



THE BOSWELL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2026

To all Members

Autumn meeting at Royal Hotel, Cumnock

The Ayrshire Boswell Dinner will take place at the Royal Hotel, Cumnock, on **Saturday 3 October at 6.00pm for 6.30pm**. The speaker this year will be **Rob Close**, who has written extensively on Ayrshire subjects. He will talk about John Douglas Boswell of Garrallan and the Ayrshire Yeomanry. Rob Close has recently co-edited 'Boswell's Galloping Farmers', published by the Ayrshire Archaeological & Natural History Society, which has also been made into a successful podcast.

The cost of the two-course dinner is £29.00, which includes gratuities. Cheques Payment should be made:

1. by cheque directly to Dane Love [REDACTED].
Please make the cheque payable to Dane Love.
2. by BACS, making the payment to:



Please email dane@dane-love.co.uk to confirm payment or if you wish more information. The Royal Hotel has accommodation (<https://royalhotelcumnock.com>), or alternatives are available locally.

Closing date for applications is **31 August 2026**.

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Subscriptions

2026 subscriptions are now due for payment. They remain at £7 per annum for single memberships and £10 for joint memberships. If you have not already paid or have not set up standing order payments, please make your payment in one of the following ways:

1. Send a cheque payable to **The Boswell Society** to Richard Davies, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

2. If you use online banking, please make a payment to
The Boswell Society, Sort Code 77 – 22 – 38, Account Number 22909068.

Please consider setting up your payment on an annual basis.

The Cranstoun – Brisbane linen collection.

The linen collection, described as “a set of fine Damask napkins”, each measuring nearly 3 feet square is now entrusted to the care of the “Dick Institute” Kilmarnock.

According to family tradition they were made by the in-laws family of Dr John Boswell (1710 – 1780), using flax grown on the Auchinleck estate. Like a number of heirlooms this was given to Dr Philip Boswell (15th heir male of Auchinleck) by Edith Marriott a descendant of Dr John, through Mrs Montgomery Williams of Crawley Grange who was grand daughter of Robert Boswell W.S. by her father William and of James Boswell by her mother Elizabeth.

Even after all this time intricate patterns showing botanic motifs, a heraldic crest, hares and peacocks can be picked out if the light catches and reflects in a certain way, also the names James Brisbane and Anne Cranstoun.

This is all the more remarkable because it must have been hand worked a century before the invention (1802) of the Jacquard loom which enables a loom to be preset to create patterned material, first used in the Lyon silk industry.

It seems strongly likely that these names were inscribed to make a wedding gift of table linen. A 1694 inscription of Anne Cranstoun’s name we have in a copy of Thomas Aquinas’ “Imitation of Christ” would suggest a birth in the 1680s, my grandfather Philip found the date 1710 woven into the pattern.

It is known that Anne’s sister, Mary was married to Robert Cramond of Auldbar, and gave birth in 1712 to Anne (naming her after her own sister) who married Dr John Boswell in 1742, Their brother Colonel Cranstoun, a leading commander under the Duke of Marlborough, died from a musket or cannon ball, at Malplaquet in 1711, again fits in with a family growing up in the 1680s and 90s.

The fact that this set of linen (as well as the portrait of Colonel Cranstoun) came down in the line of a sister’s descendants may indicate that there were no children of their own, indeed we do not know if a marriage took place, James Brisbane may have, like Anne’s brother, been in the army and also died in action.

In the next (or second generation) there was a marriage between these 2 families in the marriage between George Cranstoun, younger son of the 5th Lord Cranstoun, and Maria Brisbane. George died in 1788, Maria lived on to 1807.

The Brisbanes were an Ayrshire family and maybe also a military family. In a later generation General Sir Thomas Makdougall Brisbane was appointed governor of New south Wales in 1821 (recommended by the Duke of Wellington), after a distinguished military career, and in his 4 years he introduced many reforms which aided the transition from penal colony to the modern nation. A river and a city now bear his name.

A noted man of Science, while in Australia he catalogued 7,385 stars of the southern hemisphere, and was recipient of the Royal Society "Copley Medal". (In 1676 Edmund Halley had spent a period on the Island of St Helena to catalogue stars unknown in the Northern Hemisphere, and observe the transit of Mercury and transit of Venus, Halley recorded the positions of 341 stars.)

Back in Scotland Brisbane established an observatory at his home and followed Sir Walter Scott as President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

When Brisbane House, near Largs, was sold and demolished in the last century, the Australian government purchased some fixtures and fittings in the dispersal sale, which are now incorporated in to government buildings in Brisbane.

If the claim is correct that the Flax was produced on the Auchinleck estate, it was over 4 decades before there was any known link between the families, Anne Cramond's mother and family must have purchased flax from one of the tenant farms of her future husband John's grandfather the Laird David Boswell, a decade or more before Anne or John were even born and well over forty years before their marriage !

This David (Laird 1666 to 1713) is the one mentioned in Covenanter history (Men of Covenant by Smellie etc), who, in the 1680s, tried to give Alexander Peden a secret burial to prevent the hostile authorities dishonouring the honoured preacher's mortal remains.

Further research is needed into the Cranstoun connection. Especially as the lands held by the Bosvilles around Oxmuir, from 1165 for a couple of centuries, before Roger moved to Fife, was held by the Cranstoun family in the 17th century and in some charters described as the "Boswell lands". It would

be interesting to ascertain if it passed by a Boswell marriage to a Cranstoun or by returning to the crown and a fresh grant to the Cranstouns.

Section of linen. Note Cranstoun woven in at bottom



Robert Boswell of Auchinleck.

