

## Disability in nineteenth century Scotland – the case of Marion Brown

**Abstract.** *The perception that people with disabilities increasingly became regarded as 'other' as the nineteenth century advanced is encouraged by the expansion of institutionalisation, particularly for those with mental impairments, but also for many people with sensory disablement. People with physical impairments were given less prominence in this trend although, as the medicalisation of disablement gained ascendancy, some of them experienced confinements of considerable duration. This paper recognises that many people with disabilities did not spend portions of their lives in institutions, but lived within the family structure and as part of their local community. It explores this experience through the writings of Marion Brown (1844-1916) who lived in Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire. She suffered from a variety of physical and sensory impairments of varying duration that are revealed in correspondence to relatives in Dunmore, Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> Her letters reveal ways in which disablement was both 'normal' and marginalising, and they show how contentment and joy were juggled with yearning and apprehension. This paper offers an interpretation of the ways in which Marion Brown's impairments were of submerged significance in a society ingrained to encountering a variety of economic and social vicissitudes, while on a personal level being the cause of frustration, unrealised aspiration, and impending loss of security.*

**Keywords:** disability, emigration, physical impairment, Sanquhar.

The ease of identification of sources relating to charities and philanthropists, asylums and institutions, physicians and surgeons, educationalists and administrators, has resulted in the focus of the study of disability marginalising, if not excluding, *people with disabilities*, and their families and friends. In examining American perspectives of disability, Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky observe that 'we have largely screened them (people with disabilities) out of our collective historical memory. Why have historians generally left people with disabilities out of the account?'<sup>2</sup> They suggest that 'one practical reason may be that historians assume a paucity of primary sources for disability history. How can one write the history of a subject if one cannot gather much evidence about it?'<sup>3</sup> Of the American context, they continue, 'we expect to find people with disabilities in medical institutions, but we neglect to look for them in other social settings. ... few people with "disabilities" spent more than a portion of their lives – if any at all – in medical institutions or interacting with medical professionals'.<sup>4</sup> In Scotland there were institutions which were not primarily medical in function, notably those for the blind

and for the 'deaf and dumb' where the objective was education and training, and also the lunatic asylums during the early decades of the century when their emphasis was custodial rather than curative, yet the argument that other social settings played a role holds true. This is particularly so in the case of people with physical impairments.

The reason that people with physical disabilities remained in 'other social settings', it may be argued, is that physical impairment was widespread throughout much of the nineteenth century and was frequently accepted as 'normal.' As a result, it was often omitted from contemporary observations. Roger Cooter observed that poor health accompanied the lives of the impoverished with such prevalence, that disability was widespread and generally accepted as 'normal', and that the degree of severity was the only provision of a vague boundary between ill-health and disablement. Indeed, he states, 'it could be appropriate to speak of the majority of people being, at best, merely "temporarily abled" over the course of their lives',<sup>5</sup> while 'persons who were physically handicapped were not unlike other sick, impotent or old persons in their dis-abledness'.<sup>6</sup>

For evidence of Cooter's view we might consider Gaskell's survey, published in 1833, of the manufacturing population of England. Observing English cotton mill workers, he recorded that:

[The men's] limbs [were] slender and splaying badly and ungracefully. [There was] a very general bowing of the legs. [There were] great numbers of girls and women, walking lamely and awkwardly, with raised chests and spinal flexures. Nearly all have flat feet, accompanied by a down tread, differing widely from the elasticity of action of the foot and ankle, attendant upon perfect formation.<sup>7</sup>

Edwin Chadwick, who in 1840 extended his 1838/39 survey of sanitary conditions in England and Wales to Scotland, found that in one locality, because of the living conditions of the male labourers, 'it appeared that almost every third man was subjected to rheumatism'.<sup>8</sup>

Further evidence of the normalcy of disabling conditions is perhaps illustrated by the biography of William Cameron, an itinerant known as *Hawkie* who spent most of his life

wandering around Scotland and northern England. He was encouraged to write his biography during the 1840s by a publisher who died before seeing it into print.<sup>9</sup> The book eventually appeared in 1888, thirty-seven years after Hawkie's own death and its editor appears to have subverted its candour into an sensationalist exposé of the dishonesty of beggars, vagrants and itinerants. Nonetheless, this doctored manuscript gives a useful insight to the life of an itinerant, albeit one whom Peter Mackenzie in his *Old Reminiscences of Glasgow* described as 'no common beggar – in fact, he was an uncommon one'.<sup>10</sup> What makes Hawkie's account interesting in terms of disability is not so much what he says, but what he does not say. Hawkie explained that, during his childhood in Stirlingshire, at harvest time, 'my right leg caught damage and left me a cripple'.<sup>11</sup> Beggars were regularly reported as feigning disablement in order to attract sympathy and alms, and Hawkie was not averse to employing some form of deception from time to time. However, his genuine disability is absent throughout the remainder of his narrative except for one occasion when, in the Renfrewshire town of Johnstone, he tells us:

I, being lame, had to content myself with the low doors, when 'upstairs' was the best chance. Neither was I able to go over half the ground that a stout man or woman with both legs could do.<sup>12</sup>

Hawkie did not consider his disablement of sufficient significance to merit further comment.

The term 'disability' was not in common use during the nineteenth century. In the administration of the Scottish Poor Laws, the terms 'disabled' and 'able-bodied' were the criteria for defining eligibility for poor relief. In addition to being applied to blind, deaf and dumb, and paralysed applicants, 'disabled' also included the elderly and infirm, and deserted or single mothers with young children and facing destitution.<sup>13</sup> Disability was a direct reference to the inability to work and be self-supporting. While the twentieth century use of 'disability' is linked with the notion of an 'impairment', this was not necessarily so in the nineteenth century.

Poor relief was withdrawn from John Smith of Tow 'because tho' cripple in his feet, he was strong and well able to work with his hands, and he had recently married a strong able bodied wife'.<sup>14</sup> In the case study that follows, Marion Brown might have been 'disabled' within twentieth century medical concepts of disability. Her status is however less clear from nineteenth perspectives where the concept of disability was linked to productivity and material self-sufficiency. The letters written by Marion Brown suggest that disablement, in various manifestations, was a common occurrence in nineteenth century Scotland, but because many people who had a disability remained in the productive cycle, either directly or aided by the support of family or community networks, the extent of their presence has been hidden from view.

### **Marion Brown of Sanquhar**

Marion Brown, born in 1844, spent most of her life in the Dumfriesshire town of Sanquhar, dying there in 1916. There are 159 letters in the collection, spanning the period 1852 to 1903. Marion Brown was the author of the vast majority of these, beginning in 1865. From childhood, Marion experienced prolonged periods during which she was unable to walk and was bedridden. These confinements sometimes lasted for several years, interrupted by spells during which she had sufficient mobility to walk short distances. There were also times, usually of several weeks duration when she lost her sight and her power of speech.

Marion was the daughter of Margaret Glencross (c.1814-1850) and George Brown (c.1813-1872) from whom she became estranged possibly prompted by his remarriage following her mother's death. By the time she was seventeen years of age Marion was living with the Glencross family in 'The Bogg', a house overlooking a marshy valley two miles from Sanquhar. Eight people lived in this four-room dwelling. These included two uncles, James and Joseph Glencross, their sister Agnes Scott and her husband, Samuel.<sup>15</sup> Their father, Thomas Glencross, had died suddenly in 1859,<sup>16</sup> while another brother, John Glencross, had

emigrated to USA in 1852.<sup>17</sup> Samuel Scott died in 1865,<sup>18</sup> James Glencross died in 1866,<sup>19</sup> and Joseph Glencross emigrated to USA in 1870.<sup>20</sup> In 1851 there had been six male wage earners in the household,<sup>21</sup> but by 1871 there were none, only four people remaining at The Bogg – Agnes Scott, now the head and endeavouring to sustain it as a dairy, Marion Brown who spent much of her time confined to bed, a ten-year-old nephew, and a servant.<sup>22</sup>

Endeavours to retain The Bogg had failed by 1874 and Agnes Scott and her niece, Marion Brown, moved to a cottage occupied by Agnes's nineteen-year-old son, Tam Scott. In 1879 Tam married and his wife, Robina, joined the household.<sup>23</sup> As their own family grew in number, the household structure underwent further change and these realignments are reflected in Marion's letters to USA. Early letters to Dunmore, Pennsylvania, were to Marion's uncle, John Glencross. Marion Brown first wrote to Marion Glencross, John Glencross's sixteen-year-old daughter, in 1868. It was the beginning of a friendship which was sustained throughout the thirty-five years for which correspondence survives, yet the two cousins never met.

Disability in a variety of manifestations forms a thread throughout the correspondence. Marion Brown encountered various disabling conditions of both short-term and long-term duration, but she was by no means the only family member to have a disability. A letter in 1855, from James Glencross to his brother John, reveals Agnes's longing to go to America and the inhibition brought by the disablement of their mother:

...our Mother she is turned very frail; she cannot go betwixt the bed and fire; she is to be carried in a chair to the fireside. Old age brings frailty someway or other; Samuel and Nancy I believe wad have come to America if it was not for our Mother.<sup>24</sup>

Agnes had felt unable to go to America in 1855 because of her feeling of responsibility to her mother. In later years Marion professed a longing to emigrate to America which she suggested was inhibited by the same feelings of duty to her Aunt Agnes, her years then advanced and her limbs crippled with rheumatism. Tam Scott, Agnes's son, displayed

symptoms suggesting a respiratory condition and he had damaged ribs resulting from a work accident. Tam's second son suffered brain damage when he was kicked on the head by a horse. This injury resulted in a loss of memory and, as he reached adulthood, Marion expressed the opinion that he would never be able to work.<sup>25</sup> A nephew is described with a useless arm: 'He has got his left arm off joint at the shoulder, he cannot use it at all and the bonesetter cannot put it in'.<sup>26</sup>

Marion's letters describe a society that was gradually changing as landowners implemented drainage schemes, coalmines were sunk, small industries developed, and the arrival of the railway diminished the insularity of daily social intercourse. However, it remained a society filled with uncertainties. People were taken away by epidemics and sudden illness, or by the lure of a better life in USA.<sup>27</sup> Livelihood was threatened by unemployment and agricultural failure. Disabling impairments were among many other tribulations that had to be accommodated as a matter of course. While Marion Brown did not mention any occurrence of formal religious observance within the Glencross and Scott families, her letters are imbued with a fatalistic acceptance of disabling conditions as interventions that had to be accepted. After one bout of debilitation Marion wrote, 'Our heavenly Father has seen I have need of chastisement or he would not have afflicted me so long'.<sup>28</sup> Upon another occasion, Marion wrote:

I am not able to go without a hold of something, yet it is a great change from being close confined to bed, and I would have written sooner but I have had very sore eyes for a long time but I am thankful I can see a little better this week for I felt lonely when I could neither speak nor see. I have not could (sic) speak a word since April but midst all our sufferings we have mercies too for it would have been a very different thing both for myself and everyone connected with me if it had been my reason instead of my voice...<sup>29</sup>

The ingrained nature of religiously inspired fatalism is demonstrated by other family members, such as her uncle, James Glencross, who wrote to John:

He (God) gave us our lives and he can take it when he sees fit. This world is compared to a nursery where God rears us for a higher sphere and he transplants

when he sees fit; and we hope that God in his kindness has taken none but what was fit for his own presence where the light of his countenance is life without sorrow.<sup>30</sup>

A combination of acceptance of divine intervention in life, coupled with the need to persevere with life in the best way possible is also demonstrated by James Baird. In 1874, Baird was a thirteen-year-old employed in Ayrshire as a collier when his foot was run over by a hutch resulting in its amputation.<sup>31</sup> Baird continued a working life as a miners' representative and as an insurance agent - and undertook the manufacture and repair of his own prostheses for the ensuing fifty-five years.<sup>32</sup> Baird epitomises an ethos where such misfortunes had to be accommodated as a matter of course.

### **Changing Patterns of Family Life**

Marion Brown joined the Glencross family at The Bogg as a teenager.<sup>33</sup> Her earlier years are unaccounted for although we know that her mother died when Marion was approximately six years of age.<sup>34</sup> She is first mentioned in a letter of 1858 when she had measles,<sup>35</sup> while another piece of correspondence suggests that her stay at The Bogg was intended to be a temporary arrangement.<sup>36</sup> Marion's physical impairment dates from the age of five or six,<sup>37</sup> however the impression is conveyed that she was a welcome member of the Glencross household despite her consistent confinement to bed and periodic loss of sight and speech. There is no suggestion that her presence was resented through being prolonged beyond the extent of any initial understanding reached with her father. Marion and her aunt, Agnes, built a strong bond and a practice developed where the two women frequently provided each other with conversational companionship late at night after the rest of the family had retired.

This close relationship was sustained during the final years at The Bogg when no Glencross men remained, and continued when they set up a new home with Agnes's nineteen-year-old son, Tam Scott, as the head. Marion continued to be emotionally tied to her aunt throughout her life, especially as the older woman became crippled with rheumatism.

Family responsibility for Agnes until her death in 1902 at the age of eighty-five might have been considered reasonable, but Marion's entitlement to support became tenuous following the marriage of her cousin, Tam, to Robina Boyle in 1879. When Marion wrote of the impending marriage there was already a sense of friction between the two women and talk of the financial impracticality of forming two households that would both rely upon Tam for their upkeep:

We must try and put up the best way we can. There is no doubt but we will feel a difference. If she is kind to Aunt I don't care for myself, but I would not like to hear her speak cross to Aunt. She has always been so kind to me and Tom has always been very kind to me.<sup>38</sup>

The relationship between Marion and Robina did not blossom and harsh words were revealed in a letter of 1881:

... if you was (sic) in my place, how would you like it if anyone was to say to you that you ought to be in the poor house. One day when Tam's wife said that tie me, it made me feel I could never give her an answer. But remember neither Tam nor Aunt heard her say it, nor I would not tell them for it would do nothing but vex them both and Tam would give the last halfpenny he had for either of us...<sup>39</sup>

At this time the four adults lived in a house with two rooms. Robina, then twenty-three years of age and thirteen years Marion's junior, had one child. She was eventually to give birth to eleven children, ten surviving beyond infancy, and including a son disabled by the kick of a horse at the age of seven. Tam had various bouts of ill health and there were regular disruptions to his employment. The obligations of care for Marion and Aunt Agnes placed on Robina would have been considerable and the family obligations of responsibility towards Marion must have seemed dubious to her. Marion makes little mention of Tam and Robina's children in her letters and there is no indication that she enjoyed their company or that they brought comfort to her during her long periods of confinement. In one letter Marion complained that 'the bairns has (sic) nearly put me stupid today'.<sup>40</sup> Marion only once became a recipient of poor relief – in 1886/87 when she is described as 'delicate – confined to bed' and was granted



two shillings and sixpence weekly.<sup>41</sup> At this time she wrote that she had been unable to walk for seven years and that:

I can compare myself to nothing else but a tree blown down with as many roots left in the earth as to keep it alive but cannot lift its head. So I lie here and cannot rise but when I am lifted.<sup>42</sup>

She did not end up in the poorhouse and she was aided both by an unexpected inheritance of £500 from an uncle in Bristol,<sup>43</sup> and by periodic remittances from Pennsylvania. However she constantly worried that she would become homeless when Aunt Agnes died. She believed that her only claim to membership of the family was through her ties with Tam's mother and that, with Aunt Agnes removed, Robina's personality would be strong enough to force Tam to agree to her eviction. As Aunt Agnes became increasingly frail, Marion wrote that 'if our heavenly Father sees fit to take her away first, I may say I have no home in this world'.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps it was awareness of this scenario which prompted Marion to move out of the Scott household. The family's dwelling from 1891 was a four-room cottage. Marion still visited at weekends and in 1902 she described the composition of the family:

... Tom's wife has had another daughter. What a houseful. She has had eleven. There is ten living. Mary is in a place in Dumfries.<sup>45</sup> There is (sic) nine children, father and mother and granny (Agnes Scott) in the house every day and me on Saturday nights ...<sup>46</sup>

A few months later, Aunt Agnes died, leaving Marion with consoling words from her deathbed: 'We must go. We canna aye be here, lassie'.<sup>47</sup> In her grief, Marion wrote, 'Aunt is gone and I have no place I can call home'.<sup>48</sup>

Marion appears to have been very settled with her uncles and aunt for twenty years. Her fluctuating disablement seems not to have made her a burden to them, even under conditions of financial distress. Her relationship with Aunt Agnes was particularly close and one of mutual support. Indeed, Marion wrote: 'She has been a kind mother to me. If she had been my own mother she could have done no more for me'.<sup>49</sup>

Marion's experiences of disablement within the family units of which she was a part require consideration, not only from Marion's perspective, but from the perspective of those who undertook responsibility for her. The Glencross household took this on willingly. In a predominantly male household where, even if employment was erratic, the burden of maintaining family solvency could be spread across several adult members was not considered irksome. However, within the Scott household, Marion was one of two older, incapacitated women requiring the empathy of younger adults with heavy responsibilities of parenthood. Marion's sense of alienation might be explained, not only by the absence of kinship with Robina, but also by Marion's concern about her own problems almost to the exclusion of those of the Scott family. In an environment where gender-delineated roles might have placed certain responsibilities of domesticity and childcare upon Marion, resentment would have arisen if it was felt that she was not repaying hospitality by giving appropriate assistance with these duties.

### **Work, love and emigration**

When first recorded in the Glencross household at The Bogg in 1861, Marion was described as a dressmaker, an occupational affiliation which remained with her for the next three decades.<sup>50</sup> Marion made little reference in her letters to home work although her uncle, James Glencross, wrote that:

The more Marion B. is still confined to bed, she has ease to be in it generally and she can make dresses and shirts, and sometimes bonnets, and she has always something to sew and it keeps her from wearying ...<sup>51</sup>

However Marion did record the knitting of black and white socks in Sanquhar patterns<sup>52</sup> to send to Marion Glencross<sup>53</sup> and told her cousin that if she was with her in America: 'I would be useful at times; although I can neither walk nor speak I could sew on a button or knit a stocking as might need require'.<sup>54</sup> On another occasion she excused a delay to her letter-writing because she had been nearly blind, saying: 'The doctor blames me looking so

steady at my work for my eyes turning sore'.<sup>55</sup> Marion therefore made some contribution to the family income, as her health permitted, in a range of home-working activities loosely encapsulated within her description as a dressmaker.

At the age of 48, Marion experienced a change of fortune when, in 1892, she became employed for the first time. This coincided with the arrival, in Sanquhar, of the telephone for which Marion operated the exchange.<sup>56</sup> It was demanding work requiring attendance on six, sometimes seven, days weekly from 8.00am until 10.00pm.<sup>57</sup> The telephone operator worked from a stool at a wall panel, surrounded by mail sacks, in the town's post office.<sup>58</sup> Marion continued to have difficulty with her legs yet she did this job for at least ten years. In 1900, she wrote: 'I am still able to attend the Telephone but my knee is sometimes very painful. If I had not a plaster bandage on it, I could not go about'.<sup>59</sup>

The correspondence suggests that, by 1895, Marion had made the telephone exchange into her normal place of abode. This may have been influenced by the long hours and the distance of around half a mile from Tam Scott's cottage to the post office. Marion's relationship with Robina may also have been a motivating factor. Indeed, Marion's decision to become the telephone operator was perhaps prompted by her growing insecurity as Aunt Agnes's frailty increased. There is no indication as to how she obtained the job but there is no suggestion that her physical impairment, which might have improved from earlier times but was certainly still present, was considered to be an obstacle.

Financial security was a common concern throughout the Sanquhar community and this is particularly evident among the male breadwinners because of the vagaries of agricultural returns from smallholdings and the irregular availability of employment with larger landowners or local industries. This prompted many to emigrate and those family members left behind nurtured dreams of joining kin in America. The Glencrosses and Scotts were no exception and when Joseph Glencross took his family to Pennsylvania amid the continuing crisis at The Bogg,

Marion wrote to her cousin in Dunmore: 'You will have Uncle Joseph and his family beside you. I was very sorry to see him going away but it has to be better for him in America as here. We should not grumble at him going away'.<sup>60</sup>

In 1855, the letters had shown that Aunt Agnes would have emigrated with her husband had it not been for her feeling of responsibility towards her mother who could not go 'betwixt the bed and fire'.<sup>61</sup> This sense of a lost opportunity never left Agnes and emigration became a perpetual dream for Marion too. Marion's aspiration to be in America was frequently tempered by the awareness that her physical condition would present a serious impediment to her making such a journey. However, she appeared convinced that, with the right timing, she would be able to do it. The possibility that she might not gain entry to the USA does not arise.<sup>62</sup> In later years, Marion stifled her dream of emigrating because of her feeling of obligation towards Aunt Agnes. At the age of fifty-five, when Agnes was eighty, she wrote to reinforce a message given by word of mouth to a returning emigrant following his visit to Sanquhar: 'I told him I could go to America with him but for one thing. I could not leave Aunt'.<sup>63</sup> Later Marion wrote that: 'Many a time I wish Aunt had gone out to America when we left The Bogg as your father wanted ... but she would not'.<sup>64</sup>

The prevarication about going to America oscillated between Marion and her Aunt. Both women dreamed of emigrating throughout nearly half a century, but Marion wrote that it was her aunt who forwent the opportunity at the time when a fresh start was needed desperately and the offer of sponsorship by her brother, John, in Pennsylvania might have made it materialise. Marion frequently cited her obligation to her aunt as the obstacle that inhibited her own emigration, while perhaps suppressing the obstacles posed by her own condition. An opportunity to emigrate occurred in 1872 when James Bryden, a native of Ayrshire who had already lived in USA, was returning in order to marry Marion Glencross. Marion longed to accompany James but again cited her aunt as the reason for her hesitation.<sup>65</sup>

Marion's relationship with Bryden was a close one. Her letters make no mention of other romantic associations except for one instance when she joked that 'there is a young man going to be here at Halloween that says he will make me drink a glass of brandy and then he will have the pleasure of putting me to my bed, but I don't think he will have the pleasure if he thinks it one'.<sup>66</sup> It is clear that Marion had a special affection for James Bryden in the full knowledge that he was bound for America to marry her cousin. Bryden came to visit Marion several times during his stay in Scotland and, following one of these, Marion wrote to him saying 'I have wearied for your company since you went away'.<sup>67</sup> By the following month Bryden had arrived in USA and Marion wrote to him on decorative stationery asking him to 'take my kind wishes to all my friends in America but you know I have a warmer spot in my heart for some as I have for other(s) and you will understand who they are'.<sup>68</sup> In the following years, Marion wrote both jointly and individually to Marion Glencross and James Bryden, who did eventually marry. The mutual affection of the two Marions for Bryden seems to have further drawn the cousins together, with Marion Brown living many of her own dreams of both America and of James Bryden through the pleasure she derived from learning about Bryden's marriage to her cousin and the progress of their children.

Although Marion Brown spent much of her life bedridden, it would appear that she worked whenever she could. That her dressmaking received little comment concurs with the prevailing ethos that everyone should endeavour to be gainfully occupied and self-supporting. Marion's employment in 1892 continued this philosophy, perhaps spurred by her concerns over her Aunt Agnes's pending demise. Her longed-for emigration was tempered with a hesitancy that perhaps displayed a lack of conviction, but it also highlighted the very real barriers placed before people with disabling conditions. It was the able-bodied who departed and the weak that were left behind. Marion's infatuation with James Bryden also highlighted the impediments

that her health placed, at least in her own mind, on having a sustained romantic relationship. She used her cousin's marriage to him as a substitute for this experience.

Marion's working class experience of disability contrasts with that of the moneyed classes. Lady Victoria Campbell (1854-1910), crippled by infantile paralysis at the age of five, was little impeded by her disability, taking an active part in the administration of family estates and undertaking charitable work such as attendance at the Home for Cripple Boys in Kensington and 'reading aloud to the boys in their workshops'.<sup>69</sup> William Baillie of Dunain (1789-1869)<sup>70</sup> was certified a 'lunatic'<sup>71</sup> upon return from India 'having resided in a hot climate where he was afflicted with what is commonly called a brain fever probably from exposure to the powerful influence of the solar ray'.<sup>72</sup> The remaining six decades of his life were mostly spent on his family estate near Inverness. He received the attention of a plethora of doctors while a manservant helped him take up his days with the occasional stroll or game of backgammon. The experiences of Marion Brown, Lady Victoria Campbell and William Baillie suggest that disability was not expected to impede the respective lifestyles of the different classes any more than might be avoided.

Disability is a comparatively new area of historical research. Elizabeth Bredberg has observed that much of the work already undertaken pursues an institutional approach to the detriment of vernacular and experiential perspectives of disablement.<sup>73</sup> Of those biographical sources available, she notes a dominance of those that reflect authors of 'relatively elevated social status'.<sup>74</sup> The letters of Marion Brown provide one experience of disability that provides an extensive vernacular and experiential record from the Lowlands of Scotland reflecting the lives of ordinary people in an agricultural and nascent rural industrial setting.

Evaluation of Marion Brown's correspondence requires a judgement on the impressions that she wished to convey to relatives in USA, particularly those who had not met her. Her letters dwell on her disabling conditions and might have been aimed at encouraging

the financial support that was provided periodically. However, a genuine bond linked the two Marions, incorporating both women in a trans-Atlantic relationship that was otherwise physically unattainable for either of them - while also sustaining kinship for other family members separated by emigration. In Scotland, Marion, despite her more distant relationship to the Glencross family at The Bogg, was an accepted member of the household and her disability did not undermine this. Her position only became less secure with the change of family composition and the arrival of Robina who had no blood connection and saw that between her husband, Tam Scott, and Marion being of insufficient justification for her being considered a legitimate member of their household. It is probable that Robina felt her position undermined by Marion's tenure at the time of her marriage and her enmity was part of a defence mechanism.

Marion appears to have worked whenever she was able and, although little mention is made of her sewing work, she probably pursued with regularity. This would have been seen as routine, all members of a family being expected to contribute to a fragile household economy. Marion's career as the Sanquhar telephone operator was a continuation of this and her physical condition did not inhibit this.

Marion's personal relationships, especially with men, were perhaps not given full vent yet she was candid about her feelings for James Bryden, even in her correspondence to him once he had joined Marion Glencross in Dunmore. Notions of a sustained relationship with a man perhaps represent one area of life that she otherwise suppressed.

The wider inclusion within the family and community circle which embraced Marion for much of her life is perhaps explained by the prevalence of impairment and poor health which contemporary commentators such as Gaskell and Chadwick described, and with which Cooter concurs. These are borne out by many examples mentioned by Marion in her letters when she discusses relatives.

The overall effect of the Marion's various and variable disabling conditions was to limit the physical boundaries of her world to her places of accommodation or, during her periods of some mobility, to within a radius of no more than one mile of her home. Her dreams and desires however spanned an ocean and these did not diminish in intensity with the passing of the years. These realities and aspirations nonetheless paralleled many those of her able-bodied relatives. Marion played as full a part as she could within family life and this was considered 'normal' within the prevailing ethos of respectability and self-sufficiency. Where 'allowance' had to be made for her disabilities, it was willingly given by cousins, aunts and uncles. Her niece-in-law, with heavy child-rearing responsibilities and no blood relationship, was unwilling to display the same level of tolerance. The abrasive relationship between the two women might also have been attributable to Marion's own failure to fully interact with the family structure upon which she placed high dependency from 1874 until 1895.

Marion did play one important pivotal role within the Glencross and Scott families. There was a constant thirst for news from family members in USA. The letters are filled with concerns that all is not well when there is a break in their frequency. There are occasional letters in the collection, other than those written by James Glencross (who died in 1866) and Marion Brown, which indicate that limited literacy made their composition extremely laborious. There is no evidence that Aunt Agnes, who constantly yearned for news from her brothers and their families in America, and experienced them in her dreams, ever wrote. Aunt Agnes's dialogue with America, from the emigration of her brother John in 1852 until her own death in 1902, is conducted through the writing of others. For forty years the key to maintaining these family links was the pen of Marion Brown.



## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> 'Correspondence of Marion Brown, Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire, to Dunmore, Pennsylvania, 1852-1903', in the private collection of Louise Marsh Richards, unpublished 1994 transcription courtesy of Penny L Richards (CMB).
- <sup>2</sup> Longmore, Paul K. and Umansky, Lauri, *The New Disability History – American Perspectives*, (New York University Press, 2001), p. 6
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- <sup>5</sup> Cooter, Roger, 'The Disabled Body' in Roger Cooter and John Pickstone (eds.), *Medicine in the Twentieth Century*, (Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 368.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.
- <sup>7</sup> Gaskell, P., 'The Manufacturing Population of England: Its Moral, Social and Physical Conditions and the Changes which have Arisen from the Use of Steam Machinery', (London, 1833).
- <sup>8</sup> Chadwick, Edwin, 'Report to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, from the Poor Law Commissioners on an Inquiry into the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, (HMSO, 1842), p. 129.
- <sup>9</sup> Strathesk, John (ed.), 'Hawkie – the autobiography of a gangrel', 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (David Robertson & Co., 1888), p. 6.
- <sup>10</sup> Mackenzie, Peter, 'Old Reminiscences of Glasgow and the West of Scotland', (John Tweed, 1868), pp. 75-76.
- <sup>11</sup> Strathesk, John (ed.), *Hawkie*, p. 11.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
- <sup>13</sup> These principles were expressed in Poor Law Acts of the Scottish Parliament in 1424, 1579 and 1661. See McNeel-Caird, Alexander, 'The Poor Law Manual for Scotland', (Adam & Charles Black, 1851), p. 8.
- <sup>14</sup> Shetland Archives. Minutes of Dunrossness, Sandwick and Cunningsburgh Parochial Board, 18 March 1870. CO6/5/30.
- <sup>15</sup> Decennial Census, Sanquhar, 1861.
- <sup>16</sup> CMB. James Glencross, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 3 March 1859.
- <sup>17</sup> CMB. Letter of transfer by Rev Robert Simpson, minister of Sanquhar, 22 June 1852.
- <sup>18</sup> CMB. James Glencross, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 20 June 1865.
- <sup>19</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 25 July 1866.
- <sup>20</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 28 October 1870.
- <sup>21</sup> Decennial Census, Sanquhar, 1851.
- <sup>22</sup> Decennial Census, Sanquhar, 1871.
- <sup>23</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 23 January 1879.
- <sup>24</sup> CMB. James Glencross, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 18 May 1855.
- <sup>25</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross Bryden, Dunmore, 6 January 1898 and 31 December 1899. The first letter indicates that Thomas was injured when aged seven, while the second letter suggests that he was 'about four.' No letter survives in which the incident is reported at the time of its occurrence.
- <sup>26</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 6 April 1870.
- <sup>27</sup> A cause of depopulation in the area was prompted by the combining of small farms to create larger ones, a process which began in the 1840s. Brown, James, *History of Sanquhar*, (J. Anderson, 1891), p. 272.
- <sup>28</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 6 April 1870.
- <sup>29</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 2 August 1867.
- <sup>30</sup> CMB. James Glencross, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 18 May 1855.
- <sup>31</sup> Greater Glasgow Health Board Archives. Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Register of Admissions, 1874-1878, Surgical, No. 2042. HH67/56/34.
- <sup>32</sup> Family papers of W. Bramwell Baird and oral transcript of James Baird Anderson, grandson of James Baird, recorded on 27 August 1997.
- <sup>33</sup> Decennial Census, Sanquhar, 1861.
- <sup>34</sup> Sanquhar kirkyard. Old cemetery memorial stone No. 353.
- <sup>35</sup> CMB. John Glencross, Sanquhar, (son of John Glencross in Dunmore) to John Glencross, Dunmore, 15 December 1858.
- <sup>36</sup> CMB. James Glencross, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore. Undated letter in which James writes, 'George Brown and family is all well as fare (sic) as we know. We still have Marion Brown with us.'
- <sup>37</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 20 October 1898, when she wrote that a knee had 'been half off joint since I was about five years of age'. In Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 12 Jan 1902, she reminisced, '... when I got my knee hurt when I was about six years old, your father held me on his knee till my knee was bled with leeches...'. In Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross,

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Dunmore, 13 April 1868, Marion wrote that the doctor had attributed her various troubles to 'the nerves that goes from the spine of my back to my brain.'

<sup>38</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 23 January 1879.

<sup>39</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar to Marion Glencross and James Bryden, Dunmore, 5 September 1881.

<sup>40</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 31 July 1890.

<sup>41</sup> Dumfries and Galloway Archives. List of Paupers, Sanquhar, 1886/87. RA14/85.

<sup>42</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 7 January 1886.

<sup>43</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 18 July 1887.

<sup>44</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 13 June 1895.

<sup>45</sup> A nineteen-year-old daughter, Mary was in domestic service.

<sup>46</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 12 January 1902.

<sup>47</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 1 June 1902.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross and James Bryden, Dunmore, 12 January 1885.

<sup>50</sup> Decennial Census, Sanquhar, 1861, 1871, 1881, and 1891.

<sup>51</sup> CMB. James Glencross, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 9 January 1866.

<sup>52</sup> In 1835, the minister of Sanquhar wrote that: 'The knitting of stockings and mittens was formerly a branch of manufacture of considerable extent in the parish, but is now almost entirely discontinued. The stockings were wrought in a peculiar manner on wires, - were mostly partly coloured, and of great variety in pattern.' Rev Thomas Montgomery in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (William Blackwood & Sons, 1845), pp. 309-310. Alison Thomson, a Sanquhar knitter, continues to commercially produce traditional Sanquhar pattern knitwear in 2002.

<sup>53</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 20 September 1869.

<sup>54</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 23 December 1869.

<sup>55</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Kirkconnel, to James Bryden and Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 16 April 1877.

<sup>56</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 19 January 1893.

<sup>57</sup> CMB. Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> From photographic evidence supplied by Ken Thompson, Sanquhar Post Office historic collection.

<sup>59</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 31 December 1900.

<sup>60</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 28 October 1870.

<sup>61</sup> CMB. James Glencross, Sanquhar, to John Glencross, Dunmore, 18 April 1855.

<sup>62</sup> Douglas Baynton notes that 'the concept of disability was instrumental in crafting the image of the undesirable immigrant' and an Act of 1882 was one of several legislative steps taken to prevent entry of people who might not be self-supporting. See Baynton, Douglas C., 'Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History' in Longmore, Paul K. and Umansky, Lauri (eds.), *The New Disability History*, (New York University Press, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>63</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 15 July 1897.

<sup>64</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to Marion Glencross, Dunmore, 20 October 1898.

<sup>65</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to James Bryden, Pathhead, Ayrshire, 14 June 1872.

<sup>66</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to James Bryden, Dunmore, 10 October 1872.

<sup>67</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to James Bryden, Pathhead, 23 May 1872.

<sup>68</sup> CMB. Marion Brown, Sanquhar, to James Bryden, Dunmore, 26 June 1872.

<sup>69</sup> Balfour, Lady Frances, 'Lady Victoria Campbell - A Memoir', 2nd edition, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), pp. 78-79.

<sup>70</sup> Highland Council Archives (HCA), Baillie of Dunain papers , D456.

<sup>71</sup> HCA. Certificate issued by Dr George Rees, Finsbury Square, London 29 Sep 1915. D456/A/8/16.

<sup>72</sup> HCA. Letter to unidentified male recipient from Dr George Rees, 18 Dec 1817. D456/A/8/26.

<sup>73</sup> Bredberg, Elizabeth, 'Writing Disability History: problems, perspectives and sources', in 'Disability & Society', 14:2, 1999, p. 189.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 198.