DUMCRIEFF
WAMPHRAY
and the
ROGEKSONS

By Evan Pantelouris
On the 21st December 1823, Dr John Rogerson died at Dumcrieff. He indeed, it could be said, had been one of the men who had well served Catherine the Great as her personal doctor and confidante for more than half his life.

The position he attained afforded him the opportunity to get closer than most to the imperial families of Russia. He would also have been a close observer of many historical events throughout this period and most certainly had been involved in them. However Rogerson was an extremely private individual sharing with history that elusiveness of fact and certainty; a lot of his life today still remains a mystery.

What we can be sure of though is that from very humble beginnings John Rogerson returned to Scotland a very wealthy individual. His time spent treating the Russian elite as their personal doctor and confidante resulted in this onetime tenant farmer’s son, being in his later days in a position, of having tenants of his own farming land on his Wamphray Estate.

Rogerson’s life begun in a small tenant farm in lower Annandale (Lochbrow), and ended eighty four years later in Dumcrieff House less than five miles from where it began. His affinity for Scotland throughout his life remained and recognition of his achievements in his profession was accorded upon his return when he was made a freeman of Dumfries.
Dumcrieff House today remains a testament that confirms hard work, endeavour, a spirit of adventure and ambition can result in remarkable success. Dr John Rogerson’s life and legacy is visible all around Dumcrieff even in the present day. The current owner, Mr Philip Pantelouris confessed to me his motivation for renovating and upgrading the interior of the Mansion: “my mother was born at a nearby farm. She sometimes skated on the pond here as a child. Many people still remember her from Moffat Academy where she had been dux.”

We thank Mr John Murray of Moffat for his interesting and relevant information and reminiscences and for permission to use the engraving of the Kings Arm Hotel from his late sister’s book: Jane Boyd’s Old Moffat. Ms Svetlana Siminova who unearthed some previously unknown information recorded in the Russian language also deserves our many thanks.

I am glad to have participated in this research about Dr Rogerson and his Country House, a building with a most long and eventful history.

*Thomas Mushet*
A TENANT’S FAMILY

Janet Johnston, wife of Samuel Rogerson, gave birth in lower Annandale on 22 October 1741 to a baby boy at their cottage in Lochbrow near Lochmaben. Four days later, the child was baptised and named John. With the passage of years, John had grown to be a likeable and intelligent young man, aware of the daily concerns of his tenant farmer family. At the same time, he was benefiting from contacts and relationships with people in other walks of life.

As a teenager, he was a frequent and welcome visitor to the Clerk family who had acquired in 1737 Dumcrieff as their summer house. He was observing their efforts to improve the property, add more rooms to it and generally improve its interior and in the grounds, to repair fencing and dyking and to create a plantation of forest trees. John must have been saddened when his good friend, George Clerk had to close his linen factory in Dumfries and sell Dumcrieff in 1782.

At home, the news from Russia was that John’s Uncle James Mounsey was doing very well and was now a doctor. Mounsey’s first employment was with a group from the Navy dealing with wounded personnel. On one occasion he dared question the intention of doctors to amputate a leg of a high ranking officer, so he was detailed to accompany the officer to Paris for better surgical treatment!
Mounsey availed himself of the opportunity to attend lectures at Paris University and eventually while in Paris emerged with a medical qualification. After five years with the Navy, he opted for private practice in Saint Petersburg where eventually he was appointed as private doctor to the obese Empress Elizabeth. After her death, Peter III awarded Dr Mounsey the rank of Privy Councillor.

The unfortunate Peter was soon removed from the throne and was replaced by his wife Catherine II, who was to gain glory later as Catherine the Great. The change of sovereign was the main event of 1762. Mounsey retired and returned to Scotland wealthy and built himself the luxurious mansion of Rammerscales, near Hightae.

Mounsey’s return gave John Rogerson, by then a student of Medicine in Edinburgh, the chance to discuss with his uncle in great detail the situation and prospects in Russia. He was encouraged to seek a career there. Soon after obtaining his medical degree in 1765, he too left for Petersburg via Elsinore in Denmark, arriving in the Russian capital some time in 1766. On 5 September 1766 he was interviewed by a three member Committee and gained his permit to practice medicine in Russia. Following that, an Imperial “ukaze” appointed him as “Court Doctor” in February 1769. An original document in his name surfaced recently in Texas USA. Unfortunately, no translation or photograph has been available but it could well be a document referring to that success. It is described as written on sheepskin, the text in Latin, with gold lettering highlighted in red, a work of great craftsmanship.

His next task was to learn Russian. He quite easily learned to speak it, but his writing of it was bad. However, he won widespread sympathy among the nobility of St Petersburg.
Rain soaked and misty hills above Wamphrey Glen.