

150 YEARS OF THE PLOWMAN FAMILY IN AUSTRALIA

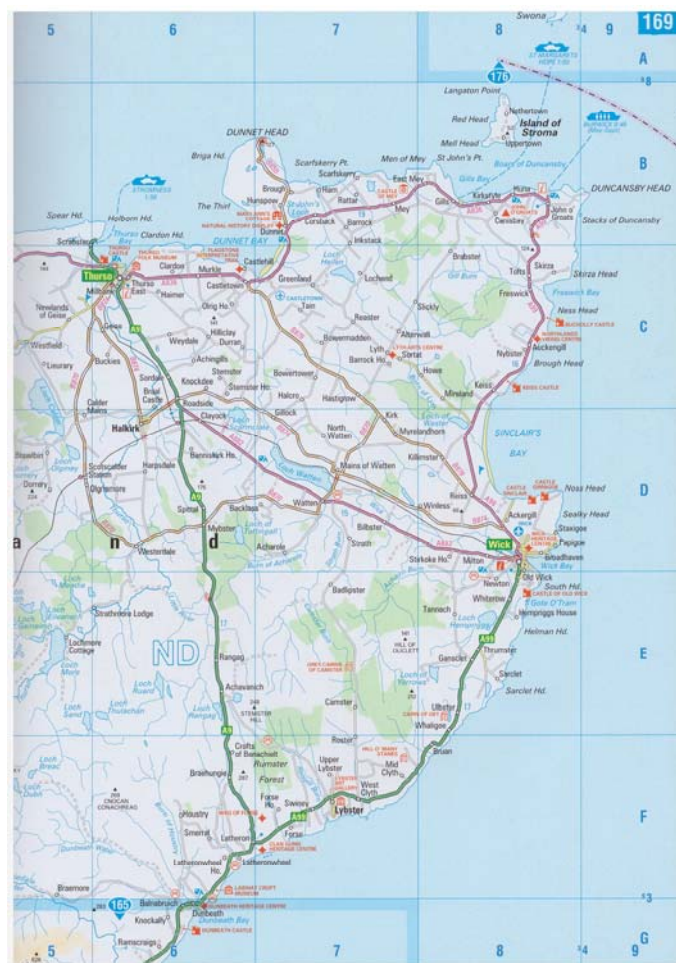
THE PLOWMANS IN SCOTLAND

Sinclair and Margaret Plowman and family arrived in NSW aboard the Sir Robert Sale in 1864. Sinclair was the youngest child of Donald Plowman and Mary Mowat who had lived near the town of Wick in County Caithness, in the northern most region of Scotland.

Approximately one out of every seven immigrants to Australia in the 19th century were Scottish. They often left remote, agricultural regions in the Highlands and the Hebrides after experiencing the miseries of famine, disease, eviction and poverty. To them national identity was secondary to subsistence. They arrived under an Assisted Immigrants program and when in Australia saved with determination to buy their own land and establish themselves in profitable businesses. The purpose was to achieve what was almost impossible in their own country.

Most place names occurring in the information about the Plowmans are within County Caithness and include Wick, Watten, Staxigoe, Thurso, Bilbster and Canisbay.

A map of Caithness is included below. Staxigoe is to the north east of Wick and could be considered now as an extension of the town itself. Canisbay is a small coastal region immediately to the west of John O'Groats. Bilbster, the region where Donald and Mary Mowat and family were based is approximately 5 kms east of Watten on the road to Wick.



The earliest information we have of our Plowman family in Wick comes from the Old Parochial Records, information provided by John Sinclair Plowman (1922-2012) and in the publication Wick and Watten Notables.

John Sinclair Plowman and his wife Barbara made several trips to northern Scotland from 1950 and Donald and Bronwyn Plowman visited the area in 2013 and stayed for some days at Bilbster House. Both were keen to explore the family roots and spent time in libraries, museums, cemeteries and the region.

Donald was the fourth of seven children born to Magnus Plowman (b.1734) and Margaret Calder (b. 8/10/1740). Magnus and Margaret were married in Wick on 27 December 1760 and had the following children:

Unknown boy (b. 11/12/1763)
Anna (b. 24/11/1765)
Elizabeth (b.27/3/1768)
Donald (1774 - 1849)
Margaret (b. 9/7/1774)
William (b. 21/9/1777)
Sinclair (b. 15/3/1784)

Donald Plowman and Mary Mowat

The Family Group Sheet for Donald Plowman and Mary Mowat is provided in Table 1 below. This information has been drawn from the Old Parochial Registers and details can be sourced from the Scotlands People website www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk if required.

Donald Plowman and Mary Mowat were married in Bilbster, County Caithness, Scotland on 23/11/ 1798

In a request made to the Scots Ancestry Research Society the following was provided:

We have consulted the microfiche index of baptisms from the extant old parochial (parish) registers of Caithness and the following children were recorded to Donald Plowman and Mary Mowat in Wick:

<i>Elizabeth, baptised</i>	<i>13 June 1799</i>
<i>Magnus, baptised</i>	<i>18 March 1801</i>
<i>Margaret, baptised</i>	<i>13 October 1802</i>
<i>Donald, baptised</i>	<i>26 July 1804</i>
<i>William, baptised</i>	<i>31 July 1806</i>
<i>James, baptised</i>	<i>8 November 1808</i>
<i>Alexander, baptised</i>	<i>26 February 1811</i>
<i>George, baptised</i>	<i>21 April 1813</i>
<i>Sinclair, baptised</i>	<i>14 September 1816</i>

If they followed the traditional naming pattern, then one would expect Donald's parents to be Magnus and Margaret.

Information from the early Scottish Census

Information has been drawn from the 1841, 1851 and 1861 Scottish Census. It should be noted that the accuracy of the information increased with each census. There was also variability from District to District within a County based on the competence of the collector. Notwithstanding, information is provided as to where the family was living at the time and in some instances the occupation of each person is noted.

We know that Mary Mowat, Donald Plowman's first wife and mother of their nine children, died in 1826. Donald remarried Mary Finlayson on 9/12/1826 and had two more daughters, Elizabeth (1827) and Isobella (1830).

In the 1841 Census there were 40 Plowmans listed in Caithness. The numbers had increased to 46 by the 1851 Census and to give an idea as to the prevalence of Plowmans in Scotland there were 71 records in all of Scotland. The conclusion to be drawn is that the name "Plowman" was not common at the time, making tracing of the family a little easier.

Donald Plowman, Mary Finlayson and their daughters were recorded as agricultural workers at Bilbster, approximately 5 miles west of Wick, in the 1841 Census. This seems to be the area where the majority of the family lived in their early years, dispersing as they got older. It seems by 1841 son Donald, his wife Christian and their young son Donald lived in Sinclair Square in Wick, James, a tailor, his wife Isobel and four children resided in Bilbster, Alexander, a fisherman, his wife Helen and their three children were in coastal Staxigoe. Sinclair and Margaret, then with 2 young children, Catherine and Donald (Daniel), are registered at Canisbay. Many of the family were in the same area for the 1851 census. It appears almost certain that some of the family were living on the property near Bilbster House, which was the centre of a large agricultural holding at the time. Below are photographs of Bilbster House and surrounding land taken in 2013.

In 1851, however, Sinclair and Margaret and their family were living in the Shetland Islands, in the district of Fetlar and North Yell. Sinclair James is recorded as a grocer. By now they had three more children James, Mary, and George. It is not known when the family moved to the Islands or for how long they stayed. However Jessie was born there and Roderick in Wick on their return to the mainland.

At the time of the 1861 census Sinclair and Margaret were in Wick Burgh, and we can surmise that they were planning their move to New South Wales. Donald (or Daniel) had already arrived in Australia in 1857, aged 19, sailing on the 'Vocalist'. His sisters Catherine and Mary were not recorded with the family in Wick. Mary, aged 17 was probably in Shapinsay on the Orkney Islands, but joined her family to emigrate before 1864. We know that Catherine married John Darling in Edinburgh in 1864, just before the rest of the family left Scotland. She remained in Scotland with her husband, where they had 5 children, until they too immigrated to Australia in 1875. Sadly John died not long after their arrival in Orange.

Donald (Daniel) married Jane Budge in Orange, NSW, Australia in 1862 - two years before Sinclair and Margaret left Scotland - and was already established at Towac near Orange when his parents and younger siblings arrived in the colony.



The Clearances

Sinclair and Margaret joined over a generation of Highland Scottish people (and others from England, Ireland and Wales) who left their homeland to establish a new life, mainly in Canada, the United States and Australia. It is most likely that their emigration was related to The Clearances occurring in Scotland at that time.

There were two periods of major clearances from the Scottish Highlands, 1782 to 1820 and 1840 to 1854. While the clearances referred to the removal of the crofters and cotters (small subsistence type farmers) from their land by the wealthy landowners there were impacts on the regional economy and broader society that resulted in these major emigrations. Small farmers and agricultural workers were compelled to find other occupations to sustain their families.

Localised clearances commenced in the early 1780s as the result of the wealthy landowners letting large areas of land to English farmers to graze sheep. The Year of the Sheep occurred in 1792 and symbolised the introduction and expansion of the Cheviot breed into the Highlands. The clearances associated with the expansion of sheep farming and the ejection of traditional crofters and cotters from their land saw the first major exodus to Canada and the USA.

Between 1807 and 1819 there was systematic, and generally brutal, eviction of crofters and cotters across all Counties in the Highlands. Emigration to Canada, USA and Australia reached a peak around 1830.

The pressure on families to find a new country to live in was exacerbated by a typhoid outbreak in 1818 and 1819, a cholera outbreak in 1832 and the famine resulting from potato blight in 1836 and again in 1846.

By the early 1850's the last of the evictions had occurred across the Highlands, resulting in between one half and two thirds of the total population in the Highland Counties leaving over a 20-30 year period. Declines in population of 80% were reported in some areas.

The 1841 Census records a number of Plowmans in the Wick Parish of the County of Caithness. Their employment is listed as agricultural labourer, cooper or fisher. The latter two categories probably reflect the expansion of the fishing industry based around Wick resulting from the clearance of crofters from their land over the preceeding 50 years. Coopers were employed making the wooden barrels required to store the dried and salted fish. The photograph below was taken of Wick harbour around the peak of the fishing industry, which had expanded from little more than subsistence food gathering prior to the clearances to the major industry at the time. The other photo is taken near Wick Harbour in 2013.



Table 1. GROUP FAMILY SHEET - DONALD PLOWMAN AND MARY MOWAT

HUSBAND Donald PLOWMAN			SOURCES / INFORMATION / COMMENTS	FILE / ID NUMBER 1a
Born	1774	Where Wick, Caithness, Scotland	Familysearch.org Donald and second wife, Mary Finlayson had two daughters, Elizabeth born about 1827 and Isobella, born 26/11/1830. Elizabeth married John Waugh in Wick in 1856 (scotlandspeople.gov.uk)	Husband's Full Name
Baptised		Where		Donald PLOWMAN
Married	23/11/1798	Where Wick, Caithness, Scotland		
Died	1849	Where Scotland		
Buried		Where		Wife's Full Name
Other Wives Mary FINLAYSON (married 9 December 1826)				
Father:	Magnus PLOWMAN	Mother:Margaret CALDER		Mary MOWAT
WIFE Mary MOWAT				
Born	24/10/1775	Where Scotland		Date 29/08/2013
Baptised		Where		Compiler:Bruce Morrison
Died	1826	Where		Address
Buried		Where		Town Canberra
Other Husbands				
Father	Thomas MOWAT	Mother Marjory SUTHERLAND		

Sex M/F	Children Born & Baptism Date (in order of birth)		Where Born	Married To/Date		Where Married	Died
1 F	Elizabeth PLOWMAN	13/06/1799	Wick Caithness, Scotland	William GRAY	1823		27/03/1871
2 M	Magnus PLOWMAN	18/03/1801	Wick Caithness, Scotland				
3 F	Margaret PLOWMAN	13/10/1802	Wick Caithness, Scotland	Donald Bruce	1826		9/2/1875
4 M	Donald PLOWMAN	26/07/1806	Wick Caithness, Scotland	Christian Smith			
5 M	William PLOWMAN	31/07/1806	Wick Caithness, Scotland	Margaret Brebner			
6 M	James PLOWMAN	08/11/1808	Wick Caithness, Scotland	Isobel Alexander	19/6/1835		1/9/1883
7 M	Alexander PLOWMAN	26/02/1811	Wick Caithness, Scotland	Helen Pryde	24/11/1832	Wick	4/2/1894
8 M	George PLOWMAN	21/04/1813	Wick Caithness, Scotland				
9 M	Sinclair PLOWMAN	b. 26/08/1816 Bapt14/09/1816	Bilbster Caithness Scotland	Margaret ROSS	20/07/1836	Wick Caithness Scotland	Orange 25/05/1902