

Mary Gibson (1809 to 1868)
by George T. Watt¹

James Alexander and Mary Gibson were married in 1841.

Mary already had a son Adam Gibson who was 4 years old. Adam would have been illegitimate, but we should not try and overlook this fact.

Mary was the daughter of a farm labourer; she would have been working on the farm on the Morton Estate from the age of 14.

As you can imagine these were hard times and for farm workers, extremely hard. You only have to read Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* to get a sanitised taste of how it must have been. Her father died in 1838 of Scarlet Fever in a poor house I believe.

Single farm workers lived in bothies [see picture below], there was no privacy, and Mary was motherless and so had no one to guide her. Working in the fields there was no toilet facilities and one can only imagine what kind of ribaldry a young girl had to endure. Those who were flighty and hard of tongue I suspect could look after themselves, but Mary clearly was not of that mould. As a young lass in these conditions in that kind of company, well it was far from idyllic. If peer pressure, or extreme loneliness didn't coerce her into the arms of a false lover, then it is quite possible she might have been raped, and who would have cared? Certainly not the estate manager. Yet Mary survived.

James Alexander saw the goodness of her, a kind heart and a loving nature who cared and nourished her child, and he fell in love with her. They had three children together and James took Adam, her first born as his own.

Mary's daughter, Elizabeth Alexander, whom my sister is named after, was a Domestic Servant in a large house. It may not seem much, but it was a big step up in those days. Elizabeth would have to be able to 'speak proper' not her usual broad Scots, she would have to have had good manners, be even tempered and incredibly patient. These qualities show how well she was brought up by her mother.

I cannot help but think Mary's history should be admired as testament to her strength of character through incredible difficulties and should not be glossed over.

I finish with a poem by Helen Cruikshank [reproduced on the next page] which will show you where I'm coming from. There is possibly an online version by the folk singer Jimmie Reid who put it to music [in 1984].

Up the Noran Water Jimmie Reid (1934 – 2009):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wg-RNbXE6YU>

Note: The link above is the preferred way to access this video. However, if that link does not work, you can use the link below, or copy the link and paste it into the address bar of your browser window.

<https://www.franklinmason.com/PDFs%20-%20Ancestors/Alexander%20-%20Mary%20Gibson%20UP%20THE%20NORAN%20WATER%20%20JIM%20REID.mp4>

¹ George T. Watt is the great, great grandson of Mary Gibson (Mary Gibson → Elizabeth Gibson Alexander → William Irvine → Elizabeth Alexander Irvine → George Thomas Watt)

Shy Geordie (or Up the Noran Water)
Helen B Cruikshank²

Up the Noran Water
In by Inglismaddy,
Annie's got a bairnie
That hasna got a daddy.
Some say it's Tammas's
An ithers say it's Chay's
An naebody expectit it,
Wi Annie's quiet ways

Up the Noran Water
The bonnie little mannie
Is dandled an cuddled close
By Inglismaddy's Annie.
Wha the bairnie's daddy is
The lassie never says
But some think it's Tammas's
An ithers think it's Chay's

Up the Noran Water
The country folk are kind
An wha the bairnie's daddy is
They dinna muckle mind.
But oh! The bairn at Annie's breist,
The love in Annie's ee -
They mak me wish wi a' my nicht
The lucky lad was me!

² Helen B Cruikshank (1886-1975) was a Scottish civil servant and poet, who spent most of her life in Edinburgh.



A typical bothy. A bothy is a basic shelter, usually left unlocked and available for anyone to use free of charge. It was also a term for basic accommodation, usually for gardeners or other workers on an estate.