centre of the dial



Elaine also revealed that her father (and hence herself) was a direct descendent of John Glassford, Tobacco Merchant of Glasgow in the 18thC. It is thought the clock had been in the hands of Glassford relatives in Lanarkshire or West Kilbride, at some point in its history.

Portrait of John Glassford, part of a family painting by Archibald McLauchlan, c1767

www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/venues/kelvingrove-art-gallery-and-museum/john-glassford-and-his-family-portrait-redisplay. Accessed 10 Mar 2026

21.

JAMES STIRRAT



Coming hot on the heels of the James Blair clock (#20) was notification of a James Stirrat, Kilwinning clock two weeks later. We were notified by Ruth Jolly from Essex, that she owned an heirloom James Stirrat clock. She wrote:

“I inherited the clock from my mother she lived in Ardrossan until the mid nineteen sixties when we moved to Essex. I believe it belonged to an aunt or great aunt prior to her mother inheriting it. Then when my grandmother died in the early 1950s it came to my mother, so ever since my early childhood it has always been in our homes.

Being so tall I have only one place it can stand in my house and I have a blind to protect it from full sunlight. The clock is a seven day movement and chimes on the hour. The mahogany veneered case I think also makes it look more decorative. I’m hoping to pass it on to my children in the future but they will need a period house with high ceilings to accommodate it.”



Brass dial around 1770, typical of the period.
Signature **JStirrat Kilwinning** engraved in the arch

Ruth continued: “There is evidence of holes in the top of the hood where perhaps it would have had the gold balls etc seen on clocks of this period but all the time I have known it, it has a little bronze half naked boy sitting on the very top.”



Example: Decorative globes on a James Ivory, Dundee clock, 1770

(Whyte, 2005, p154)



22.

JAMES BLAIR



In early 2026, Kilwinning Heritage was notified about a James Blair longcase clock, this time in Florida USA. According to the current owner, who has recently inherited it from his mother, it has been in the family for some time. At this stage, it has not been possible to get more details about the clock's journey across the Atlantic and how it came to be in the family's ownership.

The theme of the illustrations is the Napoleonic Wars. This dates it to post 1815 if referencing the Battle of Waterloo. From the flags displayed on each side, the arch shows an ongoing battle in the background between France and Britain. There are five mounted horses in the foreground. One rider is injured and falling from his horse. Astride the white horse is Napoleon but there is no telling who the other four riders are.



In each of the four spandrels, there is a portrait of a gentlemen associated with the wars, against a background of ship's rigging. Bottom right, a detail gives the name Nelson, but the text on the other three is impossible to read.



The signature **James Blair Kilwinning** across the centre of the dial

To be continued