

Robert Millar

- 12 Oct 1789 Born Perth to James Miller Weaver in Perth and May Kid* his spouse.
(OPR. Births 387/00900320)
- 1793 Father James enlists with the Breadalbane Fencibles
(born Liff 1761, OPR 301/00200104)
- 4th Oct 1798 Robert Miller*, aged 10, b Dundee County of Forfar, enlisted as Drummer in the Breadalbane Fencibles. (National Archives of Scotland GD112/52/544 volume 1 number 52)
- 1802 2nd Battalion Breadalbane Fencibles stood down
- 1803 James Miller enlists with the 2nd Battalion 92nd Foot
- 1814 92nd merged to become Gordon Highlanders, 2nd Battalion disbanded, James Miller discharged aged 53, suffering from 'Impaired Vision', becomes Chelsea Pensioner. His service record reads; Corporal, 2nd Breadalbane Fencibles from 17 Aug 1793 to 18th April 1799. (which is when the 2nd battalion was stood down), and then Private & Lance Corporal in the 92nd Regiment from 25 Sept 1803 to 18 October 1814. (Public Record Office. WO 97/1011/94)
- 16 Mar 1817 Robert Miller, Drummer, Forfar Militia & Catherine Duncan, Montrose
(OPR. Marriages. 312/00700387 Montrose)
- 6 June 1817 Robert Millar Forfar Militia & Katherine Duncan his spouse had a lawful Daughter born 15th May and baptised 6th June named Mary
(OPR. Births. 312/00500556 Montrose)
- 12 Apr 1819 Robert Millar, Forfar Militia & Katherine Duncan his spouse had a son born 28th March & baptised 12th April named Alex Duncan
(OPR. Births 312/00500586 Montrose)
- 1820 Starts the compilation of his 'Highland Manuscript' with the title of *A Collection of Pibarachs, Laments, Salutes, Marches, Reels and Strathspeys Principally adapted for the Great Highland Bag-pipe* now National Library of Scotland Acc 11829. He signs the manuscript, R Millar, Forfar Reg^t and Piper to the Abdⁿ High^d Society, 1820
- 2 Apr 1821 Robert Millar, Forfar Militia & Catherine Duncan his spouse had a son born 15th March & baptised 2nd April named Robert
(OPR. Births 312/01000028 Montrose)
- 1 Aug 1823 Robert Miller, Forfar Militia, & Catherine Duncan his spouse had a son born 11th July & baptised 1st August named James.
(OPR. Births 312/01000068 Montrose)

24 Jun 1829 Corporal Robert Miller discharged from the Forfar Militia in Montrose, 'in consequence of an order for the reduction of the [permanent] staff. He was described as being about forty years of age, Five feet Nine inches in height with Fair hair, Blue eyes and Fresh complexion. The service record was;
9th October 1799 to 1 May 1802
20 September 1802 to 24 March 1825
13 May 1825 to 23 November 1826
1 March 1827 to 24 June 1829
Forfar Militia was entered on the line with his period of service commencing 20 September 1802, and all the periods of service were listed under the column headed 'Drummer' except for his final 1 year and 89 days which was entered in the column headed 'Corporal'.
(Public Record Office. WO 97/1104/60)

1830 Presented by Lewis F Innes of Ballogie with a set of Union/Pastoral Pipes made by Robert Reid of North Shields which are now in the collections of the National Museum of Scotland (NMS H.1995.791 (1)). These pipes which were bought by the museum with a contribution from the Lowland and Border Pipers Society can be viewed on the Museum website. The circumstances behind this gift can be surmised, an advert for the Aberdeen Highland Society, described as 'This newly instituted and flourishing Society' was placed in the Aberdeen Journal for the 8th August 1821. The four stewards for its meeting included Lewis Innes, Esq of Ballogie and Lieutenant Alexander Sutherland of the Forfar Militia. As we know from his 1820 'Highland Manuscript' that Robert was piper to society it is probable that he was using the Forfar Regiments own pipes. According to Robert's army discharge record his trade was listed as 'Weaver', Since we know from the same record that he had been in continuous military service since the age of ten, then the description of weaver must be based on his father's original trade, but suggests that at the time of discharge Robert had no clear idea of what he was going to do. The gift of these pipes along with his grateful naming of a son after Lewis F Innes of Ballogie suggests that he was being set up to pursue his post military career as a musician.

4 Feb 1836 **Edinburgh Courant**
HIGHLAND BAGPIPE Mr Robert Millar of Montrose, the celebrated performer on the Northumbrian, Union, and Great Highland Bagpipes, now in Dundee, has made an improvement on our noble national instrument, the bagpipe, well worthy of public notice. He has added a horn to the lower end of the chanter and by perforating various holes which he works by means of keys, he has added three notes to the diatonic scale – one above and two below. He has also introduced semitones which render the instrument so harmonious that it has been accompanied by a violin and violincello with excellent effect.

This newspaper report seems to be the basis of suggestions that Robert Millar was a bagpipe maker. While he was clearly the innovator of the improvements it was probably the start of his collaboration with the Dundee bagpipe maker John Cameron (1796-1859) who started making bagpipes around that time. A manuscript entitled *A Collection of National Music for the Great Highland Bagpipe, Set by Mr Robert Miller, Musician, for John C. Cameron, Piper & Pipe-Maker, Dundee, 1838*, now accession 11516/2 in the National Library of Scotland, also contains transcripts of letters to the pipemaker from some of his military customers. The letters indicate that Robert Millar was acting for some of these regiments by verifying the pipes were of a suitable standard.

1841 Census Robert Miller, Musician aged 50, at Rutherglen Loan, Gorbals, Lanarkshire.
(644/02065/02003)

Catherine Millar, aged 47, at West Wynd, Dundee. (282/00036/00013)

James „ „ 17, Rope Maker

Catherine „ „ 14

Charlotte „ „ 12

Lewis „ „ 10

Robert „ „ 5

1851 Census Robert Millar, aged 61, Chelsea Pensioner, local Comp, at 28 West Wynd, Dundee.

Catherine „ „ 57

Lewis F „ „ 20, Rope and Sail Maker

Robert „ „ 15, Sail Maker apprentice.

(Census 1851282/00086/00029)

6 Jul 1861 Robert Millar, Musician, married to Catherine Duncan, of 26 West Wynd, Dundee died aged 71 years. Parents given as James Millar, Chelsea Pensioner and Charlotte Millar, nee Kidd*, both deceased. Death notified by James Millar, son.
(Statutory Deaths 282/020670)

22 Oct 1871 Catherine Millar, widow of Robert Miller musician, of 11 Smalls Wynd, Dundee died aged 77 years. Parents given as James Duncan, General Merchant and Jane Duncan nee Moffat, both deceased. Death notified by Lewis F Millar, son of 82 Dudhope St, Dundee
(Statutory Deaths 282/010470)

1871 Census Lewis F Millar, aged 40, Musician, of Dudhope Street, Dundee
(Census 1871282/03019/03015)

2 Dec 1900 Lewis Farquharson Millar, Musician of Overgate, Dundee, died aged 69. Parents given as Robert Millar, Musician and Catherine Millar nee Duncan, both deceased. Death notified by John Bell, son in law.
(Statutory Deaths 282/030452)

* There are some difficulties still surrounding his actual birth, his mother's Christian name and his first enlistment. There is little doubt about his father's identity, so the conflict regarding his mother's name may be down to a mistake in the original parish records which are not meant to be 'statutory records', or possibly an error by Robert's son James when recording his fathers death.

It seems sensible, given Robert's own statement in his 'Highland Manuscript' that he learned to whistle his first tune in 1794 when he heard it played by the 2nd Breadlbane Fencibles in Dundee, to identify him with the ten-year-old boy enlisted as a drummer in the regimental roll for October 1798, and assume that the birthplace of Dundee given in the roll was also a mistake by a clerk who had known him as one of the serving soldiers children from when the battalion was first stationed at Dundee. Without central statutory recording of even military records these sort of errors often occurred, as in the case of Robert's father James whose military discharge gives his date of service starting in August 1793 (which was when the 2nd battalion was first raised); whereas his father's attestation certificate, which has survived, is actually dated Dundee, 16 August 1794. (National Archives of Scotland GD112/52/181/14).

What seems to have happened can be explained by the background to the various battalions of the 4th (Breadalbane) Fencible Regiment. The 1st and 2nd battalions were raised in 1793 and, as it states in James Millar's attestation, 'upon condition that I am not to be marched out of Scotland, except in case of an actual Invasion of England, and upon condition also that I am not to be draughted out of said regiment into any other Corps'. Subsequently a 3rd battalion was raised but with its remit extended to Ireland, where it was to see most of its service until it was disbanded in 1802.

When the 2nd battalion was disbanded in 1799, less than a year after a 'Drummer boy' Millar had joined the regiment, the drummer was among those members of the battalion who volunteered to transfer to Ireland where he appears listed in a return of Age, size, country and servitude of Captain McLeans Company in April 1799. (GD112/52/364). The dates of his first period of service recorded on Robert Millar's discharge record would presumably therefore represent his period of service after transferring to the 3rd battalion until it too was disbanded in 1802.

For further information on Robert Millar's manuscripts and their contents see

Cannon, Roderick, *Robert Millar, Lowland Piper* in *Common Stock*, (1993), volume 8 numbers 1 and 2

_____ *The Millar (Highland Bagpipe) Manuscript*, in the Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference, (1998), volume 25

_____ *Chasing the Millar Manuscript- Hard Work and Intrigue*, in the *Piping Times* (2001), volume 54 number 1.

Keith Sanger
2008