

# Finding Wee Nan

By Helen Mason

*The women of Woddrop Street are up early this Monday as the fresh, dry breeze whistles to them on the washing lines at the backs of the new tenements in Bridgeton, Glasgow. Some already hurry to the steamies, hauling their laundry in an array of tatty baskets and old prams, gossiping and laughing loudly.*

*Mama looks across the allotments at the gaggles passing. She smiles, recalling the jolly camaraderie of wash-day. She spent many years in tenements but, now Papa's fire extinguisher business is on the up, they are renting the crumbling pile, Dalmarnock House, and she can afford to send out the laundry.*



*With the other children at school or at work with Papa, Mama has her bonnie bairn to help her with the chores. Her darling girl, at six years old, the youngest of the brood of six, is named after Mama – Annie Moffat – but is always Wee Nan to the family.*

*Old habits die hard though and Mama decides to boil up cleaning cloths in the kitchen. She fills the big brown enamel pan from the already warm kettle, tops it up from the ewer and places it on the lead-black range. The fire is burning well; it has furnished herself, her husband and two big sons with a large pot of tea already this morning.*

*Wee Nan bounces into the room and beams up at Mama who hands her a slice of bread and dripping which the little girl eagerly grasps and flops on to a chair to devour. Mama goes through to the scullery where the dirty cloths fester in a bucket. As she tips the cold water away, she daydreams about their forthcoming voyage to Canada in five weeks' time – a new market for Papa's business.*

*Her reverie is broken by a clatter and then...the scream. A cold fear knots in her belly and she is echoing the child as she races back through. The brown enamel pan is on the floor. The quivering child is clutching her face; her clothing drips, steaming.*

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Monday April 24<sup>th</sup> 1923, was the day that my great aunt, Annie Arthur Moffat, suffered a catastrophic scald that would claim her life by the end of that bright spring day. She was just six years old. She suffered convulsions and fell into a coma; her death record gives the cause of death as 'burns shock'. It is every parent's worst nightmare and, as a mother of six myself, I cannot bring myself to imagine the anguish.

My eldest daughter, Abbey, and I have discovered a shared passion in using Ancestry.co.uk to research and build family trees – we are addicted! However, the course of this new love does not run true: computers are only tools; real brick-wall busters seem to come in all shapes and forms.

When a slightly battered photo of a woman in 1920s dress standing by a grave came to light in an ancient loft-bound photo album at my parents' house, Abbey and I were intrigued. This particular monument bore several Moffat names. Erected by Alexander Moffat and Mary Gillespie, it commemorates three infant sons and 24 year old, James Moffat. Alexander and Mary are interred with their lost children in 1902 and 1903 and there at the bottom, carved into the plinth itself, is the inscription:

ANNIE ARTHUR MOFFAT (WEE NAN)  
DAUGHTER OF MATTHEW AND ANNIE MOFFAT  
DIED 24<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1923 AGED 6 YEARS



Wow – what a buzz when we saw that! A gravestone is something tangible and solid, not demolished like the Woddrop Street tenements and old Dalmarnock House; it is something that must still exist somewhere in some form, something that could be found. The hunt was on.

The first step was to ask my father, Bruce, about his memories. His father Alexander Buchanan Moffat was the eldest of Mama Annie's six children and would have been 19 at the time of the tragedy. My father didn't know where the grave was but he identified the woman in the photograph as his aunt, Janet Loughead Moffat, Wee Nan's older sister.

Mama Annie was very badly affected by the tragedy though the family still went to Canada as planned. However, the unbearable distress of the bereaved parent was the reason for the family's return from Canada after little more than a year and the photo probably dates from then. Inconsolable and across the ocean, Mama had said:

*"My poor Wee Nan, she is all alone and with no one to tend her grave!"*

The family did not remain long in Glasgow but moved to Liverpool to further develop Papa's business that was to become the L&G Fire Extinguisher Company from 1932 until 1976 when it was bought by Chubb. L&G stood for "Liverpool and Glasgow".

Using Ancestry to search available records for hints, we did not find any indication of the burial site but the parental storage cupboard was to yield another piece of gold: my grandfather Alexander Buchanan Moffat's memoirs of his childhood. The yellowing pages of the exercise book gave names, addresses, some dates and recollections. Written shortly

before he passed away suddenly in 1977, one entry alluded to the awful event of April 1923.

“With Papa’s work expanding he had to find a place suitably big for his operations and we as a family needed more room. We therefore moved to Dalmarnock House, not far from Old Farm Cross or, in fact, the Royal Burgh of Rutherglen. It was a happy place for us. It had at one time been the country mansion of the Earl of Woddrop. We learned a little of its history through an article in the Glasgow Evening News which carried a sketch of the house made, while we were there, by their artist. I saw this sketch exhibited in the Museum in Glasgow Green, some time after. The house is no more. The area is now covered by a housing estate, even a public bowling green occupies a portion of the actual house site. But it has a very sad link, too, in a chain of memories.  
I feel a strong urge to describe in detail some of the social life in Dalmarnock House but I must resist it.”

Over fifty years after the tragedy, it was still too painful to mention but the lack of further details meant our research had hit another brick wall.

As I learned the ways of the amateur genealogical researcher, I came upon the marvellous forum [www.Rootschat.com](http://www.Rootschat.com). Here, experts and newbies rub digital shoulders and the former guide the latter in finding new data, sources, theories and approaches to problems. It is free – and that always appeals to a Scot, does it not? The good folk of Rootschat guided me to <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> containing extensive and detailed Scottish records. It is NOT free but a Rootschat member revealed how I could obtain free introductory credits. Well, what can I say...

Bingo! Wee Nan’s death record is in our digital grasp but, exasperatingly, there is no accompanying record of her burial place; the brick wall looms again.

ATTESTED TRUE COPY OF THE DEATH OF A SCOTSMAN OF FATHER.	CAUSE OF DEATH, DURATION OF DISEASE, AND MEDICAL ATTENDANCE by whom certified.
Name, and Maiden Surname of Mother.	
Matthew Moffat	Burns Shock
Fire Extinguisher	Chilchiform
Manufactures	Chilchiform
	6 mos. 9 hrs.
Annie Barclay	As Cert. by
Moffat	James Legg
M. S. Arthur	M. S. Legg

On my father’s recommendation, I made contact with Clan Moffat genealogist, Colin Moffat, who, it transpires, is descended from the same Alexander Moffat and Mary Gillespie who erected the grave monument. Colin had visited Glasgow and trudged around quite a few cemeteries, finding some pertinent Gillespies but alas, no sign of our Wee Nan. Thus matters remained for more than a year but breakthroughs came in unlikely forms.

A friend of Abbey’s at a conference had some time to kill in Glasgow. He knew of the quest for Wee Nan’s grave and started having a look around, armed with the old photo on his phone. A kindly local said that the urn in the background of the picture wasn’t typical of the burial grounds in that district. Meanwhile, Abbey was trawling the internet and hit upon some photographs of the Sandymount Cemetery in Shettleston, where the Gillespies/Moffats had lived at one time: urns, everywhere!

Another chance encounter via a website detailing cemeteries with A-Z indices, [www.Memento-mori.co.uk](http://www.Memento-mori.co.uk), and the tip to request a search at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow started to accelerate matters.

Doing on-the-ground research when living hundreds of miles from Glasgow was never going to be easy. But another friend, and family history enthusiast, living 20 miles from the city, eagerly offered her assistance. She contacted the Mitchell Library in advance and gave them the details of Wee Nan's death date. The following week, she went in to look through the burial records the staff had brought up, allowing several hours to do so.

She didn't need hours, just two minutes. Poor Wee Nan's entry was there for 26<sup>th</sup> April 1923: the cemetery and lair number. Sandymount Cemetery, Shettleston, Lair C 579. The wonderful Mitchell staff recommended calling

Date	Age	Name of Deceased	Burial Office	Sex	Age	Date	Place	Remarks
April 27 20		Annie Moffat 460	St. Peter's	F	579	C 56	108	1.2.4
April 28 57		Janet Logan 460	St. Peter's	F	581	M	1.10	
April 28 57		J. Anderson	St. Peter's	M	587	M	1.10	
April 28 57		Mary Sergeant	St. Peter's	F	510	H 24	1.10	
April 28 57		William Matthews	St. Peter's	M	510	H 24	1.10	
April 28 57		Mary King	St. Peter's	F	510	H 24	1.10	
April 28 57		Paul	St. Peter's	M	510	H 24	1.10	

Glasgow City Council Bereavement Services and they, too, were exceptionally helpful: we were equipped with exact directions to the lair.

Early November 2018 – it is not too cold and, miraculously for Glasgow, it is dry. Driving through the gates of the old Sandymount Cemetery, we are struck by the dilapidated state of the majority of lairs. The roadway swings to the left of the cenotaph and we creep slowly round a bend. We are



all peering out, scouring the lines of lichen-blotched, broken and fallen stones...and urns...until Abbey shrieks, "Stop the car! There's Wee Nan!"

Only the plinth is left standing, its inscription marked with bright green lichen; the huge headstone is not visible. We stand quietly, reflecting, staring at the ground. Hidden by matted moss and grass, a carving is lurking in the undergrowth. Easily peeling back the green carpet, beneath, lies the red sandstone headstone!







Such waves of emotions crash over me as I approach the monument: sadness, euphoria, love. Time means nothing; the past and current generations meet here and now. I whisper a silent word to Mama's ghost: We have found her; she will never be lost again.




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Hello everyone! My name is Helen Mason and I am the new Clan Moffat UK webmaster. My parents are Bruce and Anne Moffat who have regularly participated in the member events each August for a number of years.

When my father informed me that Clan Moffat were looking for someone to take on their website, my ears pricked and the cogs started whirring. I have a keen interest in family history and have always identified strongly with my Scottish roots. I have worked in IT for over 30 years but I have never designed a website from scratch – the prospect was too juicy to resist!

I am very grateful to the committee and the previous web team, Betty and Alan Telford, who gave me the outline of what had been on the former site and what was needed of the new one. The aim was a clean, simple site that did not create a need to store site visitors' data thus avoiding issues relating to the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 that came into force on 25 May 2018.

In creating the style of the website, I had in my mind to evoke images of the landscape around Moffat and the Scottish Borders. I also wanted to immediately reflect the work of Clan Moffat UK in connecting with the descendants of our much-dispersed clan by emphasising this aim right at the top of the **Home** page.



The **Join the Clan** page contains general information on membership, general Clan events and the genealogy/DNA projects each with a link to the contact form. **Clan Roots** is a page dedicated more fully to the genealogy/DNA projects and contains a link to the Clan Moffat Genealogy database.

To increase traffic through the site and thus potential enquiries, I also want to tap into the popularity of Scottish period films and dramas, for example “Outlander”, “The Bruce”, “Rob Roy”, “Braveheart” and “Whisky Galore!” to name but a few. To do this, I would like to enhance the **Historical Timeline** lifted from the old website with more detail and perhaps some clarification on what the auld words mean in modern English. I hope that this would increase the appeal to an international audience.

The **Gallery** page would look good with high-resolution images of some of the sites of historical interest mentioned in the **Historical Timeline**: ancient pictures; etchings; sketches, and photos taken in modern times. Additionally, images that evoke some traditional cultural events that continue today like the Highland Games and the Gathering of the Clans.

I have uploaded a few pictures that hark back to the days of the Reivers: pictures of lovely hairy coos (thanks to Alan Telford for the Belted Galloways). I would also like to include some pictures of the Clan Moffat August Gatherings.

The **Events** page is self-explanatory and contains details of upcoming events.

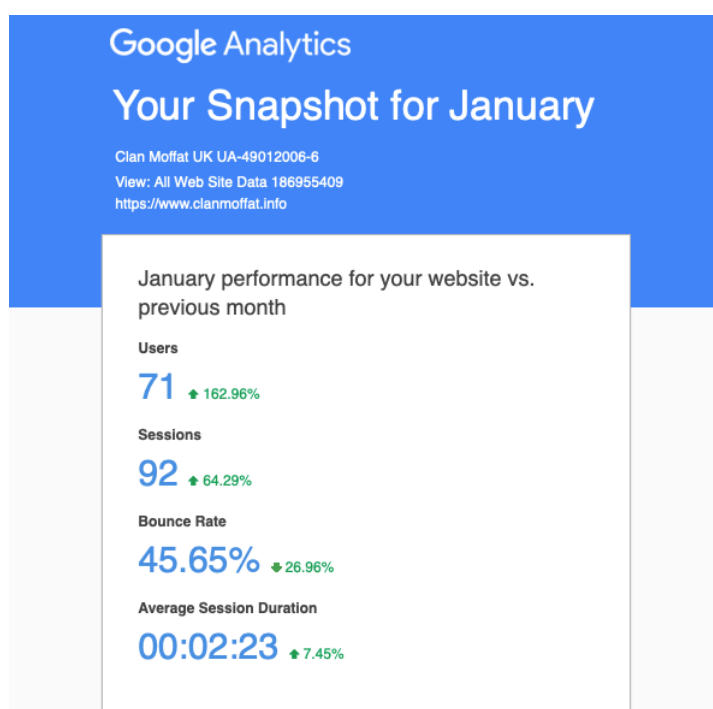
**Visit Moffat** is to promote the modern town and the whole of Scotland by using links to tourist information sites and businesses. I have included links to [www.VisitMoffat.co.uk](http://www.VisitMoffat.co.uk) as it covers the town in one link. I have also listed [www.scotlandshop.com](http://www.scotlandshop.com) for all things tartan and [www.scotclans.com/scottish-clans/clan-moffat](http://www.scotclans.com/scottish-clans/clan-moffat) for other Clan links. The link to <http://www.rampantscotland.com> then gives a huge number of options to site visitors and may help increase our site traffic in due course.

There is a single **Contact** form that generates an email to me that I in turn forward to the committee member responsible for that area.

I am open to any suggestions for tweaks to the site and would love to receive good quality images for the **Gallery**. I am interested in perhaps adding a **Blog** page where articles could be posted from past editions of Moffatalia or additional articles of interest that arise which may suit.

Clan Moffat USA runs an active Facebook group and I am considering the benefit of starting one for Clan Moffat UK. This would help to promote the website itself and Facebook's famed algorithms would help to spread the word of Clan Moffat UK's existence. Feedback on this would be most welcome.

I have set up Google Analytics to automatically monitor traffic through the site. I will consider how best to increase traffic in the coming months and am, once again, very open to any suggestions in this regard.



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