

Number 47 South Street, Duns

David McLean (2024)



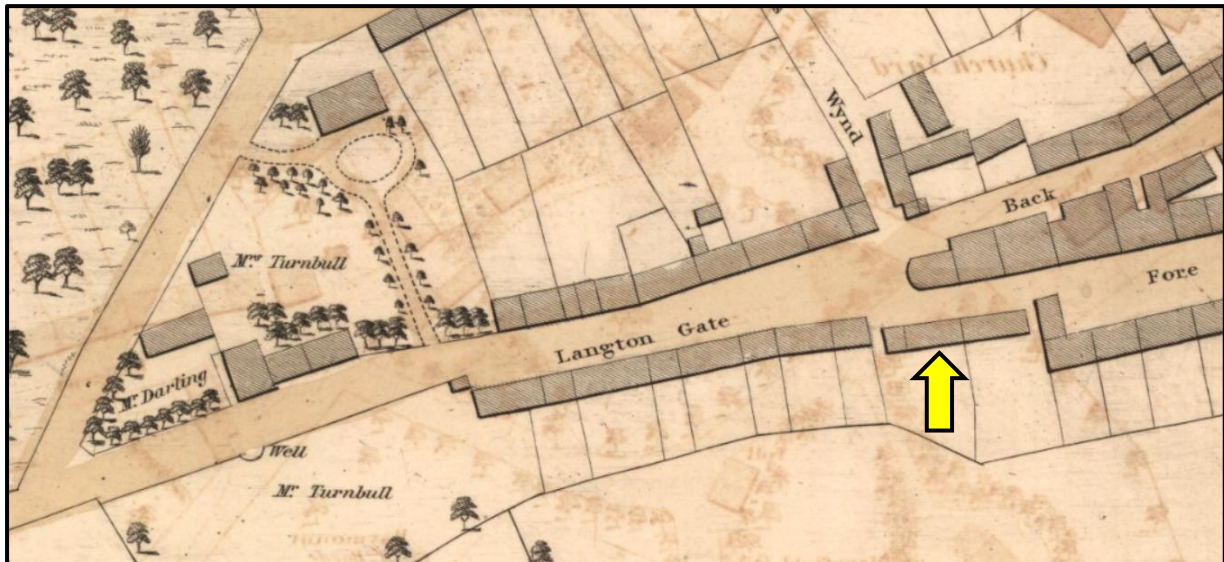
Number 47 today (originally, number 49 was right of the downpipe)

Introduction

Number 47 South Street is one of the oldest houses in Duns. The lintel stone above the door is inscribed 'DG MM 1714'. Such stones either marked marriages and are known as 'marriage lintels' or they were carved when a couple built their first real home. Searching Church of Scotland and other records has not provided any clues as to who the people were in the case of 47 South Street.

The property accommodated a brewery at one time since there is a reference among the house's title deeds to 'what was formerly the Malt Kiln, Maltbarn, Steepstone'. Barley was soaked ('steeped') in water in a vessel known as a steepstone to start germination of the grains which were then dried in a kiln to prevent further germination; the resulting malt was stored ready for the brewing process. There is also evidence that a well once existed in what is now the garden on the south side of the property. This would also make sense since the brewing process would require a regular supply of water; otherwise, water would have had to be carried from elsewhere. A town the size of Duns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have had a fair number of home industries brewing ale at a time when the quality of the drinking water was often suspect.

We can only surmise the layout of the property when it had a brewery but John Wood's 1824 map of Dunse below shows number 47 with a smaller building adjoined to its west end and then an alleyway leading into South Street. This may have been the brewery while number 47 was the brewer's dwelling. Eventually, the brewery ceased to function and at some point thereafter it was presumably converted into another dwelling which became number 49.



Number 47 South Street in John Wood's 1824 map of Dunse

From at least the later nineteenth century, numbers 47 and 49 South Street have been co-owned by various proprietors and have remained so to the present day even when, on occasion, they were offered for sale separately. They were the last two houses on the south side of South Street; the next property to the west is number 1 Langtongate. Number 47 habitually comprised two dwellings, one upstairs and one downstairs; this was a perfectly normal arrangement in the old streets of Dunse. Number 49 was apparently laid out in similar fashion but throughout the period for which a historical record survives (that is, from the later nineteenth century onwards), it appears to have largely operated as a single dwelling.

Ownership of Numbers 47 and 49 South Street to 1940

Between title deeds and valuation rolls, it is possible to trace ownership of numbers 47 and 49 South Street from the 1880s to the present day with reasonable accuracy. There is frustration when researching census records and valuation rolls before about 1900 since officials then often listed people's addresses as simply the street in which they lived without reference to house numbers; there was also a tendency not to list entries in any logical order.

Valuation roll evidence for the 1880s shows that **Alexander Weatherhead** had become an owner of houses in South Street. He was a lawyer and lived at the Barniken in Murray Street. It was very common for professional families and shopkeepers to own properties in the older

streets of Dunse; they would be purchased for quite modest sums and a regular income could then be taken from renting them, especially when many of these houses had separate dwellings on each floor. Following Alexander Weatherhead's death in 1885, ownership of his South Street houses passed to his widow and then to his children. The valuation roll of 1905 is the first to identify these houses as being numbers 47 and 49; it is therefore very likely that it was these same properties which the Weatherheads had owned since the 1880s. The Weatherhead family owned the houses for almost forty years, selling them in 1921.

William Lee Gray became the next owner; his association with the houses is quite interesting since he went from being tenant of one house to owning both properties. The 1890 valuation roll is the earliest evidence of him living in South Street and the 1901 census confirms him as tenant and occupier of number 49. William Gray (age 44) was then employed as a school janitor and there were twelve people in his household – Gray and his wife, five children, two step-children and three boarders; taking in lodgers for extra income was also common in those days. From 1905, records show him with the new occupation of 'saddler'. The Grays were still at 49 South Street in 1921 when it and number 47 were offered for sale, 'together or separately', by the Weatherheads. William Gray bought the two properties for £150, paying £75 down and probably arranging some type of mortgage loan to cover the rest. In 1932, following a report from the sanitary inspector, he was obliged to appear before Duns Town Council's housing committee regarding the unsatisfactory condition of the downstairs flat at number 47. He had been given a deadline to show cause why a demolition order should not be served on the house. While Gray gave the councillors to believe that 'he wanted to put the place right', it appears that not much was done to address the condition of number 47.

When William Gray died in 49 South Street a few years later in 1937 at the age of 81 (his death record shows his occupation as 'retired journeyman saddler'), his estate was handled by his son-in-law Thomas Trotter Veitch, a tailor who lived in Murray Street. Numbers 47 and 49 South Street were sold to local joiner and builder brothers, **James and Thomas Anderson** in 1938; they typically bought old houses to renovate. One of the number 47 flats (presumably the downstairs one) had by this time been condemned. The Andersons proposed 're-conditioning' number 47 as a dwelling house and turning number 49 into a shop. However, given that the Andersons sold the properties the following year and the houses came to the attention of the council for their poor condition on a number of occasions in the 1940s, it seems likely that the renovation work was only partly, if ever, done.

During those fifty or so years, from the 1880s to the 1930s, two families who lived in number 47 South Street – the Storeys and the Colvins – offer a particularly interesting narrative, partly on a human level and partly as a reflection of the times in which they lived.

The Storeys at 47 South Street

John Storey was born in 1855 in Eyemouth where his father George was a fisherman. John was recorded as a day labourer in 1873 when, at the age of 19, he was married in Dunse Parish Church to 22-year-old domestic servant Agnes Purves. These relatively young ages (especially for John) are explained by the fact that their first child George was born almost

exactly four weeks after the wedding; the birth was recorded as being in South Street and so it is possible that the Storeys were already at number 47. John and Agnes Storey went on to have eleven children in total (six sons and five daughters) between 1873 and 1894. Agnes Storey died in 1895, the year after their youngest child Elizabeth was born. John Storey re-married nine years later in 1904; his second wife was Mary Ann Smeaton. There is a family tree for the Storeys at the end of this paper.

While records in the 1880s and 1890s do not link their names to a house number, valuation rolls show that the Storeys lived in one of the South Street houses owned by the Weatherhead family and, as we have already seen, we know these properties to be numbers 47 and 49 South Street. From the 1901 census onwards, there is no doubt since all relevant public records specify the Storeys as living at number 47. We can therefore place the Storey family at 47 South Street from at least the 1880s but they may have been there well before that.

Soon after his first marriage, John Storey began to work as a carter, the earliest reference to this being an unfortunate incident in 1878 when he paid a fine of 7s 6d (as an alternative to three days in prison) for operating a cart without the owner's name painted on it. This was a legal requirement for all vehicles used for commercial purposes in much the same way as registration plates are required on motor vehicles today. Although he is recorded as a labourer on the odd occasion in subsequent years, he was largely employed as a carter for the rest of his life.

John Storey died tragically at the age of 51 in 1906 when both he and his second son James were working together as contractor's carters, employed by A & R Brownlie, wood merchants of Duns and Earlston. James had married Jessie Hogarth of Foulden the previous year and lived in North Street. In the summer of 1906, John and James Storey were employed for some weeks on a job near Greenlaw, carting timber from south of the town to Greenlaw railway station. Since it was too far to travel daily between the two towns, the Storeys lodged during the week in Greenlaw's High Street in the house of George Fairbairn, also a carter, while their horses were put up in the stables of the Castle Inn. The Storeys would normally travel back to Duns on Saturday evening and return to Greenlaw early on Monday morning.

In the late afternoon of Monday 13 August 1906, the Storeys, together with George Fairbairn, were in the stables of the inn, having finished their day's work. James Storey went back to the station to fetch some horse feed and found the other two gone when he returned; his father and Fairbairn had taken the chance to have a dram in the inn. This may have played a part in subsequent events. An argument broke out in the stables between father and son who squared up to each other and James swung at his father with the broom he was holding. Fairbairn stepped in between them at the vital moment and the broom caught him a glancing but not serious blow. They quickly realised that John Storey was lying injured on the stable floor behind them; the likelihood is that, in ducking aside to avoid the expected blow, he had slipped and fallen, cracking the back of his head on the flag-stone floor. John Storey was taken to the nearby home of George Fairbairn and his wife. He spent most of the next week drifting in and out of consciousness and, despite medical attention, he died in Greenlaw the following Sunday. Cause of death was a fractured skull.

On the Thursday following the incident, the police arrested James Storey and charged him with assaulting his father to the danger of his life and he appeared before Sheriff Dundas in Duns that same day. On his father's death a few days later, the charge was upgraded to

culpable homicide in that he had knocked his father down with the broom resulting in the injuries which caused his death. Sheriff Dundas thought that bail could not be set at less than £50 but, on hearing a legal appeal, he reduced it to £30 on the grounds that Storey had lived in Duns all his days and was a 'respectable hard-working man'. Storey was bailed. At his trial in Duns in October, he pleaded not guilty. Evidence and legal argument lasted almost four hours but the jury took only fifteen minutes to find him not guilty by a vote of 12 to 3. They had accepted that John Storey had fallen and not been struck by the broom.



Later photograph of the Castle Inn in Greenlaw's High Street

John Storey's death notice in the Berwickshire News announced that the funeral would make its way from 47 South Street to the cemetery on Preston Road. The notice concluded with the words 'Canadian newspapers please copy', suggesting that the family had relatives on the other side of the Atlantic.

Members of the Storey family continued as tenants of 47 South Street for another 20 years or so. The 1907 valuation roll shows Adam Storey (John Storey's fourth son) in the house; his occupation was listed as 'chauffeur'. And the 1915 roll shows George Storey (John Storey's oldest son) as tenant; he was a grocer's vanman. His step-grandson, also called George (see family tree), was born in number 47 in 1913. George Storey senior died in 1918 after which his widow, Martha Storey, was shown as tenant in valuation rolls right through to 1928. She seems to have moved soon afterwards to the Market Place (when baker Adam Frater took the number 47 flat) and no Storey is shown at number 47 from the 1929 roll onwards. Martha Storey died in Edinburgh in 1936. The Storey family had therefore been tenants at 47 South Street for some 40, perhaps 50 years and four generations had lived in the house.

The Colvins at 47 South Street

Remembering that 47 South Street consisted of two dwellings (one upstairs and one downstairs) we can now turn our attention to the other longer-term tenants, the Colvin family.

John Colvin was born in Newtown Street in Duns in 1855; his father James was a mole and rabbit catcher. In 1882, at the age of 26, John Colvin married Ellen (or Helen) Lisle, age 28, in South Street; he worked as a waiter in a local hotel and she was a domestic servant. The first of a number of family tragedies soon occurred. We will never know how events played out but, within a few years of their marriage, Ellen Colvin was a patient in the 'asylum' at Melrose; this was Dingleton Hospital which had opened in 1872. She died there in 1889; cause of death was given in the harsh style of the time as 'general paralysis of the insane'.

Ten months later, in 1890, John Colvin at the age of 33 married again in a ceremony in the sheriff courthouse on George IV Bridge in Edinburgh. His second wife was 25-year-old domestic servant Annie Fairlie. Both lived in North Street in Duns and John now worked as a 'stablesman' although presumably still at the hotel. At the 1891 census, John and Annie Colvin were living in North Street and already had two children. There are oddities in these events, especially in their timing, probably explained by the fact that, in April 1889, Annie Fairlie had given birth to an 'illegitimate' son whom she named Robert Alexander Gray Fairlie. One month later, on the authority of the Reverend Herald of Duns Parish Church, this boy's name was re-registered as John Edward Colvin Fairlie. There is another family tree for the Colvins at the end of this paper.

Ten years later, at the 1901 census, the Colvins had moved to 36 South Street and now had six children; John Colvin had changed occupation and was employed in the woollen blanket mill at Cumledge. Within the next few years, the Colvins had become tenants at 47 South Street as evidenced by the 1905 valuation roll. Their family was complete by the 1911 census which finds the Colvins with eight children, one grandchild (Annie junior's 'illegitimate' daughter Agnes) and – as if eleven people in this flat at number 47 were not enough – a boarder called James Hay who, at the age of 69, made whatever living he could as a pedlar.

In 1911, most of the family were employed in the Cumledge mill. John Colvin himself was listed in the census as 'millworker at blanket mill' as was eldest son John junior. Daughters Annie and Lily were weavers (in other words, they supervised power looms) and James, at the age of 15, was a 'piecer', knotting together any broken threads on these looms.

Frederick Colvin had not long left school and was working as a message boy when he got into trouble in 1916. He and apprentice baker Andrew Purves had gone on something of a vandalism spree and Frederick admitted one of the charges, namely using his catapult to break the window of a carriage in a siding at Duns railway station. The fact that the window was already cracked cut little ice with Sheriff Macaulay Smith. Frederick had a previous (if dated) conviction and the sheriff considered sending him to a reformatory especially when his parents said that 'thrashings had been frequently given with no effect'. In the end, the sheriff sentenced each youth to six strokes with the birch rod. Even that seems to have had little lasting effect since, four years later in 1920, Frederick and his brother Alfred appeared before the same sheriff charged with day poaching for rabbits with a lurcher dog in a field at Cumledge. This time, they were each fined 10s with another 10s expenses.

1918 was a year of double tragedy for the Colvins. In the spring of the year, Lily May Colvin was unmarried and pregnant and staying at the home of her sister Annie (now Annie Miller) at 26 North Street to await the birth of her child. A daughter was born on 23 March but, as a result of pregnancy complications, mother Lily died at the age of 25 the following day; cause of death was given as 'puerperal eclampsia'. A couple of weeks later, Annie registered the

birth of her niece who was given her mother's name and so was also called Lily May Colvin. On the registration document, her mother had to be recorded as 'Lily May Colvin deceased' and, by the custom of the time, the birth was recorded as 'illegitimate'. Lily May Colvin junior, who never knew her mother, died in Leith in 1998 at the age of 79.

It seems that two of the Colvin brothers fought in the Great War, both in the KOSB, since the Berwickshire News recorded 'Mrs Colvin, 47 South Street, Duns' sending parcels to 'Pte A Colvin' and 'Pte J Colvin' in the summer of 1917. The first of these was certainly Arthur; the other was possibly James – a James Colvin from Duns was reported in the Berwickshire News as wounded in 1917. Private Arthur Alexander Colvin was killed in action in France on 26 August 1918. He was 21 years of age and was buried in the Wancourt British Cemetery in the Pas de Calais. His name is recorded on the rear panel of the war memorial in Duns Public Park. John and Annie Colvin had lost a daughter and a son in the same year.



'Marriage lintel' at 47 South Street

By the time of the 1921 census, John Colvin senior, at the age of 65, was no longer employed in the mill but worked for Duns Town Council as a scavenger (street cleaner). His wife Annie died in 1922 and John Colvin died of senile dementia in 1928 at the age of 72 in the 'district asylum' at Melrose. So, John Colvin died in the same Dingleton hospital as his first wife had done almost forty years earlier. It is possible that one or more members of the Colvin family remained at number 47 for another few years but they were gone by 1935 when the valuation roll of that year showed one of the dwellings (again, most probably the downstairs one) as 'condemned'. The Colvins had been in number 47 for some 30 years.

Numbers 47 and 49 South Street after 1940

Following the Anderson brothers' brief ownership of the South Street properties and the seemingly abandoned renovation work, numbers 47 and 49 were both sold in 1939 to **David McKenzie Keir Spouse**, haulage contractor, who then lived at 51 Newtown Street. Spouse was soon obliged to explain to the council's housing committee what he intended to do about the unacceptable condition of the properties he had purchased. His solicitor told the councillors that Spouse did not consider them worth reconstruction – 'as far as he was concerned, they could pass a demolition order as he only wanted it as a site'. Spouse obviously changed his mind about this demolition.

The 1940 valuation roll shows number 49 South Street occupied by George Spence, an ironmonger's assistant. Number 47 had 'Mrs Catherine Johnston, widow' in one of the flats (upstairs) while the other remained 'condemned' and apparently empty. Curiously, the 1941 valuation roll shows Catherine Johnston still there but the other number 47 flat was occupied again, by tenant Peter Brack, motor driver. Spouse submitted proposals for improvements to the houses in 1946 and again in 1947 but these were considered inadequate by the council's housing committee and both George Spence and Peter Brack were allocated council houses (at the Mount and Tannage Brae respectively) around this same time; this in itself helps to confirm the poor condition of these South Street properties.



Number 47 (left) and 49 South Street in 1970 (photo Canmore)

Some substantial renovation work was done to number 47 in the 1960s, including replacing most of the original upstairs windows on both sides of the house with dormers as shown in the photograph above and building an extension on the south side to improve the sanitary arrangements. However, little if anything seems to have been done to number 49. The South Street houses remained in David Spouse's possession. When he died in 1969 without having

made a will, it was agreed that ownership would pass to his widow, **Mary Ellen Spouse**, although no legal title was ever actually completed in her name. At one point, her son (and only child) William David Spouse lived in number 47 South Street but he then swapped with his mother – she went to live in number 47 and he moved to the family home at Langlea, further west on Langtongate. In 1980, Mary Ellen Spouse transferred ownership of the South Street properties to her son and so **William David Spouse** became proprietor of numbers 47 and 49.

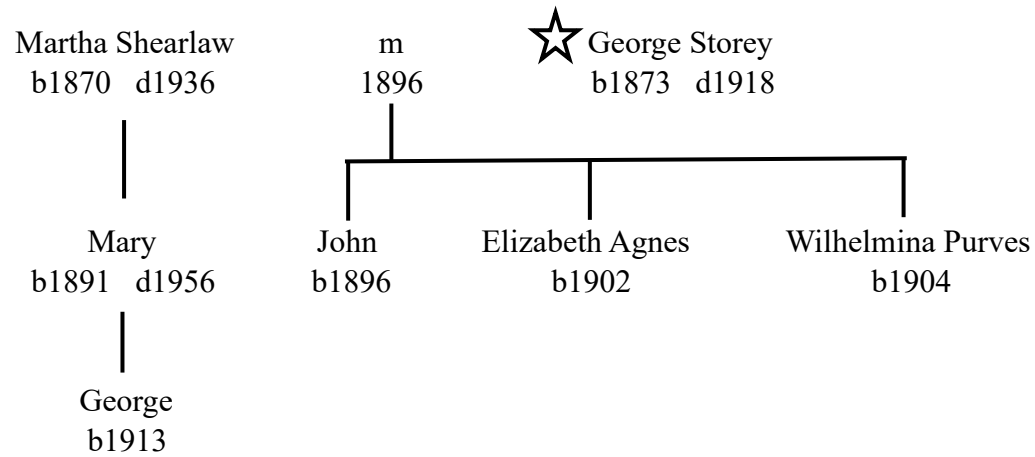
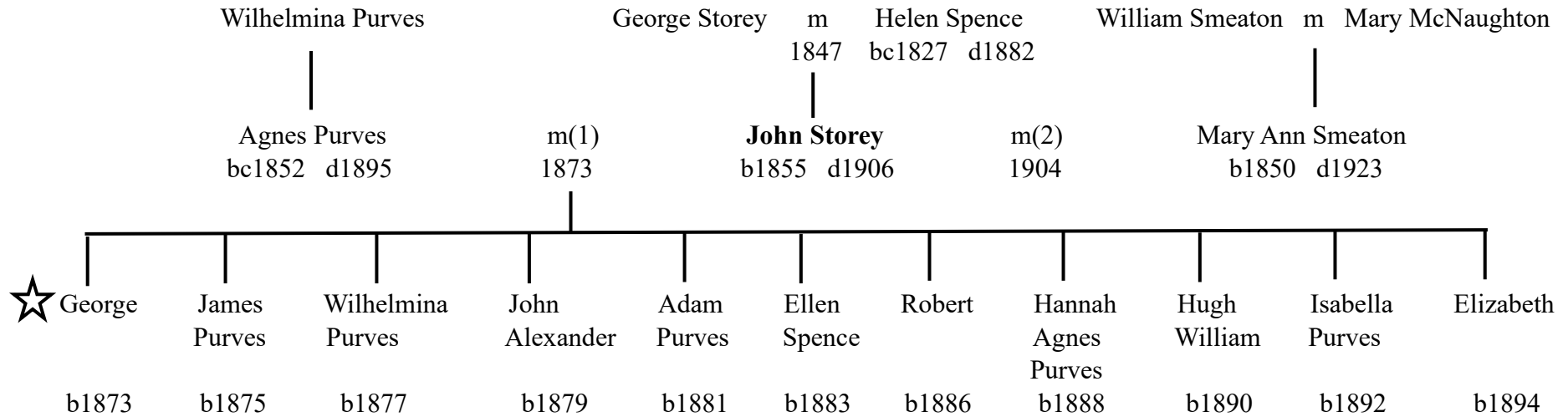
After taking ownership, Spouse sold the South Street properties to **William Michael McGuigan** of Kelso who retained them for mere weeks before selling them, in 1980, to the current owners who combined the two properties into a single dwelling. This was a challenging renovation since number 49 was by this time labelled on plans as a ‘store’ – in reality, the house had become semi-derelict, suffering various types of rot and, over a period of years, it was largely rebuilt including having its roof replaced. The door and ground floor window on the street side of number 49 were blocked up.

Against all the odds, these old houses have therefore survived. Still proudly displaying its marriage lintel – which might have been discarded at one point – the combined property is known as ‘47 South Street’ and is category-C listed. It has been refurbished both outside and inside to the highest standard, guaranteeing its survival for many years to come.

The information in this paper has been researched from newspapers of the time (especially the Berwickshire News); from information including title deeds supplied by the current owners; and from public records – census, valuation rolls and birth, marriage and death records.

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Storey (47 South Street, Duns) Family Tree



Colvin (47 South Street, Duns) Family Tree

