

The Petrie Family, a Genealogical and Biographical Perspective

by **Dimity Dornan**

Presented at a meeting of the Society 27 February 1992

Andrew Petrie (1798-1872) arrived at Moreton Bay in the August of 1837, to take up his new position as Foreman of Works at the infamous Penal Colony. With him was his family of five children, and his wife, Mary. Andrew, later described by early newspaperman Thomas Dowse as “The Father of Brisbane”,¹ was, with his family, to have a significant role in the establishment of Brisbane as a viable township. He was also to become an explorer of some note, and the architect and builder of some of Brisbane’s finest old buildings. Many of these stand today as monuments to his creativity.

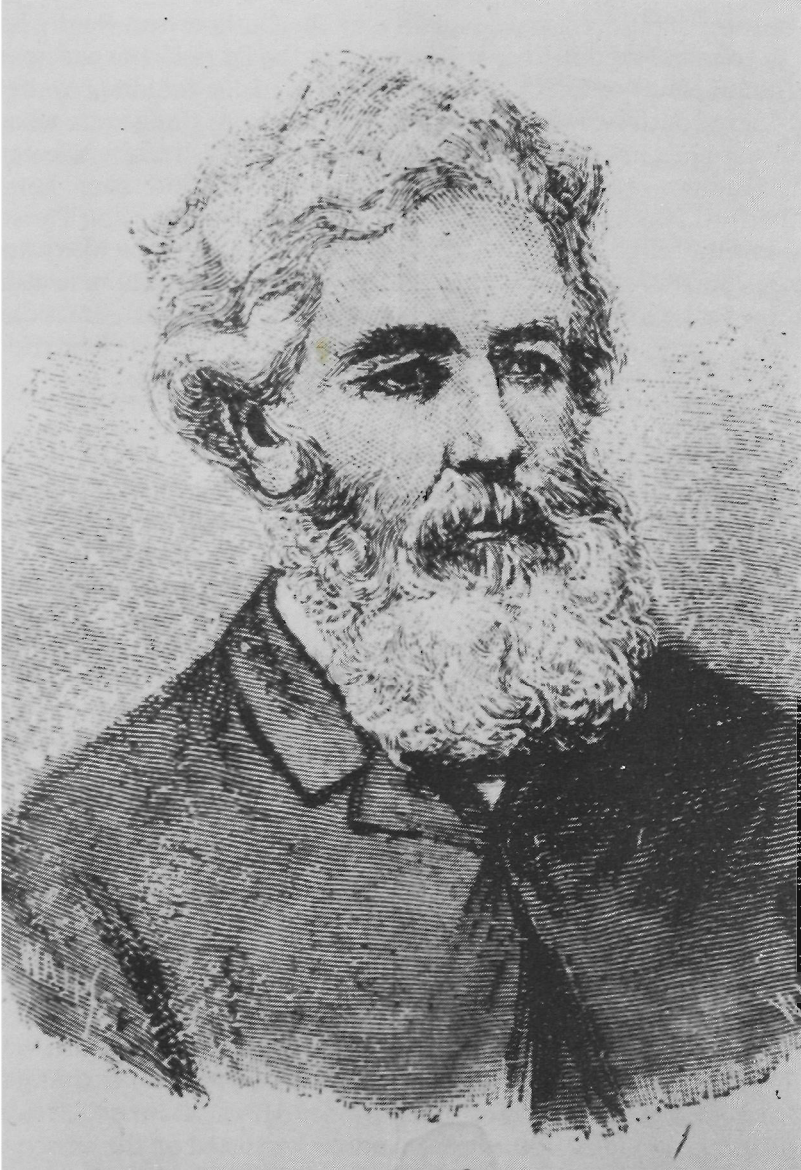
To understand the personality and ability of such a man, an understanding of his background is essential. This necessitates a journey back to Scotland of the 18th century. Andrew Petrie was baptised in 1798, the second son of Walter Petrie of Kettle, Fifeshire, Scotland.² Walter was born the eighth son of James Petrie and Margaret Elder at Freuchy mill in Kettle.³

Andrew’s mother, Margaret Hutchison (also recorded as Hutson) was baptised in Markinch, Fife, the neighbouring parish to Kettle in 1770⁴, and she married Walter Petrie in Kettle in 1792, being 10 years his junior.⁵ Margaret was the daughter of Grizel Pierson and Andrew Hutchison, and according to the traditional Scottish naming pattern, it was this ancestor, his grandfather on his mother’s side, who gave Andrew Petrie his name.

Margaret and Walter Petrie had 6 children, of whom Andrew was the fourth. His older siblings were Grezel⁶ (different spelling to her grandmother namesake), James⁷ (called after his paternal grandfather), and Margaret⁸ (named for her mother). His younger siblings were Barbara⁹ and William.¹⁰

Andrew’s baptism is actually recorded as PEDRIE in the Kettle Old Parish Records. At the time of Barbara’s and William’s births in 1803 and 1808, Walter Petrie’s profession was recorded as a weaver, and on Andrew’s death certificate it is listed as “trade worker”, so there seems to be no doubt that Andrew came from a family of tradespeople.

Andrew was of an independent, adventurous and determined nature, and he left the village of his forbears, Kettle (also known as Kingskettle) in his early youth. In Edinburgh he became connected with an eminent building firm, and served four years working with a prominent architect. Here he met and married Mary Cuthbertson, a woman two years his senior. The marriage of Mary and Andrew (listed as a joiner) was proclaimed on 28 December 1821 at St.



Andrew Petrie

Cuthbert's Parish, County Edinburgh, and at this time he resided at No.35 Fountainbridge, while his bride lived at 101 Rose St.¹¹ She was the daughter of Joseph Cuthbertson, a tall and strongly built woman of dark colouring. Her husband was fairer in complexion, but no less imposing in his appearance. His height and strong build made him well suited to being a manual worker, especially in the stone work in which he later excelled. Together they made an impressive couple.

Their first child, John was born about a fortnight after the ceremony.¹² This event may explain why the Cuthbertson family has not been mentioned in later writings about the Petries', nor the name of Joseph continued. Whatever the reaction of the families, Andrew and Mary continued with their lives, moving from Canongate where John was born in 1822 to Toll Cross in the same parish where a second son, Andrew, was born in 1823.¹³ In 1826, a third son, James Rutherford Hardcastle was born at Portobello, Duddingston Parish, also in Edinburgh.¹⁴ Yet another son, Walter, was born to Mary and Andrew in 1827 and was baptised at Tron Church Parish, indicating that the Petrie's had moved house yet again in Edinburgh. James died at four years of age, in 1830,¹⁵ and was buried at Greyfriars Cemetery from Burt's Close. Andrew was listed on the death certificate as a "wright".

The restrictive economic climate of the Scotland in the 1830's (and possibly the effects of recent family bereavement), made the Petrie family with four growing boys, willing to emigrate to Australia when the Reverend J.D. Lang approached Andrew through a local clergyman. Already Andrew had been showing restless tendencies in the many moves of residence within Scotland. The same tendency motivated him towards exploration when later confined by the stifling atmosphere of the penal colony. While suffering the after-effects of a horse-riding accident which had severely injured his leg in his youth, he was otherwise fit and ready to use his already considerable skills in a new land. Their new son Thomas was but five months old.¹⁶

Lang, an evangelical Protestant of unusual tenacity, recruited skilled tradesmen who had been recommended by respected Presbyterian employers and churchmen from his native Scotland. Since one of the reasons for the Rev. Lang's conscription of families was to remedy the climate of immorality in the penal settlement in Australia, only those of the highest moral character were chosen. Obviously, Andrew and Mary were seen to meet this requirement. Now a spirited couple in their early thirties, their strong build and adventurous spirit were well suited to colonial requirements. The *Stirling Castle* carrying 52 Scottish mechanics and their families, set off on 1 June 1831 with Captain James Fraser at the helm. Andrew was listed on the passenger inventory as a carpenter, but colonial experience would show that not

only was he a skilled stonemason, but he also had a rudimentary knowledge of surveying and architecture. The time taken for the voyage was not wasted, as in addition to bible readings and strict observance of the Sabbath, male passengers devoted a considerable amount of time to study. Mathematics, geometry and political economy were studied five days a week. Many of the mechanics, Andrew included, signed a temperance pledge before they disembarked.

On arrival in Sydney, life was very different. The mechanics were soon employed in building Lang's new Australian College, and the Petries were working hard to pay back their passage money, as half of their wages was deducted for this purpose. House rental and food were very expensive, water had to be purchased, and families could do no more than live. The cost of living was double that in Scotland. Petrie took on private work in partnership with George Ferguson, and eventually won a position as clerk in the Commissariat under Laidley. These and subsequent positions helped to support the growing family. Their first daughter, Isabella was born in 1833,¹⁷ and in 1835, another son, William, was born,¹⁸ but only survived two years.¹⁹ A new appointment under Barney in the Ordinance Department became a turning point in Petrie's career. When a position as Clerk of Works at the penal colony of Moreton Bay became available, Andrew's restless energy made him an eager candidate. Mary's possibly mixed emotions to this further upheaval have never been recorded.

After several horrific years living in ex-convict quarters, the notorious Female Factory, Andrew's energy and resourcefulness asserted themselves. He established his family in a house he built for them at what is now Petrie Bight. By 1842, when the penal settlement was about to end, he had spent years of attention to duty and in considerable exploration of the surrounding area. Andrew decided to throw in his lot with the emerging township and start up his own construction firm. The success of his company and of his exploratory feats in South East Queensland live on today. Likewise, industrial innovations such as his introduction of the Eight Hour Movement exist today in testimony to his humane reputation with the convicts and his fair but strict name as an employer.

Andrew and Mary had become parents once more, another son, George Barney being born in 1839.²⁰ Andrew's reputation as a parent was of a strict authoritarian figure, who could not tolerate such weaknesses as smoking and drinking in his children. Much family trauma resulted when his sons succumbed to the pervading influences in the colony. However, incidents such as his leniency with his son Tom on one occasion, possibly interceded for by his mother, show

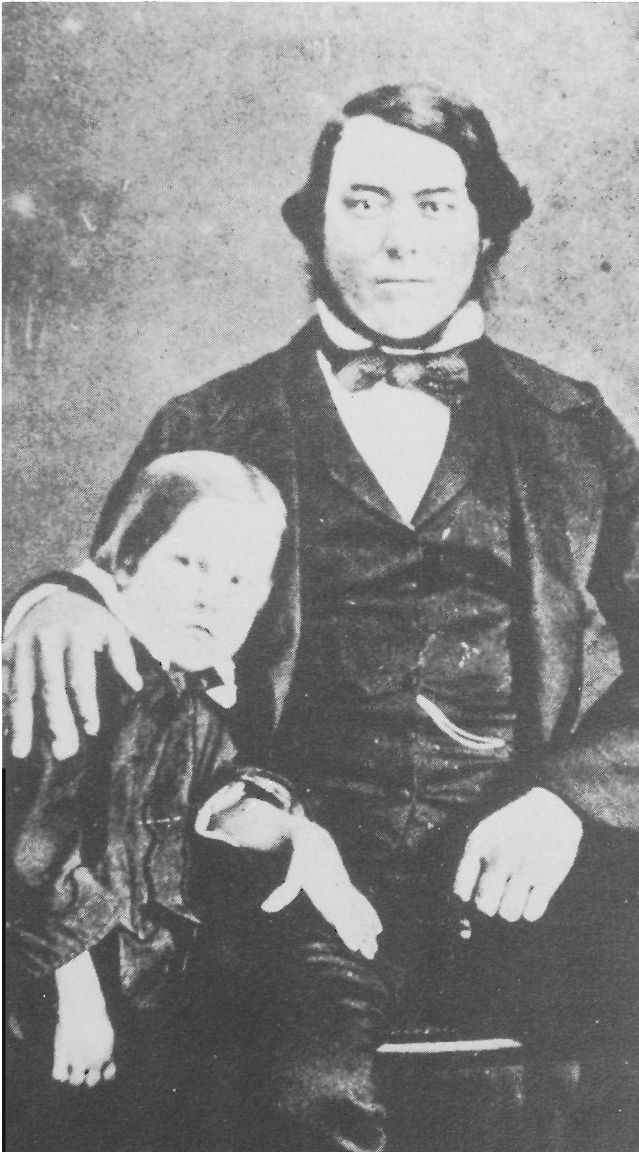
that he was basically sympathetic in nature. It is his relationships with the Aborigines which show most clearly his empathy for his fellows. Incident after incident demonstrated that Andrew was always willing to treat the Aborigines fairly, and with understanding for their lost rights. He employed them in the house and in his business. Indeed, he allowed his children to grow up with them as playmates, even to the extent that his son, Tom, became a full tribal member and went bush with them for weeks on end.

Andrew's reputation as a good and honest citizen, as well as his entrepreneurial skills, were handed on to his eldest son, John, who joined him in his firm. Eventually this reputation was instrumental in John Petrie being elected as first Lord Mayor of Brisbane. Although Andrew had a basically low political profile, he was no doubt influential behind the scenes. Likewise, his religious fervour was well known in the social circles of Moreton Bay. He also had a wide reputation as a genial host, particularly to squatters visiting the new township. Andrew built a large addition to his house to accommodate them, and enjoyed his role as benefactor. He was also welcoming to prospective explorers, and men such as Leichardt sought his hospitality and his experience.

Andrew Petrie's skills as a builder, architect and stone mason have been perpetuated in such monuments as Newstead House, the General Post Office and Parliament House. Evidence that his trade skills were passed down to his children can be seen by the hand crafted inlaid table with the central initials of "G.B." for George Barney, his youngest son, which is held in the collection of the Royal Queensland Historical Society. Other mementos of his life in south east Queensland remain in the many places either named by him or named after him or his family. Titles such as Cuthbertson Creek (now Burpengary Creek), named for Mary Petrie, and Point Hutchison, named for his mother, not to mention Petrie Terrace and Petrie Creek and the suburb of Petrie named after Tom, are all present day remembrances of Andrew Petrie's life in Brisbane.²¹

The image which embodies the kernel of the man, Andrew Petrie as we remember him today, is that of the blind man on a pony inspecting his building sites. His son Tom remembers in his reminiscences, recorded by his daughter, Constance, how Andrew, blinded in a tragic accident and lame because of the old leg injury he had suffered years ago in Scotland, used to visit the firm's building projects. Tom recalls "A boy led the pony on which my father rode to the different works in progress, and you would see him taken to a ladder leaning on a two-storey building, up which he would climb just as if he could see ... he would poke about with his stick on the

sides and all along the plank, then all over the building, feeling with it the different parts of the work".²² Tom also remembers that he would have things done properly at all costs and could reckon the amount of materials needed for a quote with uncanny accuracy. Andrew was blind for the last 24 years of his life, yet such was his interest in his firm that he continued to ring the starting bell each morning with his own hands until two years before he died at the age of 73.



John Petrie and Andrew Lang Petrie

THE TRAIL OF RESEARCH

Gathering information on the background of Andrew Petrie proved to be a daunting task. Firstly, there is a general lack of information on deaths in Scottish parish registers, although luck was with the researchers in some cases. Often the rent of a mort cloth was the only indication, as registration of deaths was not a legal requirement in Scotland at that date. Movement of family members within Scotland, especially the Petries, caused many problems. As there were many Petrie families, it was absolutely necessary to locate the correct one. As well, some of the indexes available only give "Edinburgh" without specifying the parish within Edinburgh.

Some factors were, however, useful in sorting out the morass of possible Petries in order to develop the genealogy of Andrew Petrie. Firstly, indexes have more recently become available, including indexes for Old Parish Registers (O.P.R.). Of these, the southern counties of Scotland were only made available in the last four months of the five year period of ongoing research. Also, the majority of monumental inscriptions for Scotland have been transcribed and published, and fortunately Kettle was one of these. The actual town name of Kettle from where the Petries originated was not able to be traced until near the end of the research period. It happened that a relative mentioned in passing that he was going to Scotland and wished to visit an old hut which, it was rumoured, had some family connections. Extensive foregoing investigation and interview of family members had only revealed the county, Fifeshire, but this additional clue led to a whole new strand of discoveries. It was also fortunate that the basic information with which the research was started was Queensland death certificates, as death certificates from the east coast of Australia are among the most detailed throughout the world, followed by Scotland. If Andrew Petrie had been Irish, there would have been many more problems. Another facilitating feature was that the time period of research for the Petries co-incided with the trend to use middle names, e.g. James Rutherford Hardcastle, which helped greatly with positive identification. The Scots tended to use maiden names of mothers and grandmothers as middle names. Lastly, it was fortunate that the Petries did baptise their children, and church entries for their births, marriages and deaths were available for the time period up to the time it was compulsory to do so. Certificates of births, marriages and deaths were only compulsory in New South Wales and Queensland after 1856.

In conclusion, the search for Andrew Petrie himself has been indeed a lengthy and difficult one, but there have been facilitating factors which were fortuitously well timed. It can only be hoped that as more pieces of the jig-saw have been added, others will stand out as fitting a portion of the puzzle yet unfinished. One of these could well be

the elusive Selina Petrie. Her forbidding portrait lives in the photographic records of the Oxley Library, and the first boat built in Queensland was probably named after her, but she has vanished without a trace. Likewise, two little nameless boys listed on Andrew's death certificate have never been identified.²³ Hopefully, in time, the full story will unfold.



Miss Selina Petrie

ENDNOTES

Information on Births, Marriages and Deaths were extracted from Old Parish Registers in Edinburgh and Fifeshire, which was then augmented with census data and monumental inscriptions. The Genealogical research was completed with the expert assistance of Dr. Jennifer Harrison.

1. Thomas, Dowse. "Old Times", *Brisbane Courier* 31 July 1896 p.6.
2. Baptism of Andrew Petrie (recorded as Pedrie), Kettle O.P.R., (1792-1816), Kettle Parish, Co. Fife, 435/3, son of Walter Petrie (Pedrie) and Margaret Hutchison (recorded as Hudson) on 27 June, 1798, born 25 June, 1798.
3. Birth of Walter Petrie, Kettle O.P.R. (1776-1755), to James Petrie in Freuchy mill and Margaret Elder, on 9 Oct. 1760, and baptised 12 October 1760.
4. Baptism of Margaret Hutchison, I.G.I., born to Andrew Hutchison and Grizel Pierson in Markinch, Fife on 4 March 1770.
5. Marriage of Walter Petrie (Pedrie) and Margaret Hutchison (Hutson), Kettle O P R. (1798-1816). Matrimonally contracted in order to marriage 12 September 1792, Kettle Parish, and married 28 September 1792.
6. Birth of Grezel Petrie (Pedrie), Kettle O.P.R. (1792-1816), 435/3, to Walter Petrie (Pedrie) and Margaret Hutchison (Hutson), born 9 April 1793, and baptised 19 May 1793.
7. Birth of James Petrie (Pedrie), Kettle O.P.R. (1792-1816), 435/3, to Walter Petrie (Pedrie) and Margaret Hutchison (Hudson), born 1 Oct. 1794 and baptised 5 October 1794.
8. Birth of Margaret Petrie (as above) on 3 May 1794, baptised 5 October 1794.
9. Birth of Barbara Petrie (as above) on 13 May 1803 and baptised 15 May 1803.
10. Birth of William Petrie (as above) 4 January 1808, baptised 11 January 1808.
11. Marriage of Andrew Petrie and Mary Cuthbertson, Index for St. Cuthberts Parish, Marriage proclaimed 28 Dec 1821, St. Cuthberts Parish, Co. Edinburgh, 685-2/40, for Andrew Petrie, Joiner, No.35 Fountainbridge, and Mary Cuthbertson, residing No.101 Rose St. daughter of Joseph Cuthbertson.
12. Baptism of John Petrie, St. Cuthberts O.P.R., 2 February 1822, St. Cuthberts Parish, Co. Edinburgh, 685-2/33, son of Andrew Petrie, Joiner of Cannongate and Mary Cuthbertson, born 15 January.
13. Baptism of Andrew Petrie, St. Cuthberts Parish (as above), 26 December 1823, son of Andrew Petrie, Joiner, Toll cross, and Mary Cuthbertson, born 3 December.
14. Birth of James Rutherford Hardcastle Petrie, I.G.I. for Midlothian, born Duddingston 1826, also Duddingston O.P.R. of births, born 31 October 1835 and Portobello, Duddingston Parish, Co. Edinburgh, 684/7, baptised 12 March 1826.
15. Baptism of Walter Petrie, Pre-1855 Midlothian Births, Old Parish Register, 26 July 1827, Edinburgh Parish, Co. Edinburgh, 685 1/55. Son of Andrew Petrie, Wright, and Mary Cuthbertson, Tron Church Parish, a son born 9 June last.
16. Death of James, buried 4 years, Greyfriars Cemetery, from Burts Close, died 2 August 1820. Ref. 685 1/100, p.172.
17. Baptism of Thomas, N.S.W. Baptism Register, 1831, no. 317, vol. 45.
18. Baptism of Isabella, N.S.W. Baptism Register, to Andrew Petrie and Mary Cuthbertson, 1833, 318 vol. 35.

19. Baptism of William Petrie, N.S.W. Baptism Register, 1835, 3101 vol. 45 and 288 vol. 47.
20. Death of William Petrie, N.S.W. Deaths, 1837, 1829 vol. 102 and 89 vol. 103.
21. Baptism of George Barney, Q'ld Baptisms 1829-56, 1839 no.99 and N.S.W. Baptism Register 1624 vol. 23.
22. The renaming of North Pine as Petrie was a contentious issue locally; see Railway Department file 1929/5112, A/12611, Queensland State Archives.
23. C.C. Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*. Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1983, p.300.
24. Andrew Petrie's Death Certificate, Queensland Deaths, No. A 9418.

‘A Distant Past’: Researching the First Petrie Generation’

by D. Cryle

Presented at a meeting of the Society, 27 February 1992

Researching the Scottish origins of the Petries was the first stage of a two-pronged investigation into the family's eventful history. Complementing this lengthy task was the need to interrogate early colonial sources in an attempt to reconstruct the original immigrants, Andrew and Mary, as complex historical actors. While it was not our intention to undertake a psychobiography, it was necessary to negotiate the private family sphere, firstly as a means of elucidating the achievements of a very public Brisbane family and secondly, as a subject possessing its own intrinsic interest. In this regard, researching the first immigrant generation proved to be as challenging as investigating the Scottish connection. In the case of the Petries, it was not till the early twentieth century that Constance Petrie, a granddaughter of the original immigrants on Tom's side, recorded the celebrated *Reminiscences of Early Queensland*,¹ while Andrew Lang Petrie, a grandson on John's side, wrote a series of short sketches for the *Daily Mail* at the end of his parliamentary career.² Valuable as these family sources were for the colonial period, there were significant gaps in the record, especially concerning the original immigrants.

Andrew Petrie, the master builder and business founder, remained elusive, shrouded in the reticence of a pioneer who was more concerned with practical achievement than with social reputation. Andrew appeared to have left few written records. Rather, his energy