



James Swan 1839 - 1905

James married Helen Porter in 1865 and set up home in Millburn Street, where they had nine children. Helen had visited a fortune teller who foretold that she would fill four corners of the churchyard before a child lived, a prophecy which almost proved true with her first three children dying in infancy: Jane Bell in 1866, Agnes in 1867, and James in 1869. Son John born in 1870 was the first to survive, followed by Margaret in 1872, then Janet in 1875 who also died in infancy, James in 1800 (it was common practice in these times of high infant mortality to name children after those siblings who had previously died), followed by Grenville Bell in 1881 and Agnes Helen in 1882 who also both died in infancy. Grenville however is still with us in the form of a plaster cast (see artefacts). The two surviving sons, John and James went on to continue the business.

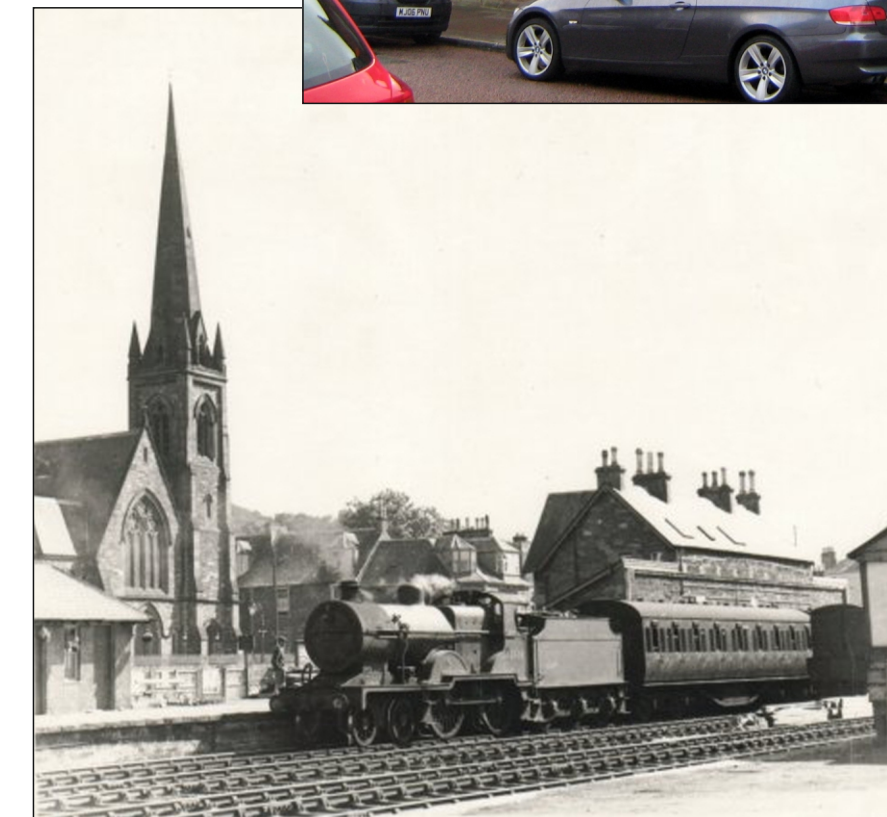
FOUNDER - 1864

James Swan

James Swan was born in 1839 and raised in Kirkton village near Dumfries. He served his time as a stone hewer at the nearby Locharbriggs sandstone quarry, before moving to Kirkcudbright in around 1860. James found employment with Kirkcudbright builders William Wallace and commenced work on the building of a new a bank, which is now known as Toad Hall and located opposite the Masonic Arms in Castle Street. When the railway arrived in Kirkcudbright in 1864 James spotted the opportunity to source stone more quickly and cheaply and decided to establish his own stone masonry business in the town, 'James Swan Monumental Sculptor'. His yard was situated at Creek Head in St Cuthbert's Road next to the then Kirkcudbright Life Boat Station, now the site of a fine house (The Old Lifeboat House).



Above:
Toad Hall
St. Cuthbert Street
Kirkcudbright



Left:
Kirkcudbright
Railway Station

OBITUARY OF JAMES SWAN

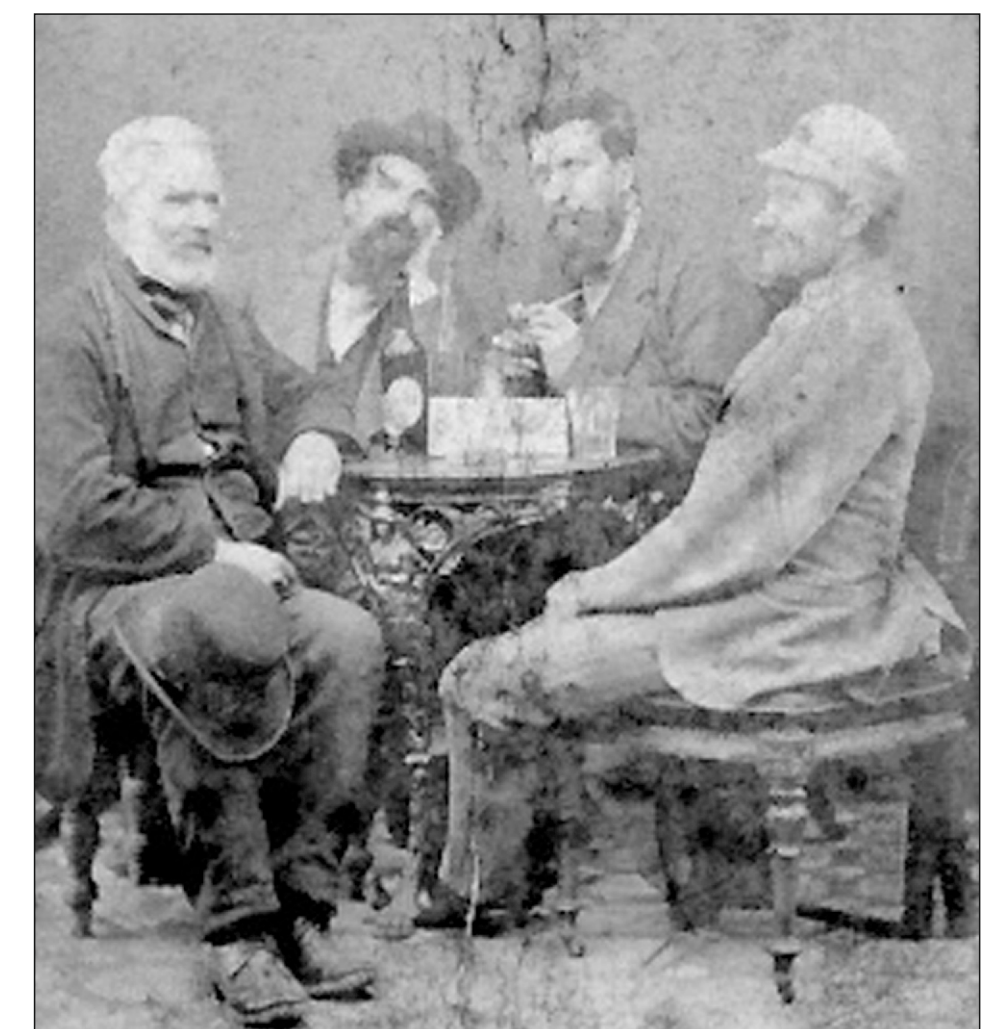
Transcribed from newspaper cutting on display

KIRKCUDBRIGHT SUDDEN DEATH, 15th October 1905

On Sunday morning, James Swan, monumental mason died with startling suddenness at his residence in Millburn Street. He had been in indifferent health for some time, but had always been able to go about his accustomed duties. After taking breakfast on Sunday morning he complained of feeling unwell, and retired to his room, where he expired in a few moments, the cause of death being attributed to failure of the heart's action. Although a native of Dumfriesshire, having been born at Kirkmahoe, Mr. Swan spent the greater part of his life in Kirkcudbright. He was employed as a hewer under the late Mr. Wallace, father of the present Mr. W. Wallace, builder, for considerable period, and ultimately commenced business as a monumental mason and sculptor. He soon acquired a considerable business and his services were requisitioned for most of the churchyards in the neighbourhood. His monumental work is characterised by neatness and good workmanship. Mr. Swan had the unique experience of lettering the inscriptions and stones in St. Cuthbert's Churchyard marking the last resting place of five Provosts of the burgh. His work as a Sculptor was not always directed as a means of obtaining a livelihood, as many of the stones of Covenanting times, with which our local churchyards and hillsides abound, were kept fresh to the public by his self imposed labour. Of these old stones he had considerable knowledge as he also had of local historical places. His familiar figure will be missed in town and country alike. The local lodge of Oddfellows, now a large and flourishing society, owes its origin to him, and he was also a Freemason. He is survived by two sons (also monumental masons and sculptors) and one daughter, for whom much sympathy is felt. The funeral took place on Wednesday to St. Cuthbert's Churchyard.

THE GEORGE HOTEL

Helen Porter had moved to Kirkcudbright around 1863 to look after her Aunt Janet Bell, who was the proprietor of the George Inn. It is uncertain exactly where the George Inn was, although in *'Maxwell's Guide Book to the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright from the Nith to the Cree'* it is described only as being "close by" in relation to the Royal Hotel and the Commercial Hotel. Janet died in 1875 and James took on the lease of The George Inn which proved not to be a profitable venture, with him applying to the court for 'cessio bonorum' (Latin for a voluntary 'surrender of goods', by a debtor to his creditors.) in 1878. The inventory of Miss Janet Bell's possessions at the time of her death in 1875 and the letter from the solicitors confirming James Swan's lease of the inn are on display, along with a newspaper cutting dated 1878 reporting on the subsequent court case.



James Swan and companions, in what is believed to be the George Inn

GENERATION 2

John Swan



John Swan 1870 - 1943

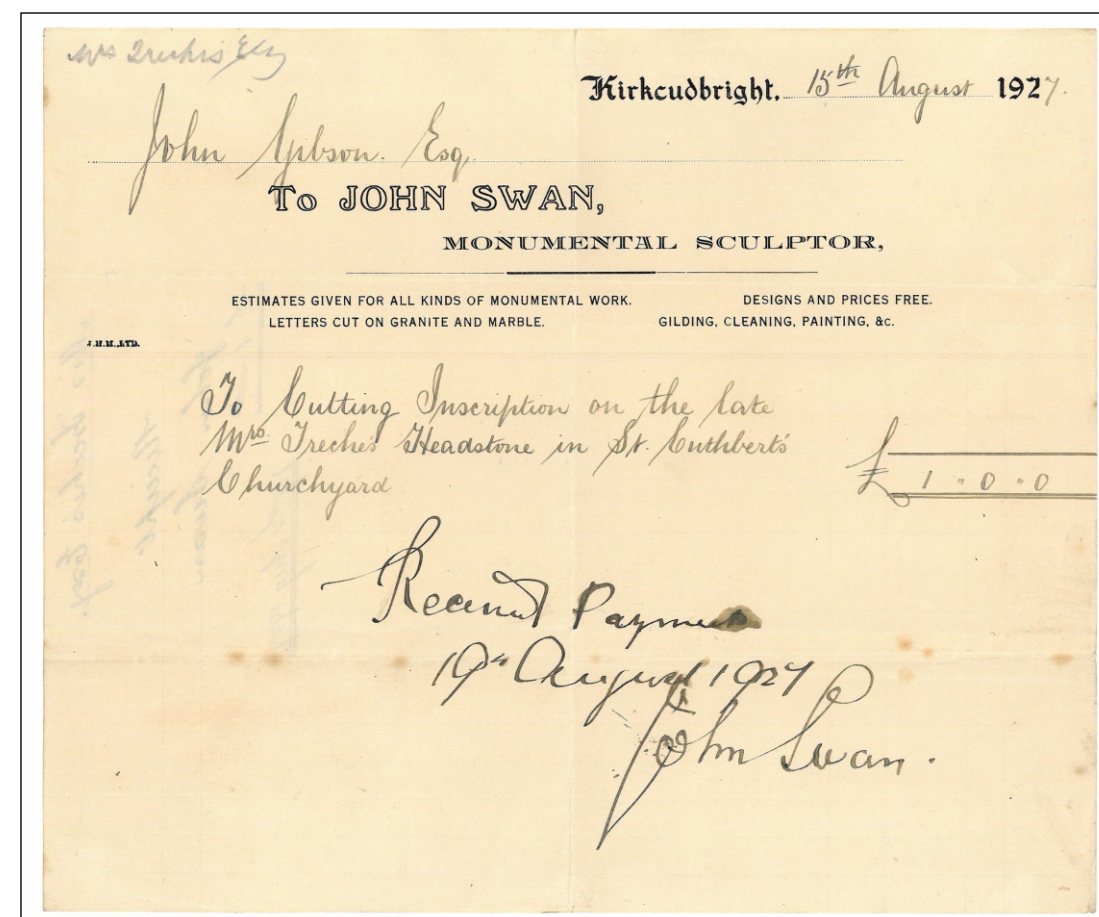
John Swan joined his father in the business and later he was joined by his younger brother James. John trained as a Monumental Sculptor and as part of his training he was dispatched by railway to Glasgow to learn and improve his skills working on buildings and architectural projects in the City. James died in 1912 leaving John to continue the business, trading as 'John Swan Monumental Sculptor'.

John married Barbara Jane Glover Williamson in 1901 and they produced six children: James Douglas in 1902 (died in infancy), Thomas Davidson in 1903 (died 1915 aged 12), Jonathan Porter in 1905, Douglas in 1907, William in 1910 (Died 1918 aged 8), and Edith Cavell (Eadie) in 1916 (Died 2001 aged 85). Jonathan and later Douglas were to carry on the business following the death of their father John in 1943, trading as 'John Swan & Sons'.



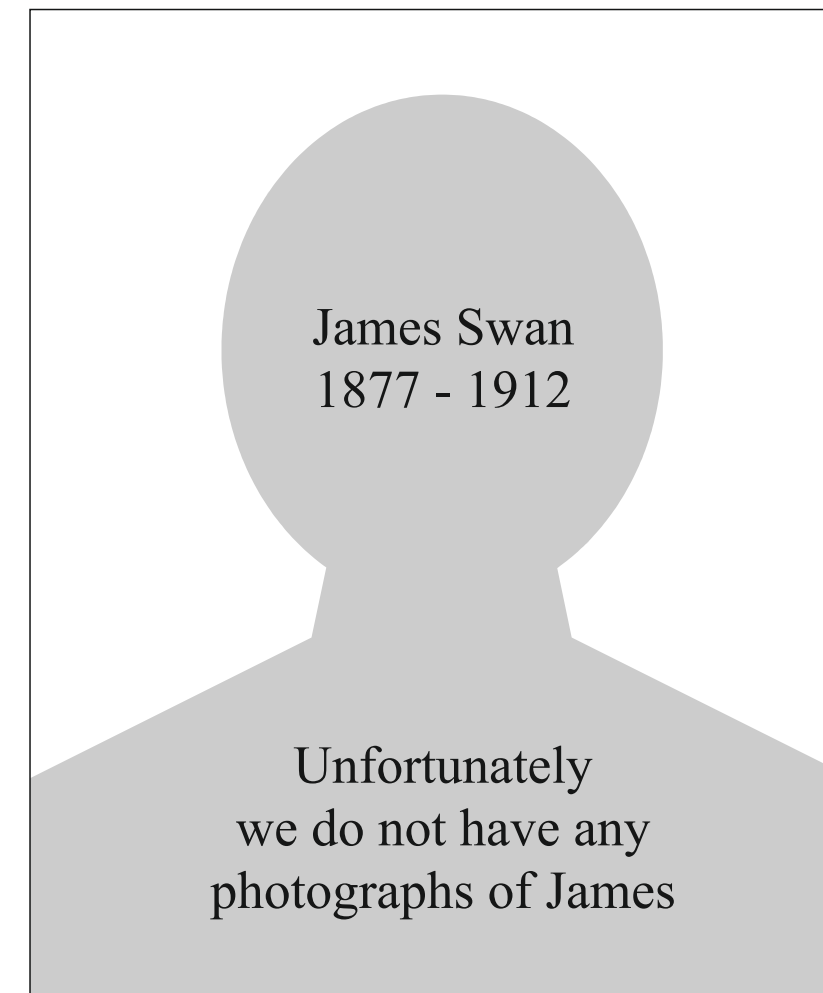
John Swan in army uniform

John Swan had been a member of the Galloway Volunteer Rifles and was eventually called to serve his country during The Great War, being stationed in North Wales from where he returned unscathed to continue the business.



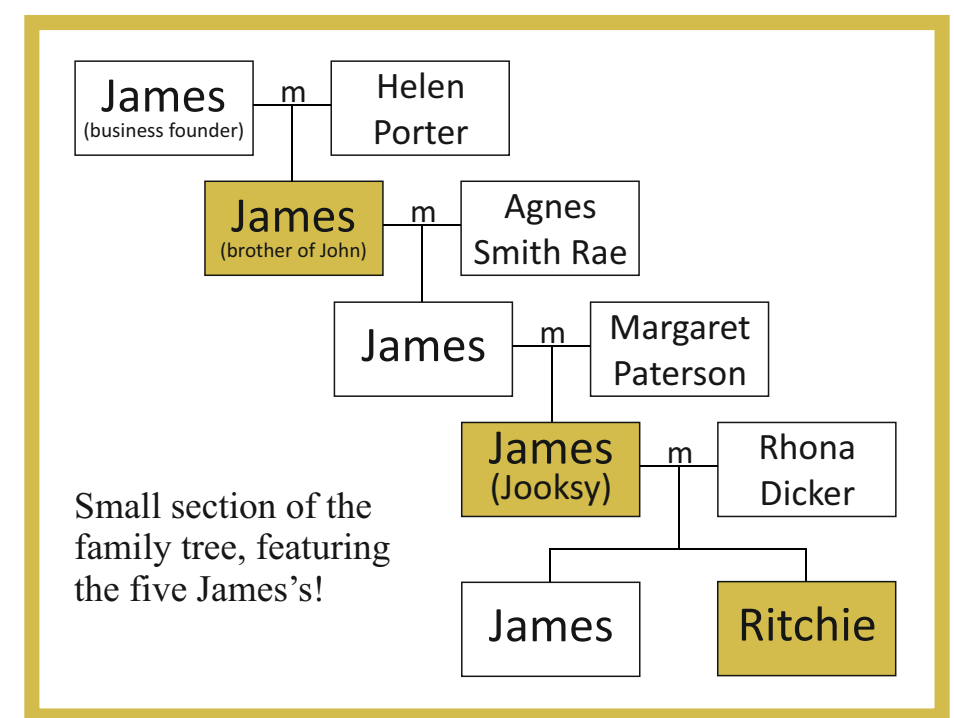
John Swan Monumental Sculptor invoice, dated 1927

James Swan



James Swan, the founders younger son, was an accomplished stone carver who worked with his brother John until his untimely death in 1912 aged 35 years. James married Agnes Smith Rae and they had four children, Margaret Sharpe in 1906, James in 1908 and Helen Porter in 1910. James and Agnes's son, also named James, did not follow the family tradition and instead became a bus driver, however his descendants through other avenues have maintained a close link with the memorial business.

James Swan, the brother of John, died young as did his son, also named James, leaving a young family. James Hunter Swan (Jooksy) who was only four when his father died, went on to become a joiner and married Rhona Dicker who he met in Battersea while he was working in London and she was on a day trip. James (Jooksy) and Rhona have two sons, James Douglas and Ritchie John. (Confusingly this branch of the family, starting with the business founder James, has five consecutive generations of men all named James.)



When the current business expanded and built new offices and workshops in 1993, James (Jooksy) was one of the main building contractors, maintaining the family link to the memorial business. Jooksy's son Ritchie who runs his own IT business also maintains that link to this day as the IT consultant and computer maintenance manager to Douglas Swan & Sons.

Left: James 'Jooksy' Swan (left) and Joe Russell working on new building, 2001

GENERATION 3

Jonathan Swan



Jonathan Porter Swan was born to John and Barbara in 1905. Jonathan was Dux of the Johnston School and an accomplished artist who won a bursary to study at Kirkcudbright Academy (at the time a fee paying school) where he proved to be a proficient scholar. Local artist E.A. Hornel was keen for Jonathan to study at The Glasgow School of Art but Jonathan simply wished to follow his love of shooting and fishing and become a gamekeeper. Jonathan was trained by his father as a Monumental Sculptor and joined him in the business in 1921.

Jonathan was friendly with local head gamekeeper John McCredie and it was no surprise that Jonathan married John's daughter Mary Hetherington McCredie. John and Mary had three children, Mary in 1943, Barbara in 1946 and John in 1948. Son John died in a road accident near Inveraray in 1975, having previously survived losing his left hand while making a bomb to stun fish, however this did not curtail his enthusiasm for shooting and even with one hand John was an expert shot.

Jonathan Porter Swan 1905 - 1961



Creek Head yard, 1938 Jonathan (far left, head just visible)
John Swan (father) (centre) and Douglas (right)

SPLITTING THE BUSINESS

The war and its experiences perhaps had a greater effect on Jonathan and Douglas than one would realise. They resumed the business partnership in 1945 after being demobbed and the business began to grow, however Jonathan's family was also growing and Douglas was still living in the family home. Douglas moved into a small hut at the Creek Head yard (which was later to be relocated as the Gatehouse of Fleet office) and Eadie's young son John McGrath was Douglas's constant companion at this time. By the time Douglas had met Sylvia (with young John's McGrath's approval) and started his own family in 1955, Jonathan's health and their business relationship had begun to deteriorate. In 1957 the brothers finally decided to part company. Douglas formed his own business 'Douglas Swan Monumental Sculptor' at 18 St. Cuthbert Street, the home of the business today, while Jonathan carried on at Creek Head until his death in 1961 at the age of 55, leaving behind a wife and young family.

Douglas Swan



Douglas Swan 1907 - 1982

Douglas, Jonathan's brother was born in 1907 and served his time as a grocer with Clingan's (now Kirkcudbright Picture Framers and formerly Ross's grocers), however following the death of his mother in 1929 Douglas joined his father John and brother Jonathan in the business and trained as a monumental sculptor. The name of the business then changed to 'John Swan & Sons Monumental Sculptors'. (By coincidence, Douglas's granddaughter Deborah was to work for a while in the same Ross's shop).

Douglas married Sylvia Thomson and had four children, Douglas in 1955, Edith Cavell in 1957, Ian Dunbar in 1959 and Karen Williamson in 1961. Douglas shared his father and brother's passion for bird catching, shooting, fishing and wildlife, however having a young family to support, combined with the brother's decision to Part Company in 1957, curtailed these activities.

WORLD WAR TWO



Jonathan in army uniform

World War Two had a severe affect on the Swan family and business with the death of their father John in August 1943 and with the two boys Jonathan and Douglas being called up, the business was suspended. Both boys served in the Royal Artillery, Jonathan in the south of England with the anti aircraft batteries and Douglas in Europe travelling through France, Belgium and Holland before being demobbed in Germany. Their sister Edith (Eadie) also suffered the loss of her husband John McGrath in North Africa in April 1943, leaving her with a son, John, of just under one year old.

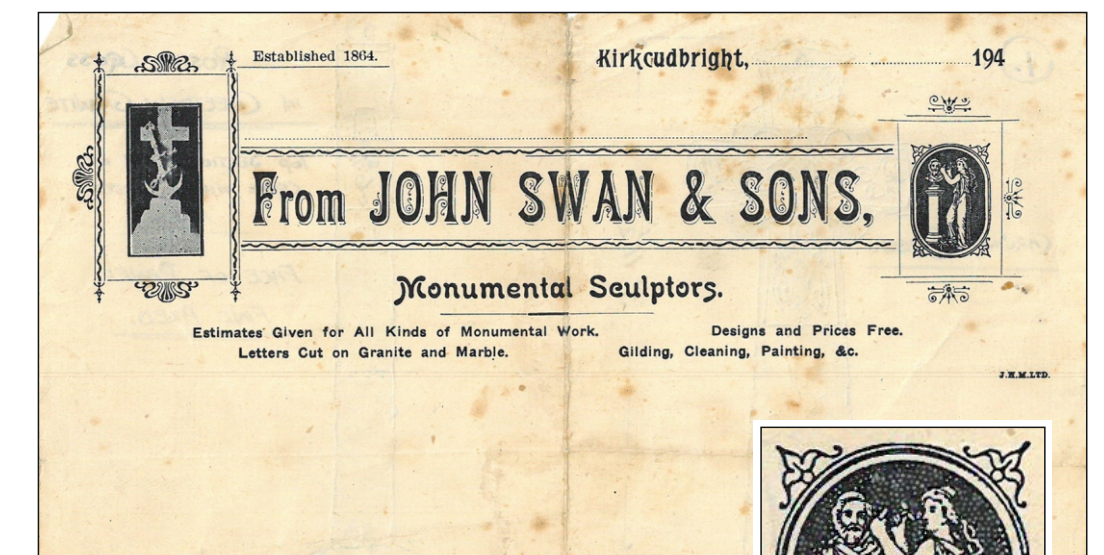


Douglas in army uniform

BUSINESS NAMES & STATIONERY

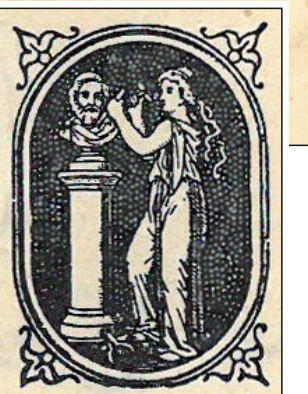
Since James founded the business the name has changed from 'James Swan' to 'John Swan' to 'John Swan & Sons' to 'Douglas Swan' to 'Douglas Swan and Sons'. In each generation, with the exception of James the founder, there have always been two brothers involved in the business. However when the business name changed to Douglas Swan & Sons, following the death of Douglas senior, it was decided by the current partners that this would be the final name change.

The business stationery was originally plain but later images were used; initially an image of a sandstone cross and anchor (the symbols of faith and hope) carved by the founder and erected at Tongland Churchyard was used on the left side, with an image of an Ancient Greek stone carver on the right. When Douglas set up in business on his own he still used the original cross and anchor image. Later the right hand side of the stationery displayed the logo of The National Association of Memorial Masons, but this was dropped in 2012 when the business withdrew from the association and the original Greek carver was reinstated. All the business stationery used since the time of the founder has referred to the year of establishment, 1864.



Above: John Swan & Sons Monumental Sculptor invoice, dated 1941

Right: This Sculptor's logo is still used on our stationery today



GENERATION 4

Douglas Swan

Ian Swan



Douglas Swan

My earliest memories are of being with my father at what he referred to as 'down at the bit', the bit being the name of the piece of rough land in St. Cuthbert Street which he purchased from the Isle estate for £12.00 in 1957. Many of my early days were spent with him as 'the bit' developed into some semblance of a yard. I can't remember when I began chiselling pieces of stone but I do recall being fascinated by electricity and wanting to be an electrician, however the shock of discovering my father was his sixties when I was a teenager with a younger brother and two sisters was the main reason I felt I had to learn the business so it could carry it on. I began learning to cut letters when I was about thirteen and when I left school my father trained me to shape and carve stone, my masons masterpiece is a birdbath now overgrown with ivy in the back garden of a house in the crofts. By the time I was ready to leave school in 1971 I was able to carve letters and use lead as an infill.

I also recall that my father had rented some land in Memory Lane, Gatehouse of Fleet, where he created a small branch yard. This yard was attended on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and on the Saturdays my siblings and I were conscripted to carry out small tasks like weeding or painting a fence, our payment for these tasks being spent in Carson's sweetie shop. I have happy memories of Gatehouse, it's characters like 'Stumpy' Hay and others and it was a sad decision to close the yard in 1978 following the opening of our Dalbeattie office.

My father made me a partner in the business in 1974 (In other words here is half the debt) and much of the expansion of the business was formed in his mind although he never survived to see the growth of the business in later years. Before my father's death in 1982, 'The Bit' had grown from one shed with no toilet or running water and one power point and one electric light, to three sheds with three phase electricity, a diamond saw, a diamond core borer, a number of power points and a telephone, but still no toilet or running water. Following the death of my father, I decided to offer my brother Ian a 50% partnership in the business on the acceptance of which the name was changed for the final time to 'Douglas Swan & Sons'.



Ian Dunbar Swan

I was born in December 1959 and from an early age I loved going with my father, either in his van or just down to the work yard. By the age of 9 or 10 we were expected to assist him in the summer holidays and on Saturdays; this was not necessarily monumental work, but repairs and renewals to the wooden work shed, like giving it a coat of paint for example, and also helping in the garden at the rear of the yard.

I left school as soon as I was sixteen, and as there was not quite enough work for me to be employed full time with Dougie and my father, I used to work three days a week with them and three days at Templeton's supermarket (now where Tesco is). In 1979 I began working full time with the business.

There used to be another six monumental sculptors working throughout Galloway, but around that time quite a few had either retired or died, with no other family members to continue their businesses.

Following our father's death in 1982, I was made a 50% partner in the business. I married my wife Alison in 1985 and we were blessed with a son Jamie, and then eight years later with a second son, Garry. I am sure their grandfather would have been very proud of both his grandsons being a continuing part of the family business.

MODERNISATION

Both Douglas and Ian trained as traditional Monumental Sculptors with Douglas also working for other local memorial masonry businesses in the area to expand his skills and knowledge base, with Ian concentrating on hand cut lettering. Douglas senior had encouraged his sons to embrace new technology and, when possible, investment had been made. Before Douglas died, the business was already using the new technique of sandblasting for lettering and ornamentation.

For all youngsters working in a family business there is a great deal of disillusionment with the pay rates and long hours. Thanks to a stern talking from Frazer McKenzie at Galloway Granite, it was pointed out to Douglas that due to the age of all the other monumental masons in the area, great opportunities lay in front of the young brothers, many of the other memorial masons in South West Scotland were older and retiring from the trade and with fewer younger people showing any interest in learning the skills, Frazer's words proved prophetic. A few of the other memorial businesses did lapse, allowing the brothers to take on their work and in 1978 they opened a branch office in Dalbeattie and also secured memorial supply contracts with many local funeral directors, ranging from the port of Stranraer in the west of Scotland to Langholm in the Central Borders, an area covering 2,649 square miles. The business has also recently taken and completed contracts as far afield as Glasgow, Edinburgh and London.

The evolution of computer aided lettering and design machinery, along with cheaper and better diamond cutting, drilling and polishing equipment, led to further investment in equipment. In 2003, purpose built workshops, display area, studio and offices were built on the site of 'the bit' in St Cuthbert Street. The business is now able to produce memorials from polished slabs or raw materials using modern methods and equipment, while still able to complete work using the same hand skills as James the founder.



Old sheds at St. Cuthbert Street yard 1998



New building, now 11 years old, 2014

TRADE ASSOCIATION

The introduction of the requirements for formal qualifications in 2005 led to some considerable unrest in the memorial industry. Douglas Swan senior had enrolled the business with the Nation Association of Memorial Mason (NAMM) in 1960. Douglas Junior, perturbed by the methods the association were using to enforce this requirement, became involved with NAMM, and was elected as Scottish Voting Delegate in 2006. Douglas and those of a like mind were instrumental in ensuring that these qualifications did not discriminate against memorial masons in Scotland and those in the trade in general. By 2008, Douglas Swan was firmly established on the NAMM board, working with David Francis on the NAMM Code of Working Practice and involved in Training & Development. David Francis was NAMM's Technical Advisor and represented NAMM on the British Standard committee, where his sits today as an independent member. The friendship and working relationship established between Douglas and David is maintained to this day.

Douglas, along with David and NAMM CEO Ian Gostling established NAMM as a City & Guilds training and test centre, developing courses and qualifications for memorial masons. Douglas also became a fully qualified City & Guilds assessor and verifier. In conjunction with Glasgow based training providers Tomasson Consultants, Douglas also qualified as a SQA assessor and verifier, working closely with the centre owner Bob Strickland.

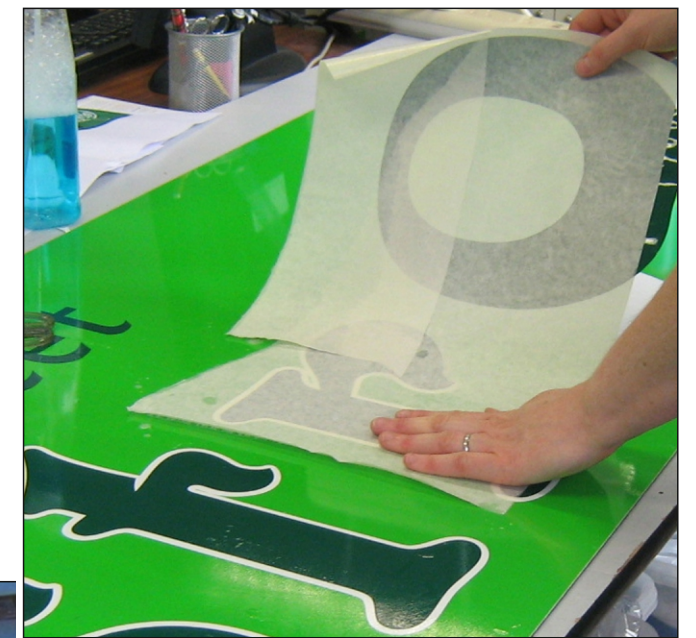
In 2010, Douglas became the national president of NAMM and hosted the annual conference of the association in Glasgow, following a civic reception at the city chambers with his guest speaker the Rt. Hon. Alex Ferguson MSP, speaker of the Scottish Parliament and his depute the Rt. Hon. Alasdair Morgan MSP.

Due to changes in NAMM, the business decided to withdraw its membership in 2012, although the Kirkcudbright workshops are still used as a training centre for Tomasson Consultants and David Francis and Douglas recently delivered a training course to members of Camden and Islington council at the St. Pancreas and Islington cemetery in London.

DIVERSIFICATION

Even since the days of John Swan & Sons, memorials were not the only tasks carried out by the firm. Stone parts for buildings were often shaped or repairs carried out, the skill of setting out lettering was used to paint signs and in some cases vehicles. The development of computer programmes for memorial lettering was derived from sign-making programmes, so it was an easy step to use the equipment for its original purpose as well as for memorial lettering and designs.

With the development of the new premises, more room was available for sign-making and the subsidiary business of Signet Signs, established in 1990, was able to develop. The use of computer plotting equipment for cutting sign vinyl was also used for cutting materials to heat press on to garments and in 2005, the former Carswell's delicatessen shop became available for rent and Mug Shots was established as an outlet for personalised garments and gifts. In 2007, following the closure of R&R Supplies, their embroidery software and equipment was purchased, and has now been augmented by a second machine and more modern software.



Above:
Working with
vinyl signage

Left:
Mug Shots shop,
St. Cuthbert Street
Kirkcudbright

GENERATION 5

Garry Swan



Garry Swan

“Growing up, I have always been around the family business and when I was around 10 years old, I started working the odd Saturday out in the cemetery with my father. This continued throughout the rest of my time at school where I achieved good enough grades to gain an unconditional offer to study biochemistry at the University of Edinburgh; however things did not work out in Edinburgh so I started working with the family business full-time in June 2012.

At the business I am the main person responsible for the boring of vase holes in memorials, dowelling the memorials and the sawing of granite. I also assist Jamie and my Dad when my help is required. My favourite part of the job is getting to travel to a variety of places including Bannockburn and London. The London job at Abney Park cemetery was particularly interesting as I had never visualised working so far from home and I enjoyed the satisfaction of aiding in the restoration of the memorials there. In the next few years, I would like to learn more skills, such as sandblasting, so I can assist even more in the business.”



Garry working the gantry at St. Cuthbert's churchyard

Jamie Swan



Jamie Swan

“Since I was a little boy I have always spent my school holidays helping my father and uncle, but it was whilst working here to earn extra money to go to university in summer 2003 to study business management that I was offered a full time job. I decided to take up the offer, as I thought what better way to learn all about business than to work in one and help with the day to day running. In 2005, at 20 years of age, I became the main person

responsible for the lettering of new memorials and additional sandblast inscriptions, as well as cutting and polishing granite. I also work out in the cemeteries erecting and renovating memorials as and when required. The best thing about the job is the satisfaction and the diverse nature of the work; no two jobs are the same and my work is always varied. Now I have a young family to support, it is an exciting challenge balancing the needs of my family with the demands of work. In 2013, after 10 years working in the business, I was made a partner.



Left: Jamie working the gantry at Little Dalton old churchyard, Dumfriesshire



Right: Jamie's son Martin, aged 9 months, at work with his Great Uncle Dougie

Carrie Caldow



Carrie Caldow (Swan)

“After completing an HND in Business Administration with Travel and Tourism in 1999, I too worked the summer at Douglas Swan & Sons, whilst pondering my options and never really left! I worked in the busy portakabin doing clerical work for the monumental side of the business and sign making for the up and coming Signet Signs. The signage side of the business blossomed and it is still lovely to see your own hard work on so many shops and businesses in Kirkcudbright and surrounding towns. I moved to Dalbeattie in 2000, where I was able to cover the Dalbeattie Branch of Douglas

Swan & Sons whilst also still doing sign work in Kirkcudbright. 2002 brought the start of my babies being born and the on-set of part-time hours. The new purpose-built premises and Signet Signs studio made a huge difference to the scope of our sign work and helped us diversify further into the embroidery and heat transfer service offered by Mug Shots today. Technology has advanced so much in the past couple of years and I look forward to finding out what we can now achieve with new machines and techniques now available to us.”

Right: Carrie's youngest son Struan, aged 3, having his first go at signage with his Papa Dougie



Below: Carrie's eldest son Ciaran, aged 9, with the Haugh of Urr village sign, after having his first try with a hammer and chisel



Left: Carrie's daughter Abbie, aged 11, painting lead letters on the war memorial in Dalbeattie, Colliston Park