Forbes Letters, Decade By Decade

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1. The Forbes Collection

1.1 The Forbes Family collection is a large and interesting one.[1] Its size and complex structure poses both problems and opportunities in how to manage and analyse its contents. An aspect of this is discussed here.

1.2 The Forbes were Scots from a small business family in the Perth and Pitlochry area. The Forbes brothers Alexander and David became 'Byrne Emigration and Colonisation Company' migrants to Natal in 1850, with younger brother James following in 1859.[2] The interrelated Purcocks, Dingleys and McCorkindale families were Byrne migrants too, with Kate Purcocks marrying David Forbes in early 1860.

1.3 After arrival in Natal, David Forbes combined hunting and trading with his older brother Alexander, and farming cash crops (arrowroot and indigo) for an inter/national market on his own behalf. On one trading trip to south-eastern Transvaal,[3] he was impressed by its rich farmlands and was the source of Alexander McCorkindale, another Byrne migrant, negotiating with the Transvaal's President Pretorius to purchase 200 large parcels of land, from which local black peoples had been disappropriated. These were the basis of how McCorkindale attracted people to his 'Glasgow and South Africa Company' migration scheme. This drew relatively few people direct from Britain, but a large number of originally Natal migrants became involved, including David and Kate Forbes, the Purcocks, Dingleys and others, amounting to a large ox-wagon trek from Natal to McCorkindale's farms. These were in an area known as New Scotland (later New Amsterdam) in the Ermelo

[1] Forbes Family, National Archives Repository, Pretoria, South Africa.
[2] The first generation of Forbes siblings were Alexander (1825-1866), David (1829-1905), Lizzie (1831-1916), James (1835-1896) and Jemima (1837-1889). The Forbes men have appeared in a number of published accounts, although the family tradition of recycling personal names across generations and different parts of the family has led to sometimes inaccurate attributions. For the most interesting, see Bonner, 1982; Crush, 1987; MacKenzie, 2007, pp.146-49).
[3] Now Mpumalanga.

district. Soon after the move, with his younger brother James, David combined agri-farming on a large-scale with prospecting and mining, first for diamonds at New Rush (Kimberley), later for gold and coal in the Barberton and Swaziland areas.

1.4 A high proportion of Byrne migrants were Scots, as were a larger proportion of McCorkindale's, and thus the New Scotland designation (MacKenzie, 2007).[4] David Forbes purchased four farms direct from the Transvaal government, later acquiring others. Some, centring on the largest, Athole, were farmed by the Forbes; others were leased to tenants, including the Purcocks and the Dingleys. After David's death in 1905, two were farmed by Forbes daughters Kitty Rawson and Madge Dunn (later Tonkin). Athole was then run primarily by Kate and their eldest daughter Nellie Forbes until Kate's death in 1922, although with holdings of land and stock retained by Forbes sons David (Dave) junior and his younger brother James (Jim) junior.[5]

1.5 The collection contains around 15,000 documents written between 1850 and 1922 by the Forbes family, their kin, friends, neighbours, business associates and officials.[6] There are over 4,000 letters, with contents also including notes and memos, lists, tallies, ledgers and inventories, accounts, diaries, wills and other business and official communications (Stanley, 2015a). Family relationships, household, farm, wider economic life, kin relations and entrepreneurial activities were overlaid for the Forbes, encompassing both immediate family and kin, and a range of friends and

[4] For detailed discussion of the factors underpinning the scale and structure of Scottish migrations, see especially Harper, 2003; also Brock, 1999.

[5] The children of Kate and David senior who survived to adulthood were, in birth order, Nellie, Alexander junior (Alex), David junior (Dave), James junior (Jim), Catherine (Kitty) and Madge. Alex junior died of typhoid in 1885. The Forbes daughters had equal shares in the economic and finance aspects with their brothers, although for them this resided mainly in land and crops rather than stock until after their father's death in 1905, when they became important farmers.

[6] Different temporal ends to the collection can be posited. The family figuration of letter-writing largely concludes in 1922, when Kate Forbes died. However, between then and 1930 there are some additional letters, although concerning more distant family members. Between 1930 and 1938, there are handfuls of letters but with the writers and recipients not traced to the Forbes family figuration, although almost certainly connected in some way. The very last document is dated 1938, when the collection was donated to the National Archives Repository. Consequently 1922 has been used as the cut-off date for the analysis here.

associates in Natal and the Cape as well as the Transvaal,[7] and internationally, from Scotland, England and at points also South Australia.

1.6 The collection is organised in a confusing and at times muddled way, with some boxes covering periods of years and then writers within this, but in a higgledy-piggledy fashion with regard to specific date order; other boxes contain bundles of letters by particular writers with no date order; some have wide mixtures of dated letters and writers but in no order at all; yet others contain partially or entirely undated letters placed in no order. It results from the filing habits of a number of the people involved - Kate Forbes, David Forbes senior, Dave Forbes junior and the succession of Athole Estate managers – and not by professionals in the National Archives. Systematic work on the collection could not occur until all items were entered into a database then onto the VRE (Virtual Research Environment) that manages WWW project data.

1.7 The extant letters seem to have been structured by various 'local' factors rather than any deliberate destructions. The main keepers of letters were Kate and David Forbes senior and their son Dave junior when the latter was at home at Athole. The main 'gaps' in the extant latters are (i) the 'actual' letters sent to Lizzie Forbes, Jemima Condie and Jemima's children in Scotland, although many drafts especially of the former survive; (ii) letters to James senior and Jim junior, who both lived in a mobile peripatetic way because of their economic and business involvements and did not keep their letters; (iii) similarly Dave junior when on duty as the manager of a Swazi coalmine; (iv) most letters by Lizzie Forbes after 1903; (v) letters by Sarah Purcocks Straker after 1899; (vi) all letters during the South African War (1899-1902); (vii) most letters around the decline and death of David senior in 1905; (viii) letters following Kate Forbes' last illness then death in 1922.

1.8 An important analytical strategy used in exploring the Forbes letters has a cross-sectional one, with all extant letters per decade of the collection's existence briefly overviewed, and with one year in each decade randomly-selected for closer inquiry (1854, 1866, 1876, 1885, 1893, 1908, 1917 and 1921). This has been combined with examining in detail the writing practices of a purposively-selected

[7] South Africa was not a unified political entity until 1910. Before then, there were four settler colonies: the two Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and two British colonies, Natal and the Cape.

group of letter-writers and correspondences, discussed elsewhere (Stanley, 2015b, 2015c). What follows here sets out the results of the cross-sectional overviews.

1.9 Forbes Letters Overviewed

Decade	Decade totals	Selected year letters
1850s	50	1854 = 4
1860s	250	1866 = 15
1870s	280	1876 = 35
1880s	290	1885+ 24
1890s	1300	1893 = 193
1900s	290	1908 = 18
1910s	180	1917 = 71
1920s	15	1921/2 = 15
Total	2650	376

2. The 1850s

2.1 There are around fifty letters extant for the 1850s. Through the 1850s the numbers of extant letters are low, with just a handful each year. Most are from Lizzie Forbes, also Jemima, sent to David and Alexander, with a small number from other family members. There is one 1858 letter to the then Kate Purcocks from an aunt in Adelaide, which mentions other letters to and from Kate so there has been considerable attrition. James Forbes joined his brothers in 1856, but no 1850s letters to him survive although other letters indicate some were sent. The year randomly-selected for closer examination is 1854.

2.2 There are just four letters dated 1854.[8] These are by Lizzie Forbes to her brothers David and Alexander (known as Alick), with content showing she regularly wrote to them by the monthly mail-ship, with the attrition perhaps because they were involved in hunting and trading at this time and had no settled residence, for David was later a major keeper of letters sent to him.[9] They are concerned with whether her letters get lost en route, ditto her brothers' apparent failures to reply, provide family and other news, inquire when they will return with their fortunes made, and request information about their activities.

3. The 1860s

3.1 For the 1860s, there are some 250 letters extant, representing a varied group of correspondents and kinds of letter-writing. Most involve family and friends in Scotland and different parts of South Africa, although some are of straight-forwardly business character, and mainly to and between David and Alick Forbes. There are around thirty letters from Mary McCorkindale to Kate after her marriage, although none in 1866. Most concern news of trips including to Britain and land deals as well as advice-giving, with others written on behalf of Kate's mother Anne regarding family news, gifts and requests. A handful are from Anne herself, Sarah Purcocks and Kate's brothers George and Vincent. Sarah's letters are to David, to whom she was close, as well as to Kate, and concern Kate's pregnancies, Purcocks money troubles and the Transvaal farms. Regular letters continue from Lizzie Forbes, who still wrote to her brothers but with her main correspondent having become Kate. There is also an increase in the number and length of letters from Jemima, including chivvying brother James for his failure to write. This was perhaps propelled by the McCorkindales's friendly overtures during their British sojourn, raising the practical possibility of the sisters migrating to South Africa.

[8] For the 1850s and all decades following, there are complications in advancing precise numbers. There are well over 400 partially or wholly undated letters. Also there are issues in how to count the hundreds of copies (not only of Forbes letters but also many 'by' Kate Forbes but sent by others) and drafts (of letters 'by' various Forbes but also often by Kate, who seems to have acted as the general administrator of such matters).
[9] James was still in various places in Europe until 1859, when he migrated to Natal.

3.2 The longest and in various respects most interesting letters are between David and Kate Forbes. After an initial horrendous experience, Kate spent subsequent 1860s childbirths with her parents, with her letters home over these separations filled with everyday detail. David was away for extended periods on trading, land surveying and prospecting trips and also regarding the New Scotland move, in 1861, 1862, 1864, later 1866 and 1867, sometimes overlapping with Kate's pregnancies.

3.3 There are fifteen letters dated 1866. There are no extant 1866 business letters (eg. from banks ands store-keepers), or letters from Jemima Forbes and Mary McCorkindale, and few from Sarah Purcocks to Kate Forbes, all usual correspondents across this decade. There are letters to Kate from an old friend about their respective bereavements and ones from and to family members, including from Alick to David asking for various items to be sent onto him. Five are from Lizzie Forbes: three to Kate and one each to Alick and James, with content indicating significant numbers now missing. These detail family and Scottish news, provide information and comment on business matters and also possible trips home, while that to James concerning Alexander's death (from a liver infection) and criticizing him for not writing about this. In later 1866 and part of 1867, David, with Kate's brother Vincent Purcocks, was away establishing the New Scotland farms. A letter from George Purcocks to his brother Vincent is the sole one extant of others mentioned, designed to provide Vincent and David with family news including about Kate's pregnancy. David himself sent letters at the infrequent stopping-places, with three extant in 1866; and while Kate generally wrote regularly, there is just one of hers for 1866 because she nearly died in childbirth and made a slow recovery.

4. The 1870s

4.1 For the 1870s, there are around 280 letters extant. During this decade, Mary McCorkindale was variously and for extended periods in Natal, Britain, Pretoria and elsewhere. James Forbes was largely away on various unspecified trips and then for an extended period at the Diamond Fields. David Forbes was also at the Fields for much of 1877, then the whole family plus the Purcocks, Dingleys and Strakers removed there for over a year in 1879, with Kate's mother Anne dying en route home]. There were periods of unrest and fighting, in Zululand and the Transvaal, and

uncertainties in Swaziland with effects concerning labour at Athole and other Forbes farms. There are rumblings from the Transvaal administration about land issues, regarding things not properly surveyed in the early days of settlement, and imposed short deadlines for surveys and estate diagrams to be completed by. There is also increasing business concerned with leasing and selling farms and swopping various parcels of land with other New Scotland migrants. These multiple mobilities and changes form the backcloth to letters of the 1870s. Numbers fluctuate between years, with increases including around Alexander McCorkindale's death, then Estate matters and the settlement, and David Forbes's trip to the Diamond Fields. There also seem to be missing letters for the later part of the decade, when all the Forbes (and for a period, the Purcocks, Dingleys and Strakers too) were at the Fields.

4.2 From 1874 on, there are letters by and some to the two eldest Forbes sons Alick and Dave, and Nellie, their oldest daughter. Letters also show the increasing visibility and involvement in family affairs of the Purcocks, including Sarah, her brother Vincent in trading and prospecting with David and McCorkindale farm matters, as well as the deaths Kate's brother George from alcoholism in March 1876 and mother Anne Purcocks in 1879 and. Between 1870 and 1878, there are twenty-four letters primarily to David from an Umhlanga, Natal, trading storekeeper Thomas Duff, who also acted as his agent too. This link enabled David to oversee his Natal interests (he still owned and leased out farms there) as well as for Athole to be supplied with various goods on credit from a trusted source, with orders in the £100s. While only two inconsequential Alexander McCorkindale 1870s letters exist, there are nearly twenty to and from Mary McCorkindale from a number of locations. Her links with Lizzie Forbes and Jemima Condie continued, but most are to David and Kate about the Estate and lengthy settlement business, with an 1877 burst around taking back the farms that were granted, also involving Vincent Purcocks and Joshua Straker, a family connection who later married Sarah.

4.3 There are nineteen letters from Lizzie Forbes across the decade, mainly to Kate and fewer to David, with one each to James and Mary McCorkindale. However, the signs are she wrote monthly, so there has been considerable attrition. These arrived in the context of multiple mobilities sketched above, checking on the arrival of shipments of goods, providing business and economic information, commenting on James' failure to acknowledge goods shipped to him, also his prospecting trips and

making a large sum at the Diamond Fields. David wrote more tore than twenty long, detailed letters to Kate between April and late October 1877, when he followed James to the Diamond Fields. While Kate wrote him just six, this was because of another difficult pregnancy and childbirth, and the letters themselves detail considerable farming and related activity as well as news. His letters provide detailed accounts of mining at a number of locations, and that he made sufficient finds to see this providing a new start.

4.4 There are 35 letters dated 1876. These include a handful from the three Forbes children at school in Pretoria, also some from their great-aunt McCorkindale, with whom they were boarding. There was unrest from African peoples protesting Transvaal rule, commandos were called out and patrols instituted around Pretoria, and she describes the ensuing events as war. Forbes sons Alex and Dave, aged 14 and 13 respectively, were required for commando duty, also horses were commandeered from the Forbes and others. The Forbes carried out various land transactions, including adjustments to the borders of Athole and neighbouring property; and friendly letters mixed with business were received, including from former employees. On a wider stage, the Transvaal President attempted to equitably settle the McCorkindale Estate when Alexander McCorkindale died of malaria in 1871, but was prevented by the Raad (parliament). There are just two extant letters from Lizzie Forbes and none from Jemima for this year. Lizzie's are both to Kate, on the Transvaal unrest, goods sent to South Africa and letters received, also Lizzie's new situation as housekeeper at Baillie's school in Edinburgh. The largest group, nine, are from the trader-storekeeper Thomas Duff in Natal to David Forbes and combine business transactions, political news, friendly exchanges, requests for remittances to cover money owed and updates on goods ordered; two, exceptionally, focus on Kate's brother George Purcocks' death, from alcohol poisoning.[10]

5. The 1880s

5.1 There are some 290 extant letters overall for the 1880s. At the start of decade, there were Boer and British standoffs regarding the status of the Transvaal, followed

[10] Duff's letters continue into 1878, then cease with no indication why.

by an 1884 Convention which reached settlement on the Transvaal's independence. Many letters over the decade concern farming, sales of produce, land sales and leases, with Kate Forbes very much involved in these and other business matters, with a joint letter with David to son Dave of 3 April 1888 in which they write of (different) aspects of family business clearly demonstrating this. There are fewer letters by and to Kate and David from the period in 1885 and 1886 they were in Britain. There are also fewer overall from Lizzie Forbes, just fourteen; and while there is an increase in 1888, this was not linked to David and Kate's return to South Africa, which had occurred much earlier, as there are many mentions of her writing in other letters and drafts.

5.2 From 1881 on, there is a much broader group of letter-writers represented, including government officials, business associates, former and current stock-managers and other employees, attorneys and so on. A clear sense is thereby conveyed of the Forbes branching out in new directions, including additional farms and adjustments of boundaries, stock farming, making and selling agricultural machinery. As part of this, mining and concessions in particular in Swaziland come into frame, David and James together regarding the Forbes Reef, also James on his own at Ingwenia, with disputes from rivals particularly concerning the latter. The older Forbes children reached adulthood over this decade, with Nellie becoming involved with the homefarm, Alick in gold-mining, Dave in sheep-farming and later Jim in carting and droving. Dave in particular features in both letters written and those received, with letters also from and the youngest daughters Kitty and Madge, who remained in Scotland until the early 1890s.

5.3 Another resurfacing of McCorkindale Estate issues began in 1884, with the Transvaal claiming more farms and David by then the principal legatee and also with his own farms entangled in the original land grant. Many letters from officials and attorneys are involved, also letters also from David to Kate while he was in Pretoria attempting to settle matters. Another event-led group of letters occurred at the end 1885 with the death from typhoid of Alex [Alexander junior], gold prospecting in Barberton with family connections the Bryants, with further large numbers of letters into 1886 regarding where his body would be buried and how Dave and Jim with Sarah were coping. After James senior's 1893 return (with niece Nellie) to South Africa, there is an upsurge of letters mainly by others but some from him regarding

various minerals concessions and disputes about these. Related to this, from late 1887 on, there is the launch of the Forbes Henderson Company, the subject (and letter-writer through some of its officials) of increasing numbers of letters, primarily to David although some to and by James concerning its public re-launch, the involvement of new directors and officials, and internal disputes regarding policy and control and also more technical matters about assay reports and where shafts were to be sunk.

5.4 There are 24 letters dated 1885. Half a dozen are from local officials and nine between the Forbes and others regarding the Swazi King and minerals concessions, with additional letters later in the year concerning gold and coal concessions. There are also letters from David Forbes' attorney in Pretoria on legalities concerning McCorkindale Estate farms, with David having become the principal legatee and with his own land grants entangled with McCorkindale's. The final group consists of two telegrams sent to Athole and Edinburgh and a number of family letters regarding the death of Alex Forbes and his cousin Isabella Bryant but survival of her husband and children.

5. The 1890s

5.1 The 1890s has the largest number of letters extant for any decade in the collection, around 1300, with numbers ranging from 193 in 1893, to 60 in 1899 when letters abruptly stop as the South African War starts. Important factors producing the increase are the survival of two of David Forbes' letter-books containing large numbers of letters to and from him, and also of boxes of copies, drafts, and enclosures of letters between third parties sent on to various of the Forbes.

5.2 The numbers per year vary from 193 in 1893, to 60 in 1899, when letters abruptly stop as the South African War started. Explaining the large increase in numbers from the 1880s raises some complications. Firstly, in part the increase comes about because all the Forbes children reached adulthood and what remains show they each had correspondence networks, in part friendship and in part 'business' of different kinds. However, only Dave Forbes among them was a keeper of letters, and most of his own letters were written when he was at work in Swaziland

and sent to his parents, also both of them letter-keepers, so it is mainly these letters that feature in the increase.

5.3 Secondly, of greater importance in contributing to volume is the fact that the range of activities and interests that the Forbes, and David Forbes especially, was involved in had expanded considerably, to include a number of minerals concessions in Swaziland, a Gold Reef Company, the purchase of additional farms and extensions of farming interests including into coffee, with flows of letters regarding all of these.

5.4 Thirdly, there over 120 letters from Lizzie Forbes to family members, more than survive for other decades, while also almost all of the dated extent letters to and by James Forbes senior are 1890s ones, with both contributing to increased volume. However and fourthly, the most significant factor of all concerns structural features of the collection, concerning the survival of two of David Forbes' letter-books containing large numbers of letters to and from him, and also of boxes of copies, drafts, and enclosures of letters between third parties which had been sent on with a letter to various of the Forbes.

5.5 This large number of extant letters makes providing a succinct summary of flows of letters and their contents difficult. The number of correspondents involved increased considerably as activities and networks did so. David and Kate Forbes and their daughters spent part of 1889 and all 1890 in the UK, but this did not lead to any decline in the number of letters exchanged, as they continued to write to family and friends elsewhere in Britain as well as their children and other family in South Africa. This visit was to settle their daughters in school, but mainly it was to facilitate David's business interests. A major extension of the economic interests of the Forbes occurred in the late 1880s in relation to Swazi and other mineral concessions. This particularly involved David Forbes and James Forbes senior, including in launching a number of associated public companies, particularly the Forbes Reef Company whose business took both David and James to London when the company was restructured and publicly floated. In addition, Kate Forbes had her own independent investments in this and other such companies, and Dave Forbes later worked and exploited his own minerals and timber concessions as well as making major investments in a number of public companies. As well as the concessions, a large number of land transactions occurred around the buying, selling and leasing of farms; this mainly

involved David Forbes senior, although as Dave Forbes moved into Swazi mine management, he also bought and leased a number of farms and increasingly relied on his youngest sister Madge to carry out the administration and paperwork involved in this.

5.6 The dividing line between family and business relationships were blurred for others of the Forbes too. Jemima Condie, youngest sister to David Forbes, died in 1892; her husband David, following a breakdown, was permanently in an asylum. In consequence, a family trust was established, to support their three children, including purchasing South African farms on their behalves. In Britain, this was administered by Lizzie Forbes, who also oversaw the education of the Condie children, who partly lived with her. This arrangement included Lizzie receiving a quarterly retainer so she could take breaks from paid employment to do so. In addition, the 1890s also saw important changes when components of the Estate were equally apportioned between the siblings; also Dave, as the future inheritor of the main part of Athole and a growing presence in mining activities, increasingly attempted to influence how his father ran Athole and the kind of investments being made.

5.7 Other consequential events occurred during the 1890s. These included the reopening of the McCorkindale Estate issue by the Transvaal administration in 1892 with a court case on this being heard in Pretoria that year, and a move by the Transvaal administration to gain protectorate status over Swaziland in 1894 bring with it great tensions and the possibility of war, both of which had considerable fallout for the Forbes, reflected in various exchanges of letters in the collection. The most consequential, however, was the death of James Forbes senior in March 1896. This revealed a secret relationship with a Mrs Welsh in Britain to whom he left nearly all his remaining property, including that earlier promised family members in exchange for favours done, and also legal confusion ensued concerning the status of various of his minerals concessions, including ones jointly held with his brother David.

5.8 The randomly-selected year of 1893 is the decade's peak year of letter-writing and includes a varied set of letter-writers and addressees. The letters are overwhelmingly business ones involving banks, surveying, land transactions and

other economic activities which are also interconnected with political and family matters.

5.9 The Athole Estate in the 1890s had considerably diversified its interests, including through land transactions to extend stock-rearing, also the large-scale production of milk and butter for a market, growing coffee beans, and supplying agricultural machinery to other farmers. Farming at this time became just one set of Forbes' interests among others, including high profile ones in mining and minerals. Swazi farming and minerals concessions had been granted haphazardly, something the Forbes somewhat reluctantly took advantage of, with Dave Forbes becoming a member of the whites-only legislative council working with the Swazi political elite to produce a more orderly situation. All the Forbes males had strong relationships with the Swazi royals, the Queen Regent especially after King Mbandzeni's 1889 death, and often acted as official translators. Eventually Shepstone, a Resident Administrator whose corruption had significantly produced the concessions problems, was ousted in 1894, with the lead-up occurring during 1893. Many of these matters are covered in 1893 letters, including a report by David Forbes senior, given to Lord Ripon as Secretary of State for the Colonies, regarding Transvaal designs on Swaziland, the likelihood of a war and the need for a stronger British line on this.

5.10 Connectedly, the Forbes Reef Company, based around Forbes' Swazi concessions and mining for gold, then also tin and coal, was a major focus of activities in 1893. James Forbes senior was still in Britain and frequently in London wheeling and dealing with other Company Directors and senior managers, which was experiencing major internal disagreements about both policy and technical aspects of managing the mine. Lizzie Forbes, who had earlier mopped up various problems involving James, expressed detailed concern about his failure to tell other family members about this. More generally across the 1890s, larger numbers of Lizzie Forbes' letters are extant than in earlier or later periods and are largely concerned with family/business matters. Forbes daughters Nellie, Kitty and Madge remained under her care and supervision whilst being educated in Britain, she regularly sent consignments of goods to Athole, and provided information about share movements that David might not otherwise hear about. In addition, following David Condie's committal to an asylum and subsequently the death of Jemima in 1889, Lizzie became responsible for the four Condie children Nellie, Susie, Lizzie and John. Also

covered in 1893 letters are more McCorkindale Estate issues, with attempts by the Transvaal administration to transfer more farms into Boer ownership, and newspaper gossip that David Forbes had received a large payoff when the land was first transferred.

6. The 1900s

6.1 There are around 290 letters from the 1900s, with just two in 1900, and a peak of 65 in 1904, with overall a major drop in number compared with the 1890s. At the beginning of this period, the South African War (October 1899 to June 1902) led to the Forbes dispersing from Athole, with an accompanying break in letters that lasted until they returned in mid-1902.[11] Another disruption occurred in 1905 with the illness then death, probably from stomach cancer, of David Forbes senior, with letters almost non-existent around this period. Relatedly, many of the components of the collection in the 1890s, including letterbooks and boxes of copies, drafts and incoming letters, do not exist for the 1900s, suggesting that these were perhaps lost or destroyed.

6.2 There was overall a massive drop in letter numbers compared with the 1890s. The major factor at the beginning of this period was the disruption brought by the South African War (October 1899 to June 1902), with a sudden sharp break in letters at the beginning of this and which lasted through to the return of the Forbes to Athole in later 1902. Those letters from this period that exist are ones to and particularly from Dave Forbes, to his father especially. The collection shows signs of elements that survive for the 1890s, including letterbooks, copies and drafts, having been lost or mislaid or simply either not kept or indeed not written during the wartime years. Numbers of extant letters than increased gradually over 1902, 1903 and 1904, but with a second major disruption occurring in 1905 with the long illness then death, probably from stomach cancer, in November of David Forbes senior. Thereafter numbers remain low for the rest of the decade, with the overall decline in numbers largely accounted for by two factors.

[11] Jim went literally on the hoof and remained with the Forbes sheep and cattle, and Dave became a volunteer in the army; the rest of the family re-established itself on a farm near Belfast, in the highlands of eastern Transvaal.

6.3 One is that David Forbes was a major keeper of letters, both those sent to him and also drafts and copies of his own, with this ceasing with his decline and death. The other is that it is clear from mentions in those letters that *do* survive that large numbers of letters once existed but are no longer extent, with the more than 90 for the years 1903 and 1904 giving a flavour of what this would have been like, with all the Forbes engaged in economic activities connected with the Forbes Estate and with the younger generation conducting busy social lives as well. In addition, other forms of writing engaged in by the Forbes – including Kate Forbes in producing invoices, tallies and inventories and also writing diaries, and Dave Forbes in writing reminiscences and reports – continued unabated.

6.4 The war had other effects too, including failing to pay taxes and quitrents and also losing track of remaining Forbes property in Natal. These matters in fact only came to light after David Forbes' death, when his Estate had to be inventoried and death duties paid. Also, the return to Athole was a difficult one, with the house half-destroyed, property removed or vandalised, and much of the farmland wrecked. A major loan was taken out for building and live-stock, and building work started in early 1903. Also in 1903, David was appointed a representative on the Transvaal Labour Commission along with such powerful figures as Percy Fitzpatrick and George Farrar, an indication of the reputation he had gained for balanced views and an ability to see both farming and mining viewpoints with regard to the supposed shortage of labour. 1903 also saw dashed hopes concerning diamonds on Forbes property. However, by this date, with David in his early 70s and not a well man, Dave was clearly in control of both Athole and also the Forbes Estate generally, and there has already been some sub-divisions of various of the property, with a number of 1903 and 1906 letters legislating activities and responsibilities for his siblings and Estate workers. In this, Jim ran Tolderia and was otherwise at Dave's disposition, with Madge his administrative arm whenever he was in Swaziland.

6.5 On one level, the death of David senior consequently did not lead to major changes, although Kate expedited further adjustments to the various Forbes properties and had boundaries re-drawn to ensure an equitable distribution after her death and instituted some hefty protections of her rights while she was alive. What *does* change is that the wider Forbes Estate largely drops out of the picture, with the focus on Athole and the aspects of its activities that are shared, in particular its core of the

homefarm under Kate, who, as her diaries and other farm paperwork attest, remained very much in hands-on control. Some aspects of wider Forbes business interests can be occasionally glimpsed, but these are largely ones put in motion before 1899. For instance, the McCorkindale Estate settlement re-surfaced, Dave remained actively involved with coal and timber concessions on land he owned in Swaziland and elsewhere, with Jim he bought steam-lorries for hiring to other farmers, and Kate branched out into butter and cheese-making on a large scale.

6.6 In this period to the end of 1909, in spite of the lower numbers of extant letters it is clear that wider family and economic connections were maintained. There are letters, for instance, from all the Condie children, now adult, with John Condie working in Cape Town, Susie in nursing including in South Africa during the South African War, and Nellie in Britain. Lizzie Forbes, at this point in her early 70s, was retired but remained assiduous in corresponding with her relatives in South Africa, commenting on this in 1904 to her niece Nellie and that she received letters back almost every week. In spite of this, the last letter extant from her is just one in 1906, also to Nellie. In addition, although less frequently corresponding, relatives in New South Wales continue to write and were also written to by both David and Kate Forbes. However, at least one group of letters that certainly once existed is absent almost in entirety. This concerns Kate Forbes' family letters, with none surviving to or from her sister Sarah Straker and brothers Vincent and David Purcocks and their families, and just one from her very close Dingley cousins, although there are mentions in other letters indicating that flows of letters to and from them would have occurred.

6.7 The eighteen extant letters for the randomly-selected year of 1908 reflect just a few of activities and concerns across the decade. At this point, while still manager at the Swazi Mine, Dave was in control of not only the strategy but much of the ongoing work of Athole and related farms, with letters to his brother Jim, sister Madge and his mother detailing these matters. Towards the end of 1908, his timber concession at the Swazi Mine was legally disallowed. A greater bombshell would have been the official letters received concerning non-payment of taxes by David Forbes since 1896, including quitrents on various Forbes properties, and a large tax bill for Natal properties from the 1860s that Kate and presumably David himself had forgotten about. More routine matters also appear, with Kate corresponding with

government officials about bacteria strains necessary for specialist cheese-making, and Jim and Dave to identify plant types unknown to them. There were also disputes with neighbouring farmers, in 1908 concerning a petition (disallowed) that an internal road at Athole should become a public highway. Important matters also covered in the 1908 letters involve Kate having key Forbes farms, including Tolderia, Glen Eland and Athole, re-surveyed as part of re-defining their boundaries to ensure an equitable distribution between the siblings in her will, and as part of this, other letters concern interim land transfers to Dave, Jim and Madge.

7. The 1910s

7.1 Overall, there are around 180 extant letters for the 1910s, with numbers ranging from just one in each of 1918 and 1919, and an out-of-step 71 in 1917. Sarah Straker died of breast cancer in late 1911, with her letters from 1899 on lost or destroyed after her death. Lizzie Forbes' sole extant letter of the decade is dated 1911; she died in March 1916. Contact between the Forbes and the Condies continued, particularly with Susie, who other letters show was still corresponding in 1917, although none of these letters are extant.[12] Some of the factors commented on above regarding numbers of 1900s letters were still operative, including that generally letters were at this point either not kept, or more likely were later lost or destroyed. Many of those extant for the decade are of a 'for filing' kind, including from tax inspectors, revenue collectors and customs officials concerning income and farm taxes, repayments of bonds, and local planning matters. World War I, apart from the frequent absence of Dave, with an army commission, is barely registered, with the focus on Athole and environs.

7.2 Some of the factors commented on regarding 1900s letters were still operative, including that generally letters were either not kept, or more likely were later lost or destroyed. Many of those surviving are of a routine 'for filing' kind, including from tax inspectors, revenue collectors and customs officials concerning delays in paying income and farm taxes, queries about the repayment of bonds, and also various planning matters involving local officials. World War I, apart from the

[12] After her uncle David's death, these were primarily sent to her cousin Nellie, who was not a keeper of letters.

frequent absence of Dave, who joined the army, is barely registered in the extant letters. Of local significance were three other events. One was the death of Sarah Straker from the recurrence of breast cancer in December 1911. She had previously suffered periods of related illness, with all of the Forbes remaining deeply involved with her and with many mentions of her in letters, although none to or from her are extant for this period, probably left at Westoe and lost or destroyed after she died. The second was the death of Lizzie Forbes in March 1916. There had been an earlier rapid decline in numbers of her letters extant. There is just one, in 1911, for this decade. There are no extant letters regarding her death, although entries in the Forbes diaries, largely written by Kate, concern it. The third, also consequential regarding flows of letters, was Kate's illness during May to July 1917, with a fall and broken knee followed by influenza and pleurisy, leading to her staying in Durban for recuperation, accompanied by her eldest daughter Nellie. Kate, like her husband David, was a major keeper as well as writer of letters, with over 60 letters sent to her at this time.

7.3 For Dave Forbes, Athole was no longer the focal point of his business or other concerns, which during this decade included prospecting for new coal mining interests in a number of areas of southern Africa, building contacts with major figures in South African economic and political life, pursuing his farming activities in Swaziland and elsewhere, as well as retaining a strong involvement in the Athole Estate. The last extant letter from Lizzie Forbes is dated 1911, sent to Nellie Forbes, with the then 80 year-old Lizzie commenting on the frequency of her both receiving and writing letters, while one of Madge Forbes's May 1917 letters to her mother Kate mentions having heard from Susie Condie. The sense is conveyed of such close family connections still maintained but with their earlier 'business' aspects no longer in the frame. Other local and Estate matters appearing letters over the decade include a planning application for Forbes-owned land in the centre of Amsterdam, recurrence of the issue of a possible public road through Athole, and plans for a number of Forbes farms, including establishing a game reserve with licensed hunting as both a conservancy and a money-making venture, one of the first such in South Africa.

7.4 In 1910 and 1911, Kate Forbes initiated major changes concerning the Estate, ensuring equal division of its property and other interests, but also spelling out to her attorney how she wanted her own rights and ultimate control during her lifetime to be

safeguarded. In letters in early 1912 and late 1914, Dave put proposals to his mother to change the focus of Estate interests, by selling off land and distributing the capital to Kate and his sisters, with Jim and him focusing on horse breeding, and the mineral rights of Estate remaining undivided. These letters are more circumspect or perhaps less confrontational than earlier similar ones to his father, while Kate's own letters imply a steely disposition and little readiness at that stage to give up the reins..

7.5 The letters for 1917, the randomly-selected year for closer examination, start with routine matters concerning tax bills and quitrents. In early May, there was a court case with costs awarded against Jim Forbes for breach of contract regarding a sheep sale, with his anger at the verdict and what the Forbes saw as a tissue of lies made clear. Immediately after, following a broken knee in January then influenza and pleurisy, Kate Forbes with daughter Nellie left for Durban to recuperate. The large majority of the 60+ letters to her from May until her return in later July are from her children, particularly Madge, who was in charge of Athole and wrote to her mother about Estate matters every day or two, and Jim about Tolderia and Glen Eland farms. There are also letters exchanged between Madge, Kitty, Nellie and Jim, with relatively few from Dave; these are concerned with the day-to-day workings and management of Athole and other farms, with the clear sense they needed to account for their stewardship. These letters were to keep Kate informed and convey she was still in control, with many details rehearsed for her and also issues and problems raised which her replies would probably have addressed. Certainly after her return, there are extant letters to local police and other officials making clear her authority, while the farming diary she wrote continues detailing her hands-on role in homefarm and wider Estate matters.

8. The 1920s

8.1 There are just 15 letters extant for the 1920s and in effect, although not literally, the Forbes letters cease with the final letter written by Kate Forbes in April 1922.[13] The randomly selected year is 1921, although all three 1920s for which there are letters have been considered. The McCorkindale Estate, and Kate's linked New

[13] See note 1.

Scotland Land Company shares make a final appearance in 1920 and were still paying dividends. The largest group of letters are seven of a 'keeping in regular touch' kind written by Dave in 1921 while away working, one of his few absences after 1918. The most important is an April 1922 copy of a letter to Kate's attorney. It follows the death of Jim Forbes, in his early 60s, in late 1921. Jim had been estranged from his wife Olive and had custody of their daughter, and the letter expresses Kate's determination to fight her daughter-in-law from stopping her seeing the child, for custody had revoked to Olive after Jim's death. Her letter conveys the same sense of authority and resolve marking her Estate letters, commented on earlier. She died later in 1922, aged 80, the last of her generation.

9. Brief Discussion

9.1 The analytical strategy of examining cross-sections of letters has helpfully shown the diversity of the flows of Forbes letters over time, who was involved in these exchanges, some of the broad changes occurring over this more than seventy-year period, and also and importantly, how all the letters fit together within this. Obviously a good deal could be said about the large number of letters that have been all too briefly overviewed above, and this is the subject of Whites Writing Whiteness articles in progress. There are, however, some broader aspects that can helpfully be briefly noted.

9.2 The ebbs and flows that mark the broad shape of the Forbes letters are products of complex factors, including external events (migrations, wars), life-cycle and generational matters (relocations, marriage, births, deaths), technological and communications changes, and attrition of different kinds, and these were more important more than relationship changes. Within these flows, the cross-sectional analysis has clearly shown that the letters, all the letters, were embedded within the unfolding fabric of activities, relationships and networks involved and there are no separate concerns or ways of writing that can be pulled out and dubbed as 'personal', 'migrant', 'business' and so on, for life and letter-writing about it was concerned with more complicated than such simplicities. Broadly, people's circumstances changed: they had developing interests and concerns over time; they reached maturity and full epistolary activity, then later their involvements decreased; everyday technologies

changed; they also moved location, within South Africa and also internationally, within Scotland and England.

9.3 What working in a cross-sectional way and at large-scale cannot show is how the correspondences of particular letter-writers develop over time or were modulated by the different people they corresponded with – but this was not what it was designed and used to do. What it was designed to do it does extremely well. This is to focus attention on ebbs and flows and accompanying annual concerns for the selected years within the decennial patterns.

9.4 However, there would be issues in confining analysis to temporal considerations and general flows, and thus the additional methodological strategy referred to above, of looking in close detail at the writing practices of particular letter-writers. Such issues are usefully sketched out, in pointing to things missing from or underplayed a cross-sectional approach.

9.5 Firstly, there are over 400 partially or wholly undated letters that cannot be included in such an exercise. As many are by James senior and Dave junior, a temporal approach underestimates their presence and significance in the collection as a whole. Secondly, there are distributional skews resulting from who was a keeper of letters and who was not, and a cross-sectional analysis can compound the effects because the absences that propel letter-writing tend to be bunched in particular time-periods rather than evenly distributed across years. An example here is that David senior was on a lengthy prospecting trip during 1887 and his letters to Kate (a letter-keeper) survive, but not any to James senior (who was not), although James was his major collaborator in such ventures and the indications are that David wrote frequently to him. Thirdly, letters are written by individuals, and a temporal approach on its own conveys little of the specific writing practices and variant usages of the different letter-writers. Relatedly, correspondences are part of a relationship between a letter-writer and their addressee, something also difficult to convey in a temporal examination of so many letters as exist in the Forbes collection.

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