

BIBLE HOMECOMING



In the course of my role as High Life Highland's Family Historian at the Highland Archive Centre I undertake in-depth family history research for customers both remotely or as one-to-one consultations in person. While the majority of my work is assisting people tracing their own ancestry, occasionally I am asked to undertake research with a different slant and that was certainly the case with an email enquiry I received from Ohio in May 2017.

Mr Whitehead, the enquirer, asked if I could trace living relatives of an Alexander Macdonald who lived at No.10 Muirtown Street, Inverness in 1866. I suggested a search through the census of 1861 and 1871 along with the Valuation Rolls we hold at the Highland Archive Centre, to see if I could find a record of an Alexander Macdonald in Muirtown Street.

It was at this point that Mr Whitehead told me the reason for his request. He had a mini pocket Bible with Alexander Macdonald's name and address inside and wished it to be returned to a close relative. Back around 2001, he had met a collector of Bibles who had a display of over 150 and offered Mr Whitehead one of his choice. Mr Whitehead said he "chose this 'cute' Bible with the clasp".

Since that time, it had been long forgotten and only recently while packing household belongings for an eventual relocation did Mr Whitehead re-discover the Bible along with the four leafed clover enclosed in it. It was then that he thought it would be an idea to identify a living relative of Mr Macdonald and return the Bible to the family.

I knew this would be a challenging search as there were about 1,500 Macdonalds living in Inverness in the 1860s and over a hundred of those had the first name Alexander! I first searched the Inverness Census for Muirtown Street but there was no sign of an Alexander Macdonald in 1861. However, I did find an Alexander at No 11 Muirtown Street in the 1871 Census. Had the numbers changed? Did he move next door?

I searched the Valuation Rolls for Muirtown Street and discovered a Mrs Janet Hay owned both No.10 and No.11 in the 1860s. At No.10 there were a few un-named tenants living there whilst Alexander Macdonald was recorded at No.11 which was also a shop. This being the only Alexander Macdonald in the vicinity during the 1860s, I worked on the premise that this had to be the

correct man. I worked from there to trace his descendants by accessing Statutory Births, Marriage and Death entries, Census entries, Old Parish Registers and wills.

Much of this search was helped by the Scotlandspeople network at the Highland Archive Centre. This facility, administered and supervised by the Registration Service, enables more up to date research to be undertaken.

Soon I had completed a basic family tree containing details of living relatives. Interestingly I discovered that one of Alexander's sons, Kenneth, had been a well-known solicitor and Town Clerk in Inverness. This fact enabled more research in a number of other records held at the Highland Archive Centre including the 'Kenneth Macdonald Antiquarian Papers, 1617–1971'.

I passed on my findings to Mr Whitehead and subsequently, was delighted to receive an email from him advising he had made contact with Donald MacKechie, a great-great-great-grandson of Alexander Macdonald, whom I had identified, and was making arrangements to have the Bible delivered to him. In due course, the Bible was brought to Scotland and handed over by Mr Whitehead's pastor, Rev Alistair Begg, during a visit from America.

We were delighted to hear that Donald would be able to attend our annual Doors Open Day on the 2nd September 2017 and that he would be bringing the Bible with him. Many of our visitors on the day had seen or read the story of the Bible's homecoming in the media and were excited to see it on display in our Family History room.



I was thrilled with the outcome of this enquiry and the opportunity it presented to highlight the wealth of records we hold at the High Life Highland Archive Centre.

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