

A noble harvest

by James Michael Fleming

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This story received the **Highly Commended award** from the judges of the
the
2019 Croker Prize
essay competition run by the
[Society of Australian Genealogists](#).

The topic was “*a woman of influence*”

The judges described the essay as – *a skillfully woven story about how Elizabeth Taylor broke the cycle of poverty for her family.*



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Researching: Bowen, Flowerdew, Gardner, Gordon, Grady, Hanrahan, Jolliffe, Kemp, Kessey, Murphy, Poulton, Press and so many more!

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A noble harvest¹

Elizabeth Taylor was born in 1831 at Clyde Iron Works² (near Glasgow, Scotland), a hamlet with a single street named, very appropriately, Mud Row. On each side was a row of terrace houses built cheaply of local brick or stone, with brick floors and no damp course³. They shared an unreliable well and five open privy middens. Drainage was by way of surface channels. With large families packed into just three damp rooms, each house was an envelope of fetid air and a crucible for disease.

The outside air was also badly polluted because the general area was a conglomeration of dirty industries including ironworks, foundries, kilns, quarries, mills, factories, a gas works and a shale-oil works.

Fire, smoke and soot, with the roar and rattle of machinery, are its leading characteristics; the flames of its furnaces cast on the midnight sky a glow as if of some vast conflagration.⁴

Her father, uncle and grandfather were all coal miners⁵. Their back-breaking jobs, pervasive air pollution and unhealthy houses caused chronic ill health and premature death. Dr S Scott Alison noted that

After the 50th year comparatively few survive, and those who ... are still left, for the most part are broken down and decrepit. Few are seen above 60 years of age and a collier of 70 has seldom come under my notice.⁶

Elizabeth Taylor naively hoped that marriage would bring a change of scene. She married wagon driver Angus Fleming (both aged 20 years) on 7 December 1851⁷, then continued with her job in a cotton-bleaching factory⁸ for a year until their son Angus was born⁹.

Her husband Angus had endured an even harder childhood than Elizabeth. When his father (Angus) died suddenly in 1837¹⁰, his mother (Margaret Lawson¹¹) was left with three small children. Within a year the two younger children died¹². Margaret and six-year-old Angus relied on charity provided by their parish. Eventually, parish officers found Angus a position as apprentice to James Landles, a wagon driver¹³.

By 1859 Elizabeth and Angus had two more sons (Charles and William) and a daughter (Jane)¹⁴. With Elizabeth now devoted to home duties, the family was completely reliant on Angus' earnings. He had to compete against other waggoneers for haulage work, resulting in a low and unreliable income. So he gave up his haulage work to become a sawyer¹⁴. Presumably, this new profession paid regular and reliable wages.

Their eldest son Angus died around this time¹⁴, and their fourth son (born in 1862) was named in honour of his late brother¹⁵. This sad event may have been the trigger for a deterioration in Angus' mental health. Apart from the adverse effects on physical health outlined above, the depressing local environment may have had a role in his mental decline.

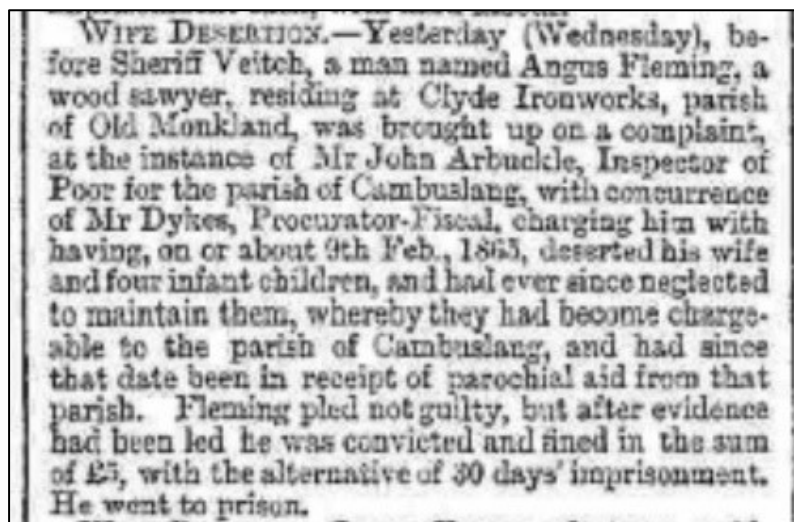
Early in 1865 Angus became very erratic and aggressive. He abandoned his family, leaving a pregnant Elizabeth to raise four young children alone¹⁶. Angus had left Elizabeth in a similar position to that which had confronted his own mother 18 years earlier. Despite this desperate situation, she was determined to do whatever she could to spare her children the drudgery and ill-health of a coal-mining life.

Elizabeth immediately moved her family back to Mud Row where she was well known and could utilise family and community support networks¹⁷. Her brother Matthew, who was married but childless, proved to be her most reliable supporter. Two months later, when her sixth child was born at Mud Row, she named him Matthew Taylor Fleming¹⁸.

She soon visited the local minister and sought financial support from the parish, which was provided. She was able to rely on parish support for many months to come¹⁶.

Next, she sought help from Archibald Wilson¹⁹ (foreman at the iron foundry) to find a job for her eldest son, Charles. While foundry work was long and hard, it was highly skilled and paid accordingly; far better than cramped, polluted, unskilled drudgery underground. So, Charles became an apprentice iron moulder²⁰; his life-long trade.

Two years later, her husband was charged with having deserted his family, found guilty and sentenced to a fine of five pounds or 30 days in gaol¹⁶; he chose gaol.



WIFE DESERTION.—Yesterday (Wednesday), before Sheriff Veitch, a man named Angus Fleming, a wood sawyer, residing at Clyde Ironworks, parish of Old Monkland, was brought up on a complaint, at the instance of Mr John Arbuckle, Inspector of Poor for the parish of Cambuslang, with concurrence of Mr Dykes, Procurator-Fiscal, charging him with having, on or about 9th Feb., 1865, deserted his wife and four infant children, and had ever since neglected to maintain them, whereby they had become chargeable to the parish of Cambuslang, and had since that date been in receipt of parochial aid from that parish. Fleming pled not guilty, but after evidence had been led he was convicted and fined in the sum of £5, with the alternative of 30 days' imprisonment. He went to prison.

The *Glasgow Daily Herald* report of the case against Angus Fleming, 6 June 1867

He returned home briefly during the following year, but his problems had worsened. He bashed Elizabeth badly and was punished with two months gaol²¹.

Eventually Elizabeth's ally Archibald Wilson found jobs at the iron foundry for her second son William (as an apprentice riveter)²² and her third son Angus (apprentice iron moulder)²³. Her daughter Jane worked as a wool weaver²³ and her youngest son Matthew was employed as a druggist²³, learning the pharmacy trade.

Elizabeth's eldest son Charles married Margaret Ballantyne on 28 December 1877²⁴ and their first son was born a year later²⁵. Hitherto the Fleming, Taylor and Ballantyne families had invariably employed the Scottish naming convention. Had they done so now, Elizabeth's first grandchild would have been named for his father's father, Angus Fleming, but she did not want her no-hoper husband honoured in this way. She influenced Charles to instead name the child for her father, Charles Taylor²⁶.

Now in her late forties, Elizabeth suffered from type 1 diabetes². With no effective treatment, she was wasting away towards an early death. But even now her influence improved the lives of her children by urging them to emigrate for a better life.

Elizabeth died on 12 February 1881 at just 49 years old². All her children (except Matthew) emigrated to Australia soon afterwards (as did their mentor Archibald Wilson²⁷) and enjoyed better lives as a result.

Despite living a deprived life, Elizabeth Taylor had improved the lives of the next generation. Her determination and influence had enabled her family to capitalize on every opportunity and brought them through the desperate times that followed the departure of her husband Angus. She had lifted her descendants out of the cycle of poverty – a noble harvest.

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- 1 S Scott Alison MD promised “a noble harvest” to any philanthropist who would help the impoverished colliers of East Lothian – see note 6.
 - 2 Death Certificate, Elizabeth Fleming, National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, Vol 1881 No 160.
 - 3 *The Housing Condition of Miners* Report by the Medical Officer of Health, Dr John T Wilson, 1910, sourced from <http://www.scottishmining.co.uk>.
 - 4 A description of nearby Coatbridge by Francis H Groome in his *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1885.
 - 5 Scottish census records of 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871 for her father, uncle and grandfather sourced from <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk>.
 - 6 S Scott Alison, MD, Hon Sec Medical Society of London, *On the Diseases, Conditions and Habits of the Collier Population of East Lothian*, extracted from the report by R F Franks to the Children’s Employment Commission on the East of Scotland District, 1842.
 - 7 Extract of Entries in Old Parish Register, 4451, Banns Register, Parish of Old Monkland, 7 Dec 1851, General Register Office, New Register House, Edinburgh
 - 8 Charles Taylor household, 1851 Census for Clyde Iron Works, 652/ 1/23, National Records of Scotland.
 - 9 Extract of Entries in Old Parish Register, 4449, Births and Baptisms Register, Parish of Barony, 17 Nov 1852, General Register Office, New Register House, Edinburgh
 - 10 Extract of Entries in Old Parish Register, 627/00 20/277, Mortcloth Money Register, Parish of Cambuslang, 30 Apr 1837, General Register Office, New Register House, Edinburgh
 - 11 Extract of Entries in Old Parish Register, 627/00 20/36, Birth and Baptism Register, Parish of Cambuslang, 7 Aug 1831, General Register Office, New Register House, Edinburgh
 - 12 Extract of Entries in Old Parish Register, 627/00 20/280-1, Mortcloth Money Register, Parish of Cambuslang, 7 Sep 1838 and 26 Oct 1828, General Register Office, New Register House, Edinburgh
 - 13 James Landles household, 1851 Census for Gartsherrie, 652/00 42/17, National Records of Scotland.
 - 14 Angus Fleming household, 1861 Census for the Parish of Trinity College, Edinburgh, page 15 line 2, National Records of Scotland.
 - 15 Birth Certificate, Angus Fleming, National Records of Scotland, Calton, 811/1862.
 - 16 Newspaper article, *Wife Desertion*, Glasgow Daily Herald, 6 Jun 1867.
 - 17 Her uncle (Alexander Taylor), grandmother (Jane Taylor nee Robertson) and brother (Matthew Taylor) all had households nearby.
 - 18 Birth Certificate Vol 1865 No 121, Old Monkland, Matthew Taylor Fleming, (3 May 1865), General Register Office, Scotland.
 - 19 Arch^d Wilson household, iron founder, 1861 Census for Bridgeton, Calton, Glasgow, 644/3 page 1 line 1, National Records of Scotland. Archibald Wilson household, iron founder, 1871 Census for Bridgeton, Calton, Glasgow, 16 Queen Mary Street, 644/3 page 19 line 1, National Records of Scotland. Archibald Wilson household, iron moulder (foreman), 1881 Census for Bridgeton, Calton, Glasgow, 29 Queen Mary Street, 644/1 page 18 line 16, National Records of Scotland.
 - 20 Iron moulders used great skill and craftsmanship in making moulds from sand and filling them with molten iron to make a finished object.
 - 21 Newspaper Article, *Justice of Peace Court*, Evening Citizen, top of column 2, 9 Sep 1868. This is the last record of Angus. He was still living when Elizabeth died but had not returned to the family. He had died by 1884 when his son Angus married Martha Duncan – see Marriage Certificate 210 at Bridgeton, 18 Jul 1884, General Register Office, Scotland, Edinburgh.

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- 22 Samuel Fleming household, William Fleming is a rivitter, 1881 Census for Barony, 206 Main Street, 644/1 38/8, National Records of Scotland.
 - 23 Charles Fleming household, Angus Fleming an iron moulder, 1881 Census for Barony, 690 Springfield Street, 644/1 36/10, National Records of Scotland.
 - 24 Marriage Certificate 34820, Charles Fleming and Margaret Ballantyne, 28 Dec 1877, General Register Office, Scotland, Edinburgh.
 - 25 Birth Certificate Vol 1879 No 106, Charles Taylor Fleming, (17 January 1879), Scottish Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages.
 - 26 A second grandson was born two years later and named for his maternal grandfather, Thomas Ballantyne, in full accordance with the naming convention – see Death Certificate, Thomas Ballantyne Fleming, General Register Office, Scotland, Edinburgh, No 1012 in 1881 at Bridgeton.
 - 27 NSW Death Certificate 1687/1891, Archibald Wilson, 28 October 1891. Buried in grave 6403, Presbyterian 05B, Section A, Rookwood Cemetery, NSW. He shares a plot with Angus Fleming (Elizabeth's son) who died 15 Mar 1887 – NSW Death Certificate 1887/481 – who is in grave 6401.