

**P38 Papers of the Keith Family
RECORDS' IDENTITY STATEMENT**

Reference number: GB1741/P38
Alternative reference number:
Title: Papers of the Keith Family
Dates of creation: 1887-1969
Level of description: Fonds
Extent: 2 boxes
Format: Paper

RECORDS' CONTEXT

Name of creators: David Barrogill Keith
Administrative history: Peter Keith (b.1847) was a solicitor and Notary Public in Thurso, as well as Justice of the Peace for Caithness and Honorary Sheriff Substitute for Caithness, Orkney and Shetland. He married Katie Bruce in 1888. Their first child was Christina Keith (b.12 Jan 1889). David Barrogill Keith was born in Thurso on 1 Mar 1891. He went to school at the Miller Academy until 1908 when he entered Edinburgh University; graduated MA in 1911, LLB in 1913 and qualified as a solicitor in 1914. He also studied painting in Paris and drawing at the Edinburgh College of Art. In 1914 he was commissioned in the Cameronians and served in France in the 10th Battalion 1915-1917, then 1917-1918 in the Judge Advocate General's Department. From 1919-1940 he practiced as a solicitor in the family firm in Thurso, then 1940-1945 he was in charge of the J.A.G.'s branch in the north of Scotland. In 1946 he was appointed Sheriff Substitute of Orkney at Kirkwall, where he remained until he retired in 1968.

Custodial history:

RECORDS' CONTENT

Description: Papers pertaining to the Keith Family
Appraisal:

Accruals:

RECORDS' CONDITION OF ACCESS AND USE

Access: open

Closed until:

Access conditions: Available within the Archive searchroom

Copying: Copying permitted within standard
Copyright Act parameters

Finding aids: Available in Archive searchroom

ALLIED MATERIALS

Related material:

Publication:

Notes:

Date of catalogue: September 2011

Ref.	Description	Dates
P38	Papers of the Keith Family	1887-1969
P38/1	Second Protocol book of Peter Keith, Solicitor, Thurso – statements of masters of vessels damaged by wind and weather before the Notary Public that the damage was as a result of natural causes. Vessels mostly putting into Thurso and Scrabster Harbours [1 volume]	1887-1914
P38/2	Photocopy of page from Slater's Directory for Thurso of 1911 with Peter Keith's entries highlighted [1 sheet]	1911
P38/3	The Sheriff's Story, autobiography of David Barrogill Keith including insert of 66 pages on his experiences as a soldier in the trenches in World War One; typescript pages with card end boards [1 volume]	1969
P38/4	The Sheriff's Story, copy of P38/3, but apparently without the World War One pages [1 folder]	1969
P38/5	"The Book of the 12 th Battalion Scottish Rifles": Drawings by D.B. Keith, Lieutenant, privately printed, two copies, [drawings of officers of the battalion, with a brief character sketch beside each]. Inside front cover of P38/5/1 is black and white photograph / post card of officers with names written on the back,	c.1914-c.1918

	marked "D.B. Keith his card" [2 volumes]	
P38/6	Autobiographical sketch by D. B. Keith written on parcel label [1 label]	c.1933
P38/7	"The Book of the Third Battalion Scottish Rifles" by D.B. Keith, scrapbook of pencil sketches, drawings of officers [1 volume]	1917
P38/8	"As A Soldier in the XIIth Scottish Rifles" by D.B. Keith, scrapbook of pencil sketches, drawings of officers [1 volume]	c.1917
P38/9	"The Book of C Mess, Vth Army B.E.F. Corps" by D.B. Keith, hand-coloured caricatures of officers, many only identified by nicknames ("Trotsky", "Napoleon" etc.) with handwritten humorous descriptions [1 volume]	c.1918
P38/10	Letters from D.B. Keith to his mother, Katie Keith or Bruce [60 sheets]	1915
P/38/10/1	Army message form: "Please inform all ranks that the Major General is exceedingly pleased with your behaviour this afternoon and he trusts that your casualties will not prove to be so large as anticipated..." [1 sheet]	c.1915
P/38/10/2	Letter from D.B. Keith to "My dear mother" from the Pavilion Hotel, Folkestone: "I have arrived here on my way to France" [1 sheet]	2 Oct 1915
P/38/10/3	First page of letter from D.B. Keith, 12 th S.R. attached 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": describes seeing "the fattest man in all the world", and hearing gunfire in the distance [1 sheet]	5 Oct 1915
P/38/10/4	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Battn. Scottish Rifles, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": "we are in a quiet place but every day & night you hear the big guns booming just a continuous rumbling something like the bubbles on boiling toffee ... It's all new and the experience of this war will if I come through all right make a tremendous difference in me. It may drive me insane and it may be the making of me." Says they are starting their own mess, and "I want you to send out or rather get Munro or one of the keepers to send out <u>every day</u> a box of grouse venison partridge duck etc." [3 sheets]	11 Oct 1915
P/38/10/5	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Scottish Rifles, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": "Apart from continuous gun firing & aeroplanes hovering overhead everything is much as usual." Discusses news from home. "If you are	16 Oct 1915

	<p>sending any stuff out here to Tommies don't send sweaters cardigans shirts socks etc. Any amount of these, as many as the people care to ask for are supplied <u>free</u> to the troops here. I know this for a fact. If they don't get them it's because the Quartermaster is rotten." [4 sheets]</p>	
P/38/10/6	<p>Letter from D.B. Keith, 10th Battn. Cameronians, Scottish Rifles, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": describes being "now within sound of the guns but quite far away from them & in absolutely no danger". Has seen George and Georgeson and Taylor and "a fellow Ross I used to know in Edinburgh". Has heard that A.S. Pringle "has been badly hit. He was magnificently game. With a battle axe and revolver old Toosie got over the trenches, He was hit 4-5 times & still fighting when last seen." [2 sheets]</p>	[17?] Oct 1915
P/38/10/7	<p>Letter from D.B. Keith, 10th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": acknowledges receipt of grouse and butter, and says that George is expected to dinner tomorrow. Describes his billet as "all right & quite comfortable – see little of war in its actuality" [2 sheets]</p>	18 Oct 1915
P/38/10/8	<p>Letter from D.B. Keith, 10th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": acknowledges receipt of letters and food. "The days here soon pass. The big guns are not far off & the flash lights up the sky very brightly and the bur of the shells thro' the air all help to make one realise the war. But for active service it is as yet pretty much of a picnic." [2 sheets]</p>	23 Oct 1915
P/38/10/9	<p>Letter from D.B. Keith, 10th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": says that "tonight we leave billets to go into the trenches, but it is improbable that things will be busy where we go as we got a pretty severe knock so lately. However as now I am in command of my company I will have a great deal to do."</p> <p>The letter has a valedictory feel, as the author describes how "I was ever a fighter so one fight more ... And here now on the verge of this trench war I feel a strength & confidence that I hope & believe will carry me thro', so that at all events you will not I hope have cause to be ashamed of how I faced the foe." [2 sheets]</p>	[30] Oct 1915
P/38/10/10	<p>Letter from D.B. Keith, 10th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": acknowledges receipt of food and letters from home. "About stuff for the men honestly they want absolutely nothing. They get a brand new rigout every time they come out to the trenches." "You will see Foulis got wounded, a soft "cushy" one we</p>	2 Nov 1915

	call it. It means a slight wound enough to let him get home & do no damage. He is as right as rain." His own last time in the trenches was "more or less uneventful except for dodging shells." [1 sheet]	
P/38/10/11	<p>Letter and typescript transcript from D.B. Keith, 10th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": describes his time in the trenches, 12 days without a change of clothes, moving up through mud and seeing French children digging drainage holes, to the firing line "to see what was once a town the size of Thurso".</p> <p>On entering the communication trench "we heard rifle bullets singing and saw the flares and knew we were in it at last." After a day or two they transferred to about 100 yards from "the Bosch" and occupied a former German dugout, whose facilities he describes. From there they advanced to within 20 yards of the German lines, and the author recounts shooting a German soldier ("He offered a good target. I am a passing shot. I took my time and he disappeared.") There follows a description of a night-time German attack which was driven off. A few days later they were relieved and moved out of the firing line.</p> <p>"It is great and strenuous and topping life. Really it is great. Everything is against you, it is man and ingenuity against Nature and Climate with a dash of venomous Bosch. I was out burying some people too and thought nothing of it. My first day in the trenches I was watching the enemy over the dead body of an Essex man lying on our parapet. Later when close to the Germans the trenches smelt horribly in places of dead Bosch." Is now Adjutant of the Battalion.</p> <p>[10 sheets]</p>	4 Nov 1915
P/38/10/12	<p>Letter from D.B. Keith, 10th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": is now back in billets. The Battalion received a number of medals and commendations for the recent attack. Requests cigarettes and describes how constantly the men smoke: "In this attack our men having rushed through the 1st and 2nd lines of German trenches, lit cigarettes & strolled up & over Hill 70. They got tired and sat about smoking, so utter was the German rout. Then when as in the trenches we are up day & night we smoke a lot."</p> <p>The author adds, "Coming under fire is not extra terrifying. In fact it doesn't distract one at all, only heavy shelling is a bit uncomfortable if it comes too near." [2 sheets]</p>	6 Nov 1915
P/38/10/13	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": acknowledges receipt of food,	9 Nov 1915

	some of it damaged in transit (“the tomatoes also arrive mostly always the worse for wear”) and discusses family news from home. Says he won’t be able to write for some days as “We go into trenches proper tomorrow.” [1 sheet]	
P/38/10/14	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to “My dear mother”: discusses souvenirs, news from home and clothes for the trenches. “Is Lord Derby’s scheme doing anything in Caithness or are they still living in hopes that it is a dream that the country is at war?” [2 sheets]	11 Dec 1915
P/38/10/15	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Scottish Rifles, B.E.F., to “My dear mother”: “we are now well back from the firing line & I have a top hole billet” [1 sheet]	14 Dec 1915
P/38/10/16	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to “My dear mother”: reports on his recent time in the trenches, experiencing artillery duels. Describes being very close to German trenches, and how the German soldiers “became quite friendly, he waved his arms he threw white papers, he got up, he sat on the parapet, he came out of the trench altogether.” One German soldier came over to the British regiment the author’s company relieved, and he and a British Lance Corporal met in No Man’s Land between the trenches and exchanged cigarettes. “But – the moment each parted they ran like billy oh for their respective little holes in the mud for the last blighter might receive some presents he did not quite desire.” That night the Germans must have been relieved, “as in the morn sullen mud & cold barbed wire & the ping of a rifle bullet were all the weather forecast we could get.” Also describes finding a German shell with “R Strong & Co.” in English on it (“It must be a swine of an American firm but these Americans are poor fools anyway and not worth quarrelling with.”); Sir John French saying farewell to his troops; a typical soldiers’ concert; marching to the pipes (“It’s a great thing to be a Scotsman & it’s tremendous to be in a Scottish Regiment with its pipes in this land of France.”); and the Roman Catholic priest. [7 sheets]	20 Dec 1915
P/38/10/17	Letter from D.B. Keith, from Folkestone, to “My dear mother”, after a rough crossing [1 sheet]	20 Jan 1916
P/38/10/18	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to “My dear mother”: back in billets and going to the trenches very soon [1 sheet]	24 Jan 1916

P/38/10/19	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": acknowledges receipt of grouse and rabbit and letters. Has been out of the trenches several days. Expects the Germans to make a strong push before the middle of March ("perhaps it will be their last effort, one really cannot tell") [1 sheet]	11 Feb 1916
P/38/10/20	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Sco. Rifles, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": "Here we are very quiet & the Hun isn't over assertive. We go out of the trenches tomorrow & get the first decent billets for a month. I haven't had my clothes off for a month save once for a bath!" Discusses the French resistance at Verdun and the recent German fleet action [1 sheet]	13 Mar 1916
P/38/10/21	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Sco. Rifles, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": back in billets with the prospect of only two or three days more in the trenches; perfect weather; has not seen George; "Archie would be in command of his Battalion while Winston was at home. I wonder how he got on & how he is liked." (N.B., after the disgrace of Gallipoli Winston Churchill commanded the 6th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers from 25 December 1915 until 7 May 1916, near Ypres on the Western Front; his second in command was Sir Archibald "Archie" Sinclair, 1 st Viscount Thurso) [2 sheets]	16 Mar 1916
P/38/10/22	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": out of the line and back at billets ("this turn in the trenches was pretty hard. Mostly we had snow & trenches were tumbling in & things were bad"); there is to be a change of command as "Colonel Noshier has returned" and Colonel Smith will leave "and that is rotten luck"; emphasis is now on smartening up ("We're now to become a kind of Prussian Guard & be nice & clean & look pretty"); has had influenza but not to worry. [1 sheet]	28 Mar 1916
P/38/10/23	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Scottish Rifles, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": acknowledges receipt of parcels from home; is still resting up; is not looking forward to Colonel Noshier taking over ("I don't think Col Noshier will like an adjutant who can't ride") [1 sheet]	31 Mar 1916
P/38/10/24	Letter from D.B. Keith, 10 th Cameronians, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": stationed far from the front line; out of hospital, then three days manoeuvres ("which consisted mainly of galloping sometimes willingly & other times unwillingly across country & over ploughed fields") [1 sheet]	11 Apr 1916

P/38/10/25	Letter from D.B. Keith, Headquarters, VII Corps A, B.E.F., to "My dear mother": situated next to a very well-kept German cemetery ("It makes me rather ashamed of our yarns about Bosch boiling down corpses for oil to see how well he has looked after this cemetery"); recounts how a man had been found, hidden by the French women since the retreat from Mons in 1914 ("at first he was suspect" until his old officer recognised him); discusses family news and if possible asks for grouse to be sent to various people [4 sheets]	28 Oct 1918
P38/11	Orkney Defences Rogues Gallery, hand-coloured caricatures and sketches of officers [1 folder]	1940-1942
P38/12	Black and white photographs of paintings of Orkney, presumably during World War 2, mostly of Kirkwall but one of "Stromness in Wartime" [36 sheets]	c.1918
P38/13	Typescript of "Care of the British Army by Behind The Line", author Christina Keith (b.1889, Thurso), her account of her experiences in the Army's education scheme in France Sep 1918-Mar 1919 [1 bundle]	1965
P38/14	"My Student Days", sketch book of drawings and caricatures by D.B. Keith of his fellow students and tutors at Edinburgh University, many signed by the subjects, with character sketches, press cuttings and biographical information, including their subsequent military careers in World War One. Subjects include Ian McHardy, later the Caithness Director of Education, and Daniel Horace Georgeson, killed in World War One. [1 small volume]	1910-1914
P38/15	Folder of miscellaneous papers of D.B. Keith [22 items]	1911-1968
P38/15/1	"Bygone Days At Edinburgh University", reprinted volume of the 'University of Edinburgh Journal' two copies [2 booklets]	1965
P38/15/2	Autobiographical sketch of D.B. Keith's experiences in World War One, "I go to war" [1 bundle]	n.d.
P38/15/3	Programme for A Dramatic Entertainment in aid of Major Carmichael's Fund for a Pipe Band for the 12 th Battalion Scottish Rifles at Town Hall, Tain [1 sheet]	11 Mar 1915
P38/15/4	'An Untold Scapa Incident', reads like a work of fiction [10 sheets]	n.d.
P38/15/5	Newspaper article from the Orcadian, "Sheriff Keith Proposes the Immortal Memory at the Kirkwall	1967

	Chamber of Commerce Burns Supper” with photograph [1 sheet]	
P38/15/6	Letter to Dr Phillip, Edinburgh from the Department of Geology at the Royal Scottish Museum, re concentric ironstone concretion [1 sheet]	3 Dec 1959
P38/15/7	‘Over the Seas and Far Away’ and ‘The Isles of Orkney’, handwritten historical notes [16 sheets]	n.d.
P38/15/8	Typescript copy letter to the Editor of the Scotsman from D.B. Keith on “the complacency of those conducting this war” [2 sheets]	11 Dec 1939
P38/15/9	Postcard sent from D.B. Keith to Miss Keith, “A Merry Xmas, Loos 1915” [1 sheet]	26 Dec 1915
P38/15/10	Copies of letter from D.B. Keith from the Loos front to his mother dated 20 Dec 1915 and copy of his letter “Complacency” 11 Dec 1939 [21 sheets]	1915, 1939
P38/15/11	Poem and notes on Orkney [5 sheets]	n.d.
P38/15/12	Notes for a History of the North of Scotland [29 sheets]	n.d.
P38/15/13	Correspondence regarding publication of D.B. Keith’s articles [13 sheets]	1969
P38/15/14	‘Grand Scones’ or ‘The Saga of Robbie McKay’ [1 volume]	n.d.
P38/15/15	‘Outposts of Empire’, handwritten note on Orkney in wartime [1 sheet]	c.1940
P38/15/16	Newspaper articles on the resignation of Sheriff Keith [2 sheets]	1968
P38/15/17	Three sketches of officers, may be World War One or World War Two [3 sheets]	c.1915, c.1940
P38/15/18	Extracts from ‘The Scots Law Times’, article on an Old Protocol Book [5 sheets]	1966
P38/15/19	Handwritten notes, D.B. Keith’s service in France [1 sheet]	Oct 1915-Jan 1917
P38/15/20	Map of Vermelles, France [1 sheet]	c.1916
P38/15/21	Black and white photograph, judge and officials [persons and place unknown] [1 sheet]	c.1940
P38/15/22	Pamphlet published by Edinburgh Unionist Association, “The Edinburgh University Liberal	c.1920

	Association is – as might be expected – in a perfectly horrible mess” [1 sheet]	
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