

## **The Swedish Knight and his Lunatic Son**

*John H. Ballantyne*

THE story begins with George Seton, born in 1696, a grandson of Sir Walter Seton of Abercorn, West Lothian, who had been created a baronet in 1663. George became a student at Ehrenburg, from whence he travelled to Dantzic, where he studied commerce. He went to Sweden in 1718, and settled in Stockholm, where he became a merchant and, though he commenced a poor man, soon acquired great wealth.

Many anecdotes are told of his peculiarities. Though one of the merchant-princes of Stockholm, he continued to wear his snuff-brown dress as he did in the days of his poverty. Once he walked to the quay to inspect one of his ships after a stormy voyage. When the vessel was made fast a sailor jumped ashore, rushed up to Seton, and put some money into his hand. 'Why do you give it to me?' asked the merchant. 'Because,' answered the sailor, 'I promised, when in sore distress on the broad seas, to give my little all to the first poor man I should meet on landing, if God would save me.' Seton kept the money, but asked the sailor to accompany him home, and subsequently made him a ship's captain.

Another time George Seton was sitting solitary in his counting-office when a young man entered, who, after some lively conversation, suddenly put a pistol to his breast, saying: 'Lend me 20,000 thaler at once, or taste this.' When the old merchant had fetched the money and given it to him, the latter put down the pistol and ran away. Whereupon Seton took up the weapon, calling to the young man to bring back the money at once or answer for it with his life, only to be met with a laugh and with the words: 'The pistol is

unloaded!'. With this forced loan the visitor, formerly a poor officer, equipped himself, and thus succeeded in overcoming the prejudice of his rich father-in-law and winning his bride. The money was returned with interest, and Seton became the intimate friend of the family.

George Seton's business ventures and money-lending proved so profitable that he was able to act as banker to the king of Sweden. He became a naturalised Swede and received the patent of nobility in 1785. He died a year later, and was buried in the church of St. Maria in Stockholm. (Fischer, pp.36-7: *SHR*, ix, pp.274-5)

George Seton had a sister Margaret who married Patrick Baron of Preston, West Lothian, a laird with a mansion house and estate situated on a ridge just over a mile to the south of Linlithgow and commanding a good view of the Palace. The Barons of Preston were said to descend from Jean Baron who accompanied Mary of Guise to Scotland (McCall, p.117). Patrick died in December 1744 at the early age of 33, leaving a son Alexander Baron, born in 1738, who was served heir to his father in October 1746. (McCall, p.53; *Retours*)

### *The Swedish Knight*

In June 1763 Alexander Baron married Elizabeth Angus, of Edinburgh. She died on 24th March 1770 having borne him four sons. The eldest, George, died at the age of nineteen in 1783. Patrick (1765-1837), the second son, was a doctor of medicine, and married a Scots woman, Agnes Thomson, and apparently went to Sweden. He died at Torquay leaving several children, of whom his son and heir Alexander, born 1806, succeeded to the Preston estate. Alexander's daughter Margaret married Baron Carl Gustav Adlercreutz, son of General Count Adlercreutz, who had been chiefly instrumental in dethroning King Gustav IV in 1809. Archibald, the third son, joined the navy and was drowned near the Cape of Good Hope in about 1788. The youngest son was Alexander, born on 10th December 1768, who had no profession, of whom more anon. (*SHR*, ix, pp.2745; Seton, vol. II, pp.583-4)

There was a connection between the Barons of Preston and the Dundases of Dundas, West Lothian. During the 1770s Alexander

Baron was involved in looking after the affairs at Dundas of Captain James Dundas of Dundas who lived in London, and his letters to Dundas deal with political matters as well as business and estate affairs. In 1768 James Dundas had contested Linlithgowshire for parliament against John Hope. Both sides created new votes which were the subject of litigation in the Court of Session and the House of Lords, but Hope was returned by a vote of 2015. In 1770 he was unseated on the petition of his opponent, James Dundas. Hope had lost favour, both with his patron (John Hope, 2nd Earl of Hopetoun) and with the majority of the House of Commons, for his equivocal support for the government in the Wilkes affair. By the 1774 election Lord Hopetoun had regained control of Linlithgowshire, and James Dundas stood no chance there. Supported by Sir Lawrence Dundas, he unsuccessfully contested Linlithgow Burghs in opposition to Sir James Cockburn. (Dundas, Adv. MS. 80.1.5-7; Namier & Brooke, ii, p.357; ODNB)

During this period Alexander Baron evidently joined George Seton, his uncle, in business in Stockholm. He was there by 1777, and from then on seems to have divided his life between Sweden and Scotland. In 1784 Alexander Baron corresponded with James Dundas's son, George Dundas of Dundas, on various matters. On February 24th he wrote: 'My people here are particularly fond of the method adopted at Hounslow Powder Milns of sifting and sorting by Buffalo Skin sieves. I therefore hope it may be in your power thro your acquaintance with the proprietor to procure me half a skin for a tryal with one of their old sieves for a pattern and an iron with which they drill the holes. Or perhaps it might be as well to buy two or three of the sieves ready made'. George Dundas was particularly keen for Alexander Baron to come over for the parliamentary election in May but this proved not to be possible, partly it seems because of the weather (Stockholm harbour being still frozen on 29th April) and partly because Alexander did not wish to repeat his journey of the previous winter. In a letter to Captain George Dundas of the *Winterton* Indiaman, dated 8th February 1788, Alexander refers to his son Archie who was on board the ship. (Dundas, Adv. MS. 80.1.9-10)

On 26 August 1783 Alexander had the degree of Doctor of Laws conferred upon him by the University of St Andrews, and in the same

year he obtained a grant of armorial bearings from the Lyon King of Arms. Like his uncle, Alexander Baron became a naturalised Swede, and received a patent of arms from King Gustav on 17th November 1785. It was in this year that he took the name of Seton, on being adopted by his uncle, then a very old man. About this time Alexander acquired the stately house and fine estate of Ekolsund at Husby-Sjutolfts, from King Gustav III. Ekolsund was one of the royal palaces, and was in the region of Uppland to the north of Stockholm. It is noted for its wild swans. According to Marryat, George Seton had lent large sums of money to King Gustav who became unable to repay the debt. In 1797 Alexander became a Knight of the Order of Vasa, and was henceforth styled Sir Alexander Seton.

In a letter to Robert Liston, his second cousin, dated 31 March 1795 at Ekolsund, Seton gave his thoughts on the Scottish constitution: 'What pity the British parliament in our younger days stopt short with the Jurisdiction and Clan Act – every fiction ... of the feudal system ought to have been burnt; the jury in civil cases as possessed so late as James V been restored; the Habeas Corpus, infinitely superior to our act of wrongous imprisonment, been extended to us; the representation in the country to comprehend all men of land property, even down to £24 Scots; the relevancy of a libel determined by the grand jury in place of the Scots judges; the commissary and admiralty courts should likewise have attracted some notice. The feudal aristocratical principles have gained strength and now form the most prominent feature of the Scots constitution. On review of what I have said I think some apology may be necessary for my political creed, when addressing one in the respectable station you hold, but be assured that it's very far from my meaning either to speak sedition or treason. I speak as an old Scotsman influenced by patriotism, and a real love for the prosperity and honour of my native country and willing to divest myself of all my feudal priviledges to evince my sincerity.' Robert Liston was a diplomat and had been envoy extraordinary at Stockholm from 1788 to 1793. (Liston, MS.5576, ff.62-5; DNB)

On 16 February 1798, Sir Alexander Seton wrote to Robert Liston from Edinburgh: 'My last to you was soon after my arrival at Ekolsund the beginning of last October. Our young king whose

conduct is still much liked, has on the arrival of his consort created a few knights and without my knowledge, far less solicitation, has, it seems conferred on me the Order of Vasa, the value of which no doubt consists in the way it is conferred'. (Liston, MS.5591, ff.127-8)

Turning now to antiquarian matters, on 12 August 1783 Alexander Baron became a corresponding member of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland (TSAS, i, p.xxix). In January 1787, now Alexander Seton, he donated a stone with a runic inscription to the Society which he had brought from Sweden. This was a granite boulder 5? feet high, an eleventh century tombstone incised with runes on a shackled serpent surrounding a large cross. A paper was subsequently published on this in the Society's transactions (TSAS, ii, part 2, pp.490-1; iii, app. 2, p.61; Stevenson, pp.49, 57). This stone now stands in Princes Street Gardens in Edinburgh just below the Castle esplanade and a more up-to-date description of it by Adam McNaughton was published in 1980 – McNaughton, however, mistakenly assumes that the donor was Seton's son Alexander (*Northern Studies*, no.15, pp.29-33).

On 19 January 1796 Alexander Seton became a fellow of the Society (TSAS, iii, app. 1, p.7). From November 1804 to November 1813 he was one of the vice-presidents of the Society (TSAS, iii, app. 4, pp.197-8). He also communicated a paper on the palace and church of Linlithgow which was published in the Transactions after his death (TSAS, ii, part 1, pp.43-52).

In 1804 Patrick Neill, the naturalist and printer, visited the Shetland Islands where he had the pleasure of accompanying Sir Alexander Seton of Preston as a fellow-traveller 'through several of those dreary wastes' (Neill, p.viii). Neill was very much Seton's junior, being some 38 years younger. It appears that Neill and Seton and his party had set out independently and only met up on the armed vessel which took them from Kirkwall Roads to Shetland, where they arrived on 26th August (Thule, p.6; Neill, p.67). On 28th August they made for Unst in an open boat arriving there in the early evening (Neill, pp.72-5). It seems that Sir Alexander and his friends had been given an introduction to Thomas Mowat, and Neill being with the party was also made welcome at Belmont (Neill, p.238). They stayed on Unst for three days, leaving on 31st August, and took

the opportunity of examining Thomas Mowat's antiquarian papers. Thomas Mowat wrote to his brother John in Lerwick on 3rd September, telling him of Sir Alexander's unexpected visit and of his interest in Thomas's collection of old charters (Gardie, no.1710). Legend has it that Thomas Mowat or William Mowat lent or presented a Swedish knight with the old papers which had belonged to the Henderson family of Unst. This family was said to be 'descended from Jarl Hendrich Hendrichson, Great Foude, Lawman and Chancellor of Zetland', whose commission had been granted by King Christian I of Denmark in 1450 (MS account of 'The Hendersons of Shetland' by Thomas Edmondston, c.1869; Note from William Henderson to John Irvine, in old oak case in Shetland Museum; *Shetland News*, 18 June 1892; *Zetland Family Histories*, by Francis Grant, p.132). As Thomas Mowat's wife had succeeded to the estate of the Hendersons of Gardie in 1798 (Retours), after the death of James Henderson of Gardie in 1797, it seems quite probable that Sir Alexander Seton was this Swedish knight. Certainly Sir Alexander did a transcript and explanation of one of the documents in Thomas Mowat's hands, dated Edinburgh, December 1804, which was published in the *Scots Magazine* in January of the following year under the pseudonym A.Y. This was a record of the verdict of an assize in a sheriff court held at Baliasta in Unst on 20th March 1571-2 concerning the inheritance to some property (Shetland Docs, no.190). Sir Alexander in his explanation notes the parallels with 'the Gothick or Scandinavian law', and adds his own views that 'the simplicity and expeditious procedure in this trial, contrasted with the tedious and expensive mode of determining a question respecting heritable property now a days, however learned and upright our judges generally are, may excite a sigh of regret in many, for the discontinuance of our jury in civil cases, which after this period seems merely to have fallen into desuetude, but does not appear to have been abolished by any positive law'. On 13th March 1805 Sir Alexander wrote from Edinburgh to Thomas Mowat thanking him for his 'Unst verdict' (Gardie, no.1739). It is to be noted that Thomas Mowat became a correspondent member of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland in 1805, no doubt as a result of Sir Alexander's visit. Other evidence of Sir Alexander's antiquarian activities in Shetland

is of a donation he made to the Society of Antiquaries of a stone dish found in the Broch of Mousa, and a stone bason or tureen found in the broch at Brough (TSAS, iii, app. 2, p.89).

In a letter to Patrick Neill, dated at Preston 11th September 1806, Sir Alexander, speaking of his visit to Shetland states: 'Your views and mine were directed to different objects. Mine were particularly turned to the antiquities of the islands; now and then to rural economy, and the character of the people. Your attention was directed to different subjects, with which I was less intimate – botany, natural history, mineralogy, the fishery, and some few strictures on economics. I shall never forget the agreeable time that we passed together in Hialtland' (Neill, pp.138-9). Following up on this Sir Alexander provided Patrick Neill with his political and economical observations on the state of the Shetland islands for inclusion in Neill's book on his tour of Orkney and Shetland. This was dated 23rd October 1806, and is in the form of a nine page letter dealing with a variety of subjects under the headings of parliamentary representation, udal tenure, draining, winter fodder for cattle, separation of the occupations of the fisher and husbandman, Zetland plough, trees, and roads. It is a pity he did not provide Neill with a contribution on the antiquities of the islands! He concludes his letter with the sentiment that 'could any of the foregoing observations conduce in the smallest degree to the comfort and happiness of these islands, it would give me infinite pleasure'. (Neill, pp.173-81)

Sir Alexander was a Whig, and in 1806 he supported Henry Erskine's candidature for Linlithgowshire, though in the event Erskine had to content himself with another seat (Fergusson, pp.458-9).

On 6 April 1811, Sir Alexander was at Preston writing to his neighbour Robert Liston at Millburn Tower: 'I have been a good deal plagued with my erysipelas this winter, and it may be uncertain if I have the pleasure of seeing you before you set off' (Liston). Sir Alexander Seton died at Gothenburg in October 1814 (*Scots Magazine*, 1814, p.958; Retours). Lady Liston, writing from Constantinople on 10 March 1815, rather uncharitably commented that the loss of Sir Alexander 'is not great to any one' (*Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, Vol. xi, 1990, p.364).

*The Lunatic Son*

Sir Alexander Seton's youngest son and namesake, whom he called Sandy, was an interesting character. In his youth he accompanied Robert Liston, the diplomat then stationed in Stockholm, who was some 26 years his senior, on a journey through the northern Swedish Provinces. This was in the winter of 1791-92 as Liston wrote to his father on 15 November 1791: 'Sandy has been much occupied with your affairs in the country. I propose to carry him with me on a tour to the north, this winter'. Many years later Sandy was to allude to this trip in a letter to Liston, written at the beginning of November 1822: 'As to our famous journey through the Northern Swedish Provinces I have often thankd God that my negligence did not occasion you any very material damage'. (Liston, MS.5566, ff.81-2, MS.5669, ff.1-2)

The story, as narrated by T.A. Fischer in *The Scots in Sweden*, is that as a young man Sandy became desperately enamoured of his stepmother, so much so that his mind seemed to be unhinged. His father, therefore, took him to England and put him into Bedlam. After a time the medical men pronounced him cured, but all his efforts to regain his liberty were rebuffed by the governor. Only when a new one came in his place did he obtain money and his freedom. But no sooner had he made his appearance on the road, when an unknown man took him to a remote vicarage, where he was again kept prisoner until the priest died. Then he wandered about for some time, avoiding the abodes of men, pacifying his hunger with the flour ground by the miller, which he kneaded into dough with rain-water and dried in the sun. At last he reached a small harbour whence a ship took him to Sweden. After an imprisonment of eighteen years, he arrived in Stockholm in the year 1825, then 56 years old. His first care was to procure an advocate to urge his claims as the co-heir of his father. In this he succeeded after his identity had been established by Count de la Gardie, but the lawsuit outlasted his life. Sandy's mind remained gentle and melancholy during his final years in Sweden. (Fischer, p.37)

The following factual evidence has been pieced together to corroborate the greater part of this story. The bulk of the information

comes from letters Alexander Seton wrote to Sir Robert Liston between 1822 and 1825.

On 25 August 1796, Messrs. Seton & Co, Stockholm, wrote to Robert Liston, stating that their A. Seton, junior, had been in Scotland these two months past and that it was uncertain how long he might stay, and also that A. Seton, Esq, of Ekolsund was 'every day expected home from Scotland'. Sandy was being treated with mercury when in Scotland, and in his words: 'I was very ill indeed, chiefly liver complaint', and it was left to Mr Surgeon Baird of Linlithgow to complain of the medicines given to him, which had been 'ordered by the best physicians'. The next hint of problems was in a letter from Sir Alexander Seton in Edinburgh to Robert Liston in London, dated 16 February 1798, where he writes that he arrived in his native country at the beginning of winter, and continues: 'I came over to arrange matters with Sandy who has been all summer in bad health and worse spirits from his old nervous complaints. Being now on the recovery and gone to England for some time I am preparing again to take my departure for the north in a month or two'. In fact, Alexander had been taken to England at the end of 1797 and placed in care. It seems that he was sent to London: 'When I was sent to London (to reside at the house of a friend of Doctor Haslam, as was promised) I found myself rapt in to a Mad house; and have continued under treatment since that period, viz. 1797'. Dr John Haslam was the medical officer at the Bethlem Hospital for lunatics from 1795 until his effective dismissal in 1816 following a parliamentary enquiry. Throughout his tenure as Bethlem apothecary, Haslam referred many people he had examined (but who were never admitted to the hospital) to the proprietors of private London 'madhouses', many of whom he counted among his friends. For instance, Sir John Miles, the proprietor of Hoxton House, received many such recommendations from Haslam, and this is one of several places to which Seton may have been admitted. At any rate, an examination of the Bethlem admission register for 1797 has no entry for Sandy, so it is unlikely that he was sent there. In those times the curing of unbalanced patients took second place to the more profitable business of caring for them. (Liston, MS.5589, ff.146-7, MS.5591, ff.127-8, MS.5669, ff.11-2)

At some stage Sandy was moved to Cheshire where he was looked after by a curate – named Wilson – at Thurstaston in Cheshire (on the west side of the Wirral overlooking the Dee estuary). It seems that this was Peter Wilson who is recorded as curate of Thurstaston on various dates from 1797 until at least 1812 (Beazley). Of his privations there he wrote to Sir Robert Liston: ‘I wrote – long since – at Thurstaston in Cheshire – when I might have used some iron pen – to engrave upon a plank if I had chose – the best of my paper was edges of newspaper to write upon – with ink of my own making, from pounded coal’. His poetry was held to be insane by Dr Renwick of Liverpool, ‘and others whom I hold to be my determined enemies’. Of his sufferings he wrote: ‘I could not allow that my disease was mental derangement – but arose from irresistible sufferings – without due means and knowledge how to meet them. I always remember with pleasure that Mr & Mrs Wilkie called at Preston to see me when I was almost at the worst, nor do I indeed forget friends. But what shall we say of Dr Renwick, etc, who persisted in calling my poetry insane. Doctor Renwick says it is sufficient to read it to be convinced that I am insane who wrote it. Pray what does Lady Liston say?’. While at Thurstaston he had an illness, such as his brother formerly had, which necessitated supporting himself with a stick for more than two years. Sandy was unhappy that in the 25 years to 1822 he had only once seen his elder brother Patrick, and in retrospect wrote of this as follows: ‘... placed in the unfortunate situation as I was, it is usual to cut off all communication with friends. Yet he is a medical man, and ought he not to have judged for himself’. (Liston, MS.5669, ff.1-2, 50-1, 62-3, MS.5668, ff.171-2)

Eventually, in 1822, Sandy was able to obtain his freedom and left Cheshire with but half a crown in his pocket which he had received from selling some possession of his. He walked to Newcastle-upon Tyne: ‘It was delightful weather I travelled in, but my face was much scorched with the heat of sun, and the nights were rather cold; one night compleatly soaked with dew fall.’ Of the journey he wrote: ‘The five days and nights that I was upon the road coming here – when I never was in any vehicle – nor ever slept under roof, was considerable suffering – yet it was truly pleasure, when thinking of the horrid privations and wrongs I had to submit to at

Thurstaston'. He arrived in Newcastle in rags on 19 June 1822, and of the last stage of his journey he writes: 'On the morning of my coming here I fell in with a little Waterloo soldier, and chatted for several miles. He recommended to me a house where I should stop and get myself cleaned, shaved, etc. This was of great use to me. The good people informed me of the Messrs Loshes and, in consequence of their information I applied first to a Mr Robertson, or indeed to Miss Robertson, for it was to her I was indebted for my reception – by the introductions she gave me. But, had I not had the good fortune to meet with Major Thain, Mr William Losh and Mr Bell at that time, my purpose was immediately to have set out for Scotland – I had 2/- in my pocket. My journey from Cheshire had cost me just a six pence'. In another letter he wrote: 'Upon succeeding in quitting Cheshire and escaping with life and limb I was naturally led here. The family of Loshes, John of Woodside [the family seat, near Carlisle], James, the counsellor, George, the merchant, and William, I formerly well knew.' This must have been from the time before the onset of his illness when Sandy was in the family business in Stockholm. (Liston, MS.5668, ff.171-2, MS.5669, ff.62-3, MS.5670, ff.80-1)

At Newcastle Sandy made contact with his old acquaintances. Initially he obtained help from William Losh, but his main support came from James Losh. James Losh was an influential figure – a solicitor by training, he also had an interest in two Tyneside collieries and was the moving spirit in the construction of the railway from Newcastle to Carlisle. He had Unitarian convictions and was a prominent Whig. As evidence of Losh's culture and learning, it took five days after his death to sell his books, from 3rd to 7th March 1834.

On 15th September 1822, James Losh noted in his diary: 'I was too late for Chapel, Thain and Mr Seton having breakfasted with me on business' (Losh, p.170). Sandy's first letter to Sir Robert Liston is dated 6th October 1822, telling him that he had got accommodation in a single room but did not yet have a servant. It seems that this was in Forth Street as according to a later letter Sandy was six weeks there living 'in great penury'. (Liston, MS.5668, ff.171-2, MS.5669, ff.62-3)

On 30th October he wrote to Lady Liston saying: 'It was fortune threw me here ... I wrote, a few weeks ago, to Sir Robert Liston, that inclination would have induced me soon to visit Milton (*sic*) Tower,

and attend you – at least have volunteered my unworthy services as Sir Robert's squire'. He asks for 'intelligence of my very respectable well-beloved Mrs Gray of Kinneel. Am I writing like a fool! Perhaps the little poem that I address to her is to find her in heaven – in a better world than this. My address finishes thus (Liston, MS.5668, ff.238-9):

O! ever more, in Scotia  
Temper her fair the rugged north  
May this, the feeble poet's lay  
Be heard, even by the banks of Forth!  
And if relentless fate do spread,  
The last, that ever parting veil  
Then let it not oblivious shade  
Hail! Lady! shall within this .. [*torn*]

The first four lines of the above appeared in a publication of Sandy's poems in 1827 under the title 'The prisoner, to the virtuous, the good, the honourable, Mrs Mary Ann —'.

By the beginning of November Sandy had obtained two rooms in Saville Court at 14/- per week, and a man to attend him as needed. He was now looking for means to maintain himself and set out the situation in a letter to Sir Robert Liston (Liston, MS.5669, ff.1-2):

The law gentlemen here agreed in thinking that a copy of my father's last will ought to be produced. Mr Losh has required an extract of it, so far as concerned me. Whether it is supposed that I am an incurable lunatic or imbecile; or, that I might be capable of recovery, perhaps a different arrangement of settlement is adopted in such like cases ... I know not what my father's intentions were formerly too with regard to these matters, and of deeds that were finished 27 years ago. I am now, it would appear thrown upon the mercy and tender heartedness of my brother. I would content myself with the simplest fare – by my own industry or exertions maintaining my independence, than become the slave, the toy thing of another person – were the allowance of maintenance ever so much. My expenses at present are, even to minutiae paid at Mr Losh's office; and I have the indulgence of a trifle in my pocket. This is the footing that I am upon; even under the orders of a Mr Irving of Edinburgh too who holds me insane ...

As to this, or such recidence for time indefinite, I should consider it as throwing my life to the dogs; but a step better than to have died at Thurstaston, to have it said – there the poor lunatic lies ... My purpose is, and ought to be, to obtain a rational independence. With moderate expenditure, I should have liket well even to visit France (where my good friend Mr George Losh recides). I would certainly visit Scotland ... May I not yet indulge a hope that degrading restraints shall be taken off.

On 7<sup>th</sup> November he was telling Sir Robert Liston that he had heard from his brother Patrick, who seemed to have been a bit taken aback at the news of his departure from Cheshire, as in Sandy's words: 'I had a letter from my brother, from Ekolsund, lately ... I can but pity my brother who payd so little attention to me or to my personal freedom. His letter is, or at least terminates conciliatory. Yet, he takes for granted that I am staying near Newcastle, perhaps with another respectable curate such as – Wilson – in Cheshire. I would have fain lived within £150 a year, so that I could have something accumulating in case of a journey being eligible at any time. I think I am going at £200 a year (which, my brother writes in a former letter to one of the gentlemen here, Mr Losh or Mr Thain, is the allowance settled for my maintainance by my father's will)'. However, James Losh took Sandy under his wing and introduced him to the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, to which he was elected member on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. James Losh wrote to Sandy on 16<sup>th</sup> November: 'Your plan of carefully writing and re-writing your poetical compositions, seems to me a good one – as it will at least afford you both occupation and amusement beyond which I scarcely know what a Philosopher has to wish for. A comfortable small house with a good garden, and a few acres for experimental farming – within a short distance of a good town, where you could get books, newspapers, etc, might probably contribute to your happiness'. On 18<sup>th</sup> November Sandy wrote to Sir Robert Liston telling him: 'I shall go to the lectures upon Mineralogy (by the worthy Rev. Mr Turner, Unitarian), but I insist upon paying for the ticket'. The Rev. William Turner was minister of the Unitarian Chapel in Hanover Square, Newcastle (Liston, MS.5669, ff.11-2, 44-5, 50-1; DNB).

During the time Sandy was in care the house of Seton & Co had failed. This resulted in financial loss to him. However, Sandy understood that his deceased father had made provision in his will for him to have an annual allowance, but he only had direct access to this if he was certified sane. It seems that this came from capital held in a trust, but the lawyer John Irving, W.S., still considered Sandy insane. By 2<sup>nd</sup> December James Losh had arranged for Sandy to be allowed £2 per month for his pocket expenses. One of his trustees it appears was Major Thain, whom Sandy described as ‘the rough centurion’, with whom he had been in a quarrel which ‘almost amounted to canaillerie – if not intimidation (when it is to be remembered that both my brother and Dr Renwick put much power into his hands with regard to me). In short it really required a man of the influence and coolness of Mr Counsellor Losh to counteract these gentlemen – and to let me feel some degree of security.’ Problems had arisen because Mr Irving, the Edinburgh lawyer, had been wrongly informed that Sandy had got into debt for over £30 and had written to James Losh that this showed that Sandy was ‘still unfit to be entrusted with the management of any money’. Happily the matter was made up as, in a subsequent letter to Sir Robert, Sandy reported: ‘By the by, I was under the necessity of calling to account in some degree Major Thain for his conduct – or of renouncing his friendship. He condescended even to acknowledge his fault, and that he was sorry for it’. Thain was a business colleague of James Losh, the two having entered into partnership in 1798 in an alkali business on Tyneside. (Liston, MS.5669, ff.40-1, 78-9, MS.5670, ff.3-6)

On 23rd January 1823 Sandy, now writing from Lile Street, Newcastle, was reporting with pleasure on the books and pamphlets he could get from the Philosophic Society. Several of his letters to Sir Robert Liston and his wife contained poems; two were odes to Mrs Gray, who he discovered had died, and another was a pastoral called Lubin which took up six pages. He was already envisaging publication and, by March, had started to make out copies for that purpose, saying, ‘As my means may allow I intend having one sheet at a time published’. Eventually his poems were published in Stockholm in 1826 and 1827 in eleven instalments. These have been bound up in one volume under the title *Poems, upon Various Subjects*

*and on Various Occasions.* A full list of the titles is given in an appendix to this paper. (Liston, MS.5670, ff.3-6)

On 26<sup>th</sup> March Sandy wrote to Sir Robert extolling the virtue of wearing flannel shirts, especially in rain or frosty weather: 'They are admirable. And even in summer – Count Rumford in his philosophical essays highly recommends their use. I use the common (not course) thin welch flannel'. Mr Irving of Edinburgh was being difficult over his father's will: 'The annuity of £300 a year, by will allotted me – if I be in sane state of mind, has been denied me by Mr Irving of Edinburgh, in the first instance; and we are waiting here for an answer from my brother in Sweden with his decision on that point. Most certainly law suit were to be avoided. Mr Counsellor Losh is of opinion that I shall be allowed the £300 a year – commencing from the date of my coming here. And this most likely is all that I can aspire to'. (Liston, MS.5670, ff.17-8)

In November 1823 Sandy tells Sir Robert that he had intended to go through a course of application to English reading, orthography and pronunciation with a tutor, but could get him to do little else than to drink porter, and so gave up the plan. He regrets that he never 'had the good fortune to be known and acquainted with Mr W. Wilkie, now one of my curators. Mr Baird, surgeon in Linlithgow, is likewise one of the trustees'. By now Sandy was getting out and about as in a postscript to the letter he writes, 'I have performed another tour in Durham to Lanchester and Ebchester', and in a letter to Sir Robert, dated 27<sup>th</sup> March 1824, he describes the altar at Corbridge and a visit to the Roman Wall. (Liston, MS.5670, ff.80-1; RCS, no.1105)

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1824, Sandy reported that at last he had received a remittance of his annuity from Mr Irving of Edinburgh. It seems that this ready access to money gave him much greater freedom, as he embarked on a visit to the Isle of Man, and in letters to Sir Robert on 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> May he relates the hardships encountered on his journey there. However, the trip was successful in that he examined the runic remains there and received assistance from various people. On 9<sup>th</sup> July Sandy was at the Star Inn in Edinburgh, planning to return to Newcastle by way of Carlisle, going 'to wait upon a lady of the name Carlisle, to whom I have an introduction from Mr Counsellor Losh,

and I am in high expectation of examining a gold ring with a Runic legend in that lady's possession'. He tells Liston that he has had help in Edinburgh from no less than three Jamiesons, viz., the Rev. Doctor Jamieson, Professor Jamieson, and Mr Jamieson of the Register Office, 'who formerly kept an academy in Cheshire, afterwards at Dantzick, and who knows many of the Northern literati'. He also had visited the Advocate's Library. On 24<sup>th</sup> July he writes to Sir Robert with details of the inscription on the cross at Kirk Braddon in the Isle of Man. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August he was back in Edinburgh about to embark on a trip to visit the Rev. Doctor Duncan at Ruthwell, near Dumfries, to examine another runic monument. It seems that after Ruthwell he went to Campbeltown, as on 23<sup>rd</sup> September he writes to Sir Robert: 'I was glad in ascertaining that the ancient monument now standing in the market place at Campbeltown was brought from Orronsa, from the east end of the ruined monastery of that island. The pedestal yet remaining at Orronsa ...'. This is in contrast to more recent opinion that the well-known cross, adapted to serve as the market cross at Campbeltown, originally came from the vicinity of Kilkivan churchyard, five miles to the west. He also opened a tumulus when in Kintyre. (Liston, MS.5671, ff.19-20, 59-60, 81-2; RCS, nos.1106-10; *Late Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands*, by K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman, 1977, pp. 34, 159)

Back in Edinburgh it appears that Sandy attended the University, as on 8th October he writes to Sir Robert Liston, with regard to paying a visit: 'I beg leave to mention, that, of a Saturday when my Nat: Hist: Class does not interfere'. He stayed in Edinburgh until the end of May 1825, staying initially in Murray's Lodgings at 21 Lothian Street and then at Hunter's Square rooms. While there he took the opportunity of visiting the local antiquarian sites. On 15<sup>th</sup> October he wrote to Sir Robert Liston of a visit to Newbridge as follows: '... on the Glasgow road I took to the left, and at the 8th mile stone, by Newbrig, examined the ancient monuments there, in the fields on the left side of the road – Mr Glen, farmer; proprietor, Sir Thomas Cochrane.' Then, on 5th December: 'I took a very strange walk on Friday evening last. Having been informed at Mr Gibson Craig's that the Gogar-sten was worth the visiting – it being a frosty evening, I set out for the said famed stone at time of lamp lighting.

The night proved very dark; however, I procured a boy and a lantern and reconnoitred the spot. Having engaged workmen, I yesterday set out again after the Chemical lecture, and commenced digging up the Gogar-sten. Two masons replaced it in a proper perpendicular firmly wedged in the ground.' He also visited the Catstane and provided Sir Robert with possible interpretations of the inscription on the stone, in which he enlisted the aid of the Rev. Dr. Fleming of Flisk – this project was the subject of several letters. (RCS, nos.1110-2, 1115-9)

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1824 Sandy called at Clifton Hall to introduce himself to Sir Alexander Maitland Gibson, but he was out at the time. The following day Sir Alexander wrote to Sir Robert Liston asking for details of his visitor 'so as to enable me to shew a proper attention to the gentleman'. Sir Robert replied the next day as follows (RCS, nos. 1113-4):

The person who called at your house on Saturday and respecting whom your servant seems to have made a report not quite accurate must have been Mr Alexander Seton, son of the late Sir Alexander Seton (formerly Baron) of Preston, and younger brother of Dr Seton, now in Sweden.

This gentleman was for a number of years, longer he says than he ought to have been, confined in a private madhouse, in consequence of a degree of insanity, brought on him by long nervous fever. He is now at liberty, and, so far as I see, ought to remain so, being perfectly harmless. There is about him a restlessness and a singularity, which I would check if I could, but nothing that can be called derangement.

His great Hobby (in which he has no disinclination to ride in dirty weather) is hunting after antiquities, especially ancient monuments and inscriptions; and above all those in the Runick language, of which he acquired some knowledge during his stay with his father in Sweden. He has of late shown a great anxiety to explore the Barrow near the New Bridge, and has, I believe, frequently stopt for a short time, that is for a few hours, at Loanhead, attracted by this object. It is probable he wishes to interest you in the project of digging through the mound, and laying open the Tomb. I have endeavoured to dissuade him from attempting to interfere further than suggesting the operation to the proprietor of the land.

Sandy was successful in his introduction to Sir Alexander Maitland Gibson as he was able to report to Sir Robert on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1825: ‘... Sir Alexander Maitland – in driving past me yesterday recognised me – and informed me of his having obtained leave for my opening the great tumulus at Newbriggs.’ However, in a subsequent letter Sandy tells Sir Robert: ‘The grand tumulus at Newbridge which I opened had previously been opened and robbed’. (RCS, no.1117; *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, by Daniel Wilson, 1863, ii, pp.210-1)

While in Edinburgh Sandy visited Captain James Lunn who lived in Meadow Place. Captain Lunn seems to have had some connection with Sir Robert Liston as his eldest son was named Robert Liston Lunn. However, Sandy’s relationship with the Captain was not a happy one. On 29<sup>th</sup> June 1824 he wrote to Sir Robert: ‘Captain Lunn’s complaint has become more manifest now – eliciting itself in obstruction of the spermatic vessels leading from the abdomen, and occasioning the phenomenon which I mentioned. He is most distressed, and the bleedings, by leeches, afford the chief relief. I am sorry to say the Captain has made me really ill again by my being so simple as to allow him to stuff me with chickens’. Worse was to come, for on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1825 he writes: ‘Let me now speak of Captain Lunn. I have been a good deal deceived in that gentleman whose conduct seems more suitable for the past Middle Ages – or times of barbarism. At his house, Meadow-place, when I called, when I dared or presumed to introduce the subject of his niece, his sister’s daughter, Miss Brown, the rejoinder was (with certain epithets) that I was intermidling in subjects that did not concern me. He wrought himself up to furious passion, ordering me out of his house, and that for ever – adding thereto many observations (which I encountered with patience), and at last threatenings of personal violence’. (Liston, MS.5671, ff.57-8; RCS, no.1116; NAS, RD5/486, pp.488-93)

On 11<sup>th</sup> April 1825 Alexander Seton wrote to Sir Robert concerning a silver denarius with the head of Trajan discovered by him in a field at Barnton, and on the same day he became a corresponding member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and on 25<sup>th</sup> April acknowledgement was made to him of the donation to the Society of a papier maché cast of the early Christian inscription of the Catstane, near Edinburgh, along with communications of various

notices including a Roman altar found at Corbridge; relics discovered in a barrow near Dunbar; and ancient inscriptions of stone crosses of Ruthwell and Campbeltown. Alexander Seton had two accounts of his communications published in *Archaeologia Scotica*, viz., of a large tumulus or barrow near the west coast of the peninsular of Kintyre, and of tumuli discovered at Bowerhouses, near Dunbar. These communications were recorded by the Society as having been received on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1825. According to R.B.K. Stevenson the barrow at Machrihanish – a stratified sand and cairn structure, containing a cist – was the first careful account to be made of an excavated barrow. (RCS, no.1120; Stevenson, p.65).

During his time in Edinburgh Sandy kept in touch with Sweden, through Robert Dundas (of the Dundas of Dundas family) and others. On 10<sup>th</sup> March 1825 he reported to Sir Robert Liston: 'I have not heard from my brother – but, what is perhaps equally good, I have had information from Mr Irving (no.106 Prince's Street) that my brother in his last letter to him, sends his remembrance to me – inviting me over to visit him in Sweden. And I doubt not, in this event money shall not be wanting for the journey – from Mr Irving'. Then, on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1825 Sandy writes: 'I find my brother's mentioning the magnificent parties at Sir Benjamin Bloomfield's, that that gentleman is not yet a British peer'. It seems that he was now seeking letters of introduction to take with him to Sweden, for he writes: 'I could have written a whole letter about Professor Jameson, but must at present desist. I am under the necessity however of making application to other men of science, past that gentleman'. Robert Jameson, the professor of natural history at the University of Edinburgh, seems to have been a difficult character in this respect as others, such as William MacGillivray, the celebrated ornithologist, had similar problems with him. Soon after he wrote, in what appears to be his final letter in Scotland, to Sir Robert letting him know how he could be contacted in Sweden, and stating: 'I am in hopes to make my way to the Sound – in usual sailing time, notwithstanding the late prevalence of easterly winds'. (RCS, nos.1119-21; *Audubon in Edinburgh*, by John Chalmers)

In the next three years before his death in 1828 Seton carried out serious pioneer excavation in the cemetery of what has turned out to

be a most important Viking period trading-site at Birka, near Stockholm. During his short stay in Sweden he was the driving force in the planning and publication of the first volume of the collection of Swedish documents, the *Svenskt Diplomatarium*. He collected and attempted to rescue, before it was too late, what could be saved of Swedish medieval documents.

Donations of Swedish books were made by Seton to the Society of Antiquaries in 1826 and 1827 (NLS, MS.20466). On 11<sup>th</sup> February 1828 he sent a letter to Samuel Hibbert, editor of *Archaeologia Scotica*, with a facsimile of the inscription on a gold double bracelet of raised work in gold, found in the vicinity of Stockholm.

During the short period of only three years Alexander Seton made important contributions to Swedish archaeological research, particularly as a field archaeologist, and partly as a collector of antiquities for the 'National Collection', the present State Historical Museum. In June 1825, when at last Alexander could return to Sweden, he settled down in Stockholm, after a short stay at the family estate of Ekolsund, which ended in Alexander suing his brother for his share of the father's estate. Not until several years after his death was the verdict given in this long drawn out litigation. The suit was won by his brother, and Alexander's testamentary dispositions, among which were large amounts to the Academy of Literature, History and Antiquities, became null and void.

The last three years of his life were characterised by uninterrupted activity. He presented the Academy of Literature, History and Antiquities with frequent gifts of archaeological specimens, books and manuscripts, and of drawings which he had made at his own expense. His work can be followed in the numerous letters in his handwriting which are preserved, sometimes even from day to day.

Alexander Seton was the first to make excavations on any considerable scale on Björkö in Lake Mälaren, the site of the trading centre of Birka in the Viking period. He carried out excavations on Björkö on three separate occasions. In 1825, he examined two burial mounds, and in August 1826 a further two; and probably on the same occasion also a triangular mound, although on this occasion serious objections were raised against his work on the ground of faulty

excavation methods. He examined eight small mounds in May 1827, this time, however, to some extent as an authorised 'antiquarius', in that he had in the meantime (January 1827) been made a corresponding member of the Academy of Literature, History and Antiquities. His plans now became increasingly far-reaching, and he expressed a desire to open 200-300 mounds on Björkö, a project which was not enthusiastically received by the members of the Academy, and which was never realised, owing to his death on 1 October 1828. One source states that he was drowned crossing the Mälarsjöarna in an open boat, while another states that he had gone off in a boat alone to get planks to repair his cabin and was driven on to a deserted strand, where he had to spend the night in the open, an experience which brought about his death (*A History of the Family of Seton*, by George Seton, vol. i, p.369; *Northern Studies*, no.15, p.32).

Contemporaneously with the first Björkö finds, a grave find from the period of migrations, which Seton had found in the excavations of a stone circle near Litslensås parsonage in Uppland, was presented to the Academy of Literature, History and Antiquities in April 1826.

From the point of view of finds, the excavations that he made in September 1826 in a large cairn at Värpeby, in the parish of Kolbäck, Västmanland, yielded very little. The excavations are interesting, however, as they show how Seton took *ad notam* the severe criticism of August 1826, and now he presented both a detailed report and also attached ground plans and perspective drawings of the excavations, supplemented with meticulous measurements.

Seton also carried out the excavation of a mound at Munsjö, Uppland, but without finding any objects of importance. His field work consists for the rest in the raising of fallen rune stones, and in the 'inspection' of various fixed ancient monuments, enterprises which he always undertook on his own initiative and without sparing any expense. Thus, on his initiative, the area of the ancient monuments and the stronghold at Björkö and the ruins of Alsnö House were surveyed, besides which ground plans and perspective drawings were made of the ruins at Sigtuna and the ancient strongholds in Västmanland.

Seton's work during his years in Sweden was characterised by his tireless search for facts, by confirmed scepticism, and by an insistent demand for accuracy, which indicated that – apart from the confusion and disharmony which can be clearly traced – his was a scientific disposition. In contradistinction to many of those who, like him, were ardent collectors, of whom the early days of Swedish archaeology can show numerous examples, he did not look on antiquities as curiosities, but as objects of study, where even the simplest objects or details were of value for scientific information. Alexander Seton was far-sighted in many matters, and his achievements as a collector and one of the first field archaeologists in Sweden vindicate his place in the story of Swedish archaeological research (Selling, pp.130-3).

The starting point of my research was to try and find out if any truth lay behind the story that a commission by Christian I of Denmark to Hendrich Hendrichson in 1450, along with the other Henderson family documents, were presented to a Swedish knight. In an obituary of William Henderson of Petister, written by the Rev Thomas Mathewson, it is stated that the deceased 'was possessed of a keen and accurate memory, and on his father's side, through the Great Foude, Hendrich Hendrichson, could trace his connection with Herr Thorvald Thoresson, who was the representative in Shetland of Duke Hakon Magnusson' (*Shetland Times*, 6 June 1908). There is no genealogical evidence to connect either of these alleged forebears with the Henderson family in Unst, and no further information has come to light regarding Hendrich Hendrichson.

As regards the Swedish knight, all that has been established is that Sir Alexander Seton of Ekolsund did borrow a 16th century document, written in Scots, concerning a court case in Unst, which he returned to Thomas Mowat soon after his visit to Shetland in 1804. Could he also have been presented with other documents, possibly written in Danish or Norse, which he took back to Sweden? If so what did he do with them? Could they still be at Ekolsund or some other Seton seat in Sweden? Or presented, possibly by his son, to the Swedish Academy of Literature, History and Antiquities, or its Danish equivalent, some time between 1804 and 1828?

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The Harper of Armorica.

(Stockholm, 1826)

A Morning Recreation in Scotland.

Poem, addressed to Sir Thomas Stanley, of Pouditon Hall, etc, Bt., written  
at \*\*\*,

West of England.

Second Recreation.

Adarno.

(Stockholm, 1826)

Ode on King George the IVs purposed renewed Sea-voyage and his visit  
on Ireland,

Spring 182 .

The Scotch Piper.

Hodge's Fortunes, told in Rhyme.

On the Death of King George the III<sup>d</sup> of England.

Hymn.

The Author's First Essay in Poesy. On Miss \*\*\*, of Youthful Beauty.

The Author's Second Essay in Poesy. The Prisoner inspired.

The Prisoner in Despair.

(Stockholm, 1826)

Upon the Occasion of Captain Parry's successful Polar Expedition of the  
years,

1819-20.

Owen. A pastoral. On the Borders of Wales, on Days past.

Lubin. Pastoral Tale.

On the later Adventurers of the Emperor Napoleon. Written at an Early  
Date.

On the Death of Peter Pindar. Poet of the People.

Hymn. Night-piece.

Ode Familiar.

(Stockholm, 1826, no. 1)

Verses written Twenty years ago, in Consequence of the Question of Irish  
Catholick

Emancipation.

On the Catholick Question, when before the House of Commons in 1821.

Rhapsody on the Rejection of the Catholick Claims, in the House of Peers,  
1821.

The Death of Coloquho. A simple Rural Tale.

Ode Ridiculous.

(Stockholm, 1826, no. 2)

Lagom. A North-Swedish Bucolick.

Masonick Song.

A Far Flight. Recital, narrated to a Friend.

Armine. A Levant Tale.

Ode, with a Glance at Horace.

(Stockholm, 1826, no. 3)

Bucolo. A Pastoral.

Gaffer Whoing.

Another Effort at Something.

On Fellow-sympathy.

On the Death of Gustavus the Third, King of Sweden.

Bootes. A Conversation-piece.

(Stockholm, 1827, no. 4)

Mr Rey's Journey to see Sights.

Mr Row's comfortable Market-ride.

(Stockholm, 1827, no. 5)

Lindip. A Pastoral.

A Very Few Words on Attractions and Repulsions.

Ode Serio-humorous.

I and Y.

Rollo.

(Stockholm, 1827, no. 6)

Sicilian Brothers.

On the Death of Napoleon, Emperor.

Ode Serio-rambling.

On the Finale of the Villain.

A Few Words on Shaving.

Visit to Cleon Hall.

Effusions and Complaints.

Hymn.

Verses, written in Fifth Lustrum of Imprisonment.

The Prisoner, to the Virtuous, the Good, the Honourable, Mrs Mary Ann —  
—.

On Hearing from Sir Robert Liston of the Death of the said Lady.

Hymn.

Elegy.

Elegy.

The Master of the Choir.

Cryptogamia's Marriage.

Fatiocidis' Art Poetick.

Superscription.

Elegy.

Philo's Tour.

(Stockholm, 1827, no. 7)