

Chapter XII. — Matthew's death and his will.

Matthew Perston Bell spent Christmas Day 1866 at Ardrossan making out his will. The only possible explanation for his being there and spending the time in such a pursuit is that he was there for health reasons. The will significantly was witnessed by a surgeon and an apothecary. (74)

On 18 February 1870 at 12.55 p.m. after an illness lasting only four hours Matthew died of an apoplexy at the age of 61. He died in the Royal Hotel, Bridge of Allan where, again, he had stayed for some time for health reasons, attended by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Reid. The town was at that time a well-frequented spa with several mineral wells. His death was reported by John Bell. (75)

Matthew's presence at these two health resorts at such times of the year establishes, I think, that he had been an invalid for some time though the nature of his illness cannot be ascertained, certainly not from the cause of his death given on the death certificate. It is, of course, possible that this was not his first stroke.

Matthew's coffin was supplied by a local funeral agent - John Henderson of Bridge of Allan - but the body was then immediately conveyed to Glasgow by train. At Buchanan Street Station it was met by a four-horse hearse and taken to 245, St. Vincent St. The funeral service took place on Thursday 24 February in St. George's Church, Anderston from where the hearse and seven coaches left for the Glasgow Necropolis at 1.45 p.m. Matthew was buried with the rest of the family in layer beta 80. The funeral arrangements were conducted by Wylie & Lochhead. (76)

His death affected the Pottery not at all which, of course, it would not have done had Charles Arthur been brought in to take his place some time before, as we surmised earlier. His will, however, provides a lot of information which we would otherwise not have had. (77) First, his residuary legatee is his brother as we would have expected but he also leaves cash legacies to others of £16,745 which is a considerable fortune in itself.

His first and biggest bequests are to his family and friends. Doctor William A. Perston of Wangaree, Auckland, New Zealand gets £3000, the biggest single bequest. Then Jane and Annie Perston, daughters of the deceased James Perston, "my cousin", gets £1000 each while Isabella Perston who is his full cousin gets £2000. His friend John Lang who was a writer and Procurator Fiscal in Glasgow gets £2000 and "my large telescope"; Mrs. Lang gets the drawing room pianoforte, some furniture of Indian workmanship and a case of stuffed birds with mirror above it and marble table below it. She also gets paid £1000 to look after for a Miss Margaret Craig.

The next bequests relate to the Reid family. Robert "my manservant" gets £300 and all the clothes and fishing tackle. Jessie gets £400 and every item of furniture in the house which did not go to Mrs. Lang, except for the pictures which go to John Bell. Matthew takes good care that her legacy will not be subject to her husband but be hers completely. The two children - Matthew Perston Bell Reid and Robert Reid Junior each get £250 but a codicil adds another £250 each and Matthew gets the writing desk. Other servants get £20 each and mournings but Isabella McLellan gets £25.

There then follows a series of bequests to charities. These are mostly of £200 but some, such as Glasgow Royal Infirmary, the Glasgow Native Benevolent Society and the Scheme of the Established Church of Scotland for the Conversion of the Jews get £500 and the Mission to Chimney Sweeps and the Glasgow Seaman's Friend Society get only £100.

Another codicil leaves "my collection of minerals sponges metals fossils et cetera with the exception of the case of minerals in my parlour in St. Vincent St. and any duplicate specimens to the Andersonian University of Glasgow; the case of metals in the parlour and duplicate specimens go to Robert Reid." This was to lead to some trouble.

On 22 March 1870 the Managers of Anderson's University got a letter from Bannatyne, Kirkwood and McJannet, John Bell's lawyers, intimating a legacy to the University of Matthew Perston Bell's collection of minerals, sponges, metals, fossils et cetera. They agreed to accept it and asked for an inventory. (78)

On the 1 December John Bell and "Mr. Robert Reid of Woodend House Millport" met the managers, exhibited the collection and handed over the keys to the cases. Mr. Robert Reid of Woodend House Millport is, of course, none other than Robert Reid, Potter bowl maker - "my Manservant". Matthew's legacy has turned him into a gentleman. Mr. Reid and Dr. Scoular agreed to meet to decide on duplicates. (79)

At a further meeting on 27 December 1870 Robert Reid, who has been making difficulties, through his agent made an offer of settlement which the University managers agreed to and by the 16 January 1871 the collection and its cases were installed in the philosophical room at the University.(80) Unfortunately the collection has since been dispersed along with all the other geological specimens from the University's collection and only one piece, in the collection of Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum is identifiable. It shows crystals of Heulandite from the Long Craigs in the Kilpatrick Hills and bears a handwritten label with the date 3 August 1866,(81). The disappearance of the collection is all the sadder in that the collection was exhibited at a meeting of the Natural History Society of Glasgow on 24 November 1863 when "Mr. M. P. Bell's collection of minerals created much interest by the large size and value of the specimens". (82) It seems to have been a collection of some distinction. John's collection also contained some mineralogical specimens but the largest family collection, now in Kelvingrove Museum, was that of David Gorse Glen, a cousin of the brothers by marriage, being the son of Ocella Perston's husband's sister. Ocella had married Robert Gorse of Corsemill as his second wife and his sister Janet had married William Glen. David Corse Glen was their son. (83) It is significant also that when Matthew's collection was shown to the Natural History Society of Glasgow it was shown not by Matthew but by David Gorse Glen. Ocella Perston is buried in the north transept of Paisley Abbey among the Corses and commemorated on a gravestone on the wall.

