The Case for Sir Nathaniel Dunlop

Laurence Brown Douglas, born Lawrence Brown in Edinburgh on June 14, 1907.

Of the two Dunlop men, Sir Nathaniel has the stronger documented connection to Shieldhill in 1906. A newspaper places him there welcoming visitors. The medical records establish his nephew Binnie’s profession. The missing link for both men is Agnes herself.

What Laurence’s daughter remembered. Constance Anderson Douglas told her son that Laurence’s father was a doctor at the estate and that a gardener took him in. Her account gives us two descriptions. Laurence’s birth registration names no father.

Large-print case edition. The estate evidence is followed by the companion discussion of the witnesses, Edinburgh and the surviving records.

Read the case and open its sources online

The man at Shieldhill

Nathaniel Dunlop was born at Campbeltown on April 7, 1830. He spent half a century with the Allan Line, the Glasgow shipping company whose steamers carried tens of thousands of Scots to Canada, became senior partner of its firm, James & Alexander Allan, and chairman of the Clyde Navigation Trust. His wife died within weeks of the birth of their only child, Ellen, and he never remarried.

In 1898 he bought Shieldhill, near Biggar, from the Chancellor family, who had held it since 1434, and with it the village of Quothquan below the house and its cottages. When he died at Shieldhill in 1919, his will left his daughter alone £100,000.

A home, a hall, and a village

“Domestic servant” is what Agnes Brown wrote when she registered her son. The same record gives her usual home as Gean Cottage, Shieldhill. Those are two different pieces of information. The entry leaves her employer unnamed. It gives us no basis for placing her at work in the mansion, identifying who paid her wages, or saying she attended a particular gathering.

Three places matter. Shieldhill House was the Dunlops’ private residence. A reported supper in its dining room brought tenants and servants there as invited guests. Shieldhill Hall was a separate building in Quothquan. Nathaniel and his daughter Ellen built it in 1903 for evening worship. It later housed winter lessons and a concert. Gean Cottage was the address Agnes gave in 1907. The project’s comparison of modern coordinates puts the cottage about 400 feet from the hall in a straight line. The mansion was farther away.

The same household could invite a villager to worship, provide a room for a class, and receive her socially. Nathaniel also owned houses in the village. A May 1906 water-supply report establishes that much. The account cited here does not name Gean Cottage. A valuation roll or rental naming its proprietor and occupier would answer the narrower question.

Laurence’s civil birth entry · Historic Environment Scotland, LB12995 · Motherwell Times, May 4, 1906 · Estate and newspaper research notes

Who was actually there?

January 1, 1902

Supper and dancing inside Shieldhill House

The Hamilton Advertiser named Mr and Miss Dunlop as hosts. Tenants, villagers, estate servants and house servants came to supper and a dance in the mansion. The paper described supper in the dining room. It is direct evidence that the owners opened their private house across employment and social lines on this occasion. Agnes would have been sixteen. The report gives no evidence that she danced there or that this happened every year.

Hamilton Advertiser, January 4, 1902, page 6

December 1905

A lecture and Christmas party in the hall

The newspaper attributed the invitation for the lecture to father and daughter and reported a Christmas party in the hall. The named invitation establishes sponsorship. It cannot supply a guest list or put either host at every event.

Hamilton Advertiser, December 30, 1905, page 6

March 9, 1906

A bowling club supper in the village schoolroom

About seventy sat down to supper and a dance followed. The club organized the event. The report names the Rev. Mr Picken and local musicians. It names neither Dunlop nor Agnes. This is an important comparison: Quothquan also had gatherings organized outside the mansion and the Dunlops’ hall.

Hamilton Advertiser, March 17, 1906, page 6 · Issue reference

July 11, 1906

From Biggar to the hall, then to Shieldhill

This is the closest dated evidence presented here for Nathaniel at an estate gathering before the estimated autumn conception. More than seventy members and associates of the Biggar and Culter branch of the Scotch Girls’ Friendly Society travelled from Biggar. Ellen met them at Quothquan. The Rev. C. Ross Lowdon conducted the service. The visitors went on to Shieldhill, gathered for tea at half past four and enjoyed the gardens and pond. The paper specifically describes Mr Dunlop arriving from the city and welcoming them. Ellen organized the visit. Nathaniel’s reported arrival places him there for part of it. The clipping lists neither Agnes nor Binnie. It supplies no evidence of a private meeting.

Hamilton Advertiser, July 21, 1906, page 5 · Issue reference

Open the original July 1906 newspaper clipping.

Winter 1906–07

Lessons and the closing concert

The April 6 report describes a teacher coming from Glasgow twice a week, music lessons and farm servants learning to read music. At the closing concert, Nathaniel chaired and Ellen played the piano. About two hundred people attended. The report places the owner publicly at the hall during Agnes’s pregnancy. It cannot identify where he was on a particular day the preceding autumn.

Hamilton Advertiser, April 6, 1907, page 6

March 29, 1910

A crowded hall, three years after the birth

The report names Sir Nathaniel in the chair, W. F. Addie as violin teacher, Miss Reid as a singer and Mrs M’Lellan in connection with needlework. The activities outlasted the period of the pregnancy. They also depended on teachers, clergy, performers and families whose names survive alongside those of the owners.

Hamilton Advertiser, April 2, 1910, page 6 · Issue reference

How much influence did one household have?

Consider the July visit from a guest’s perspective as far as the report permits. The society assembled in Biggar. Ellen met the party, guided it to worship and hosted it at her family’s home. The minister led the service. The secretary reported on the society. Nathaniel arrived later. The distinction matters. The story preserves the authority of the landowner, the organizing work of his daughter, and the independent roles of the society and church.

The evidence supports a concentrated form of estate patronage. The Dunlops supplied premises, extended invitations and presided at public occasions. People who might work on the estate could also encounter the family as neighbours, pupils, worshippers and guests. The newspapers give us the hosts’ public reputation. They tell us little about how a young servant experienced those relationships in private.

There is no account here from Agnes describing pressure to attend, surveillance, punishment for staying away, control of courtship, or a demand for secrecy. No source cited here identifies Shieldhill as a cult. The records can support a precise question about social power: did access to housing, worship or assistance depend on maintaining the family’s favour? Tenancy terms, private correspondence, church minutes and testimony from residents would carry more weight on that point than newspaper praise.

Historic Environment Scotland, LB12995 · Hamilton Advertiser, July 21, 1906, page 5 · Issue reference · Hamilton Advertiser, March 17, 1906, page 6 · Issue reference

Nathaniel and Binnie, compared

Presence. Nathaniel has an on-site sighting in July 1906. His absence from the start of the festival is part of that evidence, too. Binnie's relationship to the owner is documented in census and family records. His 1907 medical entry gives 16 Carlton Place, Glasgow. His former school's register, published in 1905, gives Charteris House, Woodford Green, Essex. Neither address fixes his daily movements. No dated source presented here places the nephew at Shieldhill in the relevant autumn. No dated source places either man together with Agnes.

What the word "doctor" can mean. Binnie was a qualified medical practitioner before the pregnancy. Nathaniel received an honorary Doctor of Laws in April 1907. That distinction came after the estimated conception and before the birth. In June a newspaper used "Dr" for Nathaniel. If the family recollection specifically meant a practising physician, it points more naturally toward Binnie. If it preserved the title by which a man was known later, Nathaniel remains possible. Laurence's daughter supplied a description, not either man's name.

Age, standing and opportunity. In autumn 1906 Agnes was twenty, Binnie thirty-two and Nathaniel about seventy-six. Nathaniel was a shipping executive with an estate and a public role. His position helps explain why his movements appear in newspapers. It does not establish a relationship or payment. Binnie may have left fewer public traces. Counting articles about one man and comparing that total with silence about the other would exaggerate the difference.

Why Nathaniel leads. One man can be placed in the social setting itself, at a dated function in the relevant year. For the

other, the chain stops at kinship, profession and addresses elsewhere. That is a defensible order for pursuing the two men. It gives no probability of paternity, and the identity of the father could lie outside the Dunlop family.

Dunlop household, 1861 · Dr James Dunlop’s obituary · 1905 college register · 1907 Medical Register · Glasgow newspapers, April 1907 · Naval & Military Record, June 6, 1907 · The London Gazette, July 26, 1907

Follow Agnes through the records

The neighbours. In 1901 Agnes lived with her uncle at Lime Tree Cottage. Mary Archibald, a sewing mistress, was recorded at Gean Tree Cottages. Mary’s brother Alexander, a domestic gardener, headed a household recorded at Shieldhill with his wife Annie and a servant. The census does not say which building the gardener occupied. Similar cottage names six years apart are a reason to track tenants. They do not establish that Mary and Agnes shared a household during the pregnancy.

The birth. Agnes gave birth at nine in the evening on June 14, 1907, at the Royal Maternity Hospital in Edinburgh. She registered Lawrence Brown on July 4. The father’s entry is blank. Autumn 1906 is an estimate from the birth date. A gestational age or an earlier clinical entry could shift that estimate. A summer festival and a winter concert sit on either side of the period that matters most.

Edinburgh. The electoral rolls list a Robert Douglas at 18 Lochrin Place around the time of the birth. In the 1911 census three-year-old Laurence was in the Douglas household at No. 16. Those are strong pieces of the child’s history. They leave the date of his move, the person who arranged his care, and the identity of his father unanswered. Likewise, Nathaniel’s reported

appearances in Glasgow on June 21 and July 2, 1907 concern the registration period, months after the estimated conception.

The family account. Laurence's daughter, Constance Anderson Douglas, told her son that her father's father was a doctor at the estate and that a gardener took him in. Her recollection is preserved in her own right as family testimony. The identification of a gardener and two possible meanings of "doctor" makes her account investigable. It does not establish who took custody of the baby or who fathered him.

1901 Libberton census · Alexander's census entry · Laurence's civil birth entry · Lochrin Place electoral roll · 1911 Douglas household · Family testimony, maps and weather

What would change the finding?

A record from autumn 1906. The first target is a dated household diary, letter, guest book, estate account or local report placing either man and Agnes at the same address in approximately August–October. A long absence documented across that period would weaken that man's case. A shared event would establish an opportunity to meet. A private letter acknowledging a child would carry much greater weight.

An address with a name attached. The 1905–06 and 1906–07 valuation rolls and any surviving rent book could identify the owner and tenant of Gean Cottage. A wage book or hiring agreement naming Agnes could identify her employer. The two records would answer different questions. Class registers or festival membership lists could settle whether she attended. Even proof of attendance would leave the identity of the father open.

Acknowledgment or support. A later correction to the birth entry, a sheriff-court aliment action for child support, or a parish relief application could name a man and state who supplied the information. A claim by the mother, an acknowledgment by a man and a court finding carry different evidential weight. Hospital registers and casebooks for June and July 1907 may reveal admission, discharge or a contact. Their usefulness does not depend on naming the father.

Family DNA. A match to relatives shared by uncle and nephew could support a Dunlop connection while leaving the individual unresolved. Documented descendants of different branches, multiple independent matches and the ability to account for other shared ancestors would matter. Until a record or a discriminating set of matches links an individual to this child, Laurence’s biological father remains unidentified.

Laurence’s civil birth entry · Chronological source register · University of Edinburgh archive catalogue, maternity registers LHB3/14 and casebooks LHB3/16

The wider chronology

1830Nathaniel’s birth year, consistent with his stated age of 31 in the 1861 household

1885Agnes McGarth Brown born, December 18

1891Agnes, five, a few doors from the Archibalds in the Quothquan row

1901Alexander’s household recorded at Shieldhill, Mary at Gean Tree and Agnes at Lime Tree

1902New Year dance in the mansion for servants and villagers, "with their usual generosity"

1903Nathaniel and Ellen build Shieldhill Hall

May 1906Water supply for the houses at Quothquan "belonging to him"

July 11, 1906Girls' Friendly Society festival at Shieldhill; Mr Dunlop welcomes them

Autumn 1906Agnes becomes pregnant (counted back from the birth)

Winter 1906–07Classes in the hall; concert with the laird in the chair

April 23, 1907Nathaniel made an honorary Doctor of Laws: "Dr. Nathaniel Dunlop"

June 14, 1907Lawrence Brown born at the Royal Maternity Hospital, Edinburgh

June 28, 1907Nathaniel named a knight

July 4, 1907Agnes registers her son in Edinburgh, giving her home as Gean Cottage, Shieldhill

1911Laurence, three, with the Douglases at 16 Lochrin Place; Agnes a nurse about a mile away

1919Nathaniel dies. His testament was recorded in 1920.

Companion discussion

Based on the original case presentation by Claude, with subsequent revisions for the family investigation.

Opening statement

On the evidence of his documented appearances, Sir Nathaniel is the first of the two Dunlop men to investigate. His nephew Binnie supplies a second line through his medical qualification. The birth entry names neither man. The Case for Sir Nathaniel Dunlop reviews each dated sighting and the competing interpretations.

Part 1. The family that owned the place where Agnes lived

Sir Nathaniel Dunlop owned Shieldhill, a large country house in Lanarkshire, from 1898. He was knighted in July 1907, one month after Laurence was born.

1861 census, 50 Abbotsford Place, Glasgow: Archibald Dunlop's household includes sons Nathaniel, 31, and James, 27, physician and surgeon. James was the knight's brother.

Binnie Dunlop was born 3 August 1874 to Dr James Dunlop and Jane Menzies Binnie. James's obituary (Glasgow Medical Journal, April 1901) names "Dr. Binnie Dunlop" as his son. Binnie was the knight's nephew. That relationship is proven.

The medical register gave Binnie’s professional address as 16 Carlton Place, Glasgow, through 1907 and Woodford Green from 1908. His former school already listed the Essex address in 1905. These entries cannot date a move or locate him on a particular day.

Part 2. The gardener and his sister

1901 census: Alexander Archibald, 30, domestic gardener at Shieldhill, living there with his wife Annie and a servant. He worked for the Dunlops.

Where the gardener lived (added after review): the 1901 census lists Alexander's household at the address "Shieldhill" itself (Libberton ED 3, schedule 3), not at a lodge or cottage, and the household kept its own live-in servant, Susan Cumisky, 26, which is unusual for a gardener. On census night Sir Nathaniel was in Glasgow, at 1 Montgomerie Crescent, Partick, with his daughter Ellen and seven servants. So in 1901 the gardener's family was the household recorded at Shieldhill while the owner was away, which suggests they may have been living in, or keeping, the house. The census does not say which building they occupied, and no record yet shows the gardener and the knight under the same roof. If they were in the house, the gardener's family would have been the people who knew who came and went at Shieldhill.

Mary Archibald, born 23 October 1864, Alexander's sister, was at Gean Tree Cottages in 1901.

Agnes Brown as a neighbor: in 1891 Agnes, age 5, was listed one household from Alexander and Mary. In 1901 she was at Lime Tree Cottage, close to Mary. The Archibalds had known her since she was a small child.

The two cottage entries. The 1901 census placed Mary Archibald at Gean Tree Cottages and Agnes at Lime Tree Cottage. Agnes gave Gean Cottage as her own address in 1907. A

rental or dated household record is needed to establish whether Mary was still there and whether they lived together.

Laurence's 1907 birth entry: Agnes, domestic servant, gives her home as Gean Cottage, Shieldhill, and signs as the mother. No father is named.

Part 2b. The hall at the heart of the village (added after review)

Distances, measured from map coordinates: Gean Tree Cottage, the home Agnes gave on the birth entry, is about 400 feet in a straight line from Shieldhill Hall, the corrugated-iron hall Nathaniel and Ellen Dunlop put up in 1903 (listed building LB12995, grid reference NS 99544 39695). Shieldhill House, the Dunlops' own house, is about 0.9 mile from the cottage.

The hall was the centre of village life, and the Dunlops were in it in person. The Hamilton Advertiser reported, on December 30, 1905, a lecture given "through the invitation of Mr and Miss Dunlop" and a Christmas party in Shieldhill Hall, "generously entertained by Mr and Miss Dunlop." On April 6, 1907 it reported that "the lady of the manor," Ellen, had for more than a year run winter evening classes in the hall: a lady governess came from Glasgow two days a week to teach the women of the village, the young people learned music and singing, Ellen played the organ, and "some of the farm servants excel in the reading of the notes." At the closing concert, about March 29, 1907, some 200 people from the village and neighbourhood attended, "the laird of Shieldhill himself took the chair, and his daughter presided at the piano." These were routine, reported events, and the young servants of the estate

were part of them, a few hundred yards from Agnes's door, during the months she was pregnant.

The January 4, 1902 Hamilton Advertiser reported a New Year supper and dance inside the mansion for tenants, villagers and estate and house servants. Nathaniel and Ellen were present. The report describes a particular evening. It supplies neither a yearly guest list nor an entry for Agnes.

A festival for working girls at Shieldhill, July 1906. On Wednesday, July 11, 1906, about two months before Agnes became pregnant, the Biggar and Culter branch of the Scotch Girls' Friendly Society held its annual festival at Shieldhill "by the kind invitation of Miss Dunlop" (Hamilton Advertiser, July 21, 1906, page 5, British Newspaper Archive; newspaper clipping). The Girls' Friendly Society was a church society for young working women, many of them domestic servants ("members"), overseen by ladies ("associates"). More than seventy came by carriage from Biggar. Ellen met them at Quothquan and took them to the hall for a short service, and then they all went on to the mansion for tea, walks in the gardens, and boating on the pond. "Mr Dunlop, on his arrival from the city, gave a cordial welcome to all." The report gives no list of names, so it does not show whether Agnes was there. It does show the Dunlops hosting young working women at the house itself, with Nathaniel present, in the summer of 1906.

The village social of March 1906. On Friday, March 9, 1906, the Quothquan Bowling Club held its annual social in the village schoolroom (Hamilton Advertiser, March 17, 1906, page 6, British Newspaper Archive). The paper says nearly every family in the Quothquan district was there, with guests from Libberton,

Thankerton and Biggar, and about seventy sat down to supper. Mr Scott of Eastertown spoke first, and the Rev. Mr Picken of Shieldhill Hall proposed a toast to two members, Mr James Wilson and Mr Walter Frood, who were leaving to start business in Montana. A dance followed, with the music by Mr and Miss Jackson (newspaper clipping). A Mr Jackson was also one of the singers at the 1902 New Year dance in the mansion. The report names no Dunlop, and no one named in it is Agnes. It shows how often the whole village, servants included, gathered together in the year Agnes became pregnant.

The classes were still running in 1910, with a singer from Glasgow. On Tuesday, March 29, 1910, the annual entertainment for the winter evening classes was held in the Quothquan Hall before a crowded audience from the village and neighbourhood, with Sir Nathaniel Dunlop of Shieldhill presiding (Hamilton Advertiser, April 2, 1910, page 6, British Newspaper Archive; newspaper clipping). Mr W. F. Addie of Biggar taught violin. Miss Reid led a choir, and "Miss Reid, of Glasgow" sang several pieces. Miss Dunlop was praised for the great interest she took in the welfare of the locality. Mrs M'Lellan ran the needlework class, the Rev. M. Picken gave an address, and the performers were given supper afterwards. The 1907 report described a governess coming from Glasgow two days a week to teach the classes. Miss Reid of Glasgow may be that teacher, which still needs checking.

The records connect Agnes to a cottage address and a birth in Edinburgh. The questions are who, if anyone, helped her during the pregnancy and how Laurence came into the Douglas household. Neither the gardener nor an estate payment has been established in that chain.

Part 3. The choice of hospital

Most women gave birth at home. National Records of Scotland estimates that about 95% of all births in this period, among rich and poor alike, were home births (National Records of Scotland, "Safe delivery: a history of Scottish midwives"). Agnes had a home: on the birth entry she gave her domicile as Gean Cottage, Shieldhill, the estate owned by the knight, Binnie Dunlop's uncle. She could have given birth there with a local midwife, as most women did. Instead she went about 25 miles to a hospital in another city. That makes the hospital birth itself unusual, before even asking why it was Edinburgh.

Agnes’s recorded destination was Edinburgh. Home delivery, medical advice and personal contacts are among the possibilities to consider. No letter, referral or diary records which choices Agnes considered.

The journey itself (added after review). Going to Edinburgh meant a train trip of roughly 25 miles from the Biggar area, very likely with a change of trains, late in pregnancy. That is a hard and risky journey for a woman close to giving birth, made when a home birth with a local midwife was the normal choice. When Agnes travelled is not yet known. Unmarried women were often admitted to the Edinburgh hospital before labour, for shelter, so she may have gone days or weeks ahead. Either way, the trip took planning. From the Biggar area the line most likely ran on the Caledonian Railway into Edinburgh's Princes Street station, about two-thirds of a mile from the hospital, partly uphill by Lothian Road and Lauriston. Her train time and travel date are not recorded, so the weather on her journey cannot be known. The hospital casebook for June 1907 should give her admission

date, which would show how far ahead the trip was arranged. Three years and ten months later, the baby is living about half a mile from that hospital.

Laurence was born on June 14, 1907, at the Royal Maternity Hospital in Edinburgh. The next civil entry records another unmarried domestic servant who gave birth there. Agnes's own admission and discharge entries may help explain her circumstances. Her choice of city identifies neither a financier nor a father.

Part 4. Where the baby went

1911 census, 16 Lochrin Place, Edinburgh: Elizabeth (Lizzie) Douglas, her daughter Janet, and three-year-old "Laurence B.," recorded as son. Lochrin Place is about 0.2 miles from the maternity hospital.

The gap (added after review): Laurence's whereabouts between his birth in Edinburgh on 14 June 1907 and the census of 2 April 1911 are unknown. No record shows him going back to Shieldhill. What is known is that Agnes was still in Edinburgh on 4 July 1907, twenty days after the birth, when she registered him at St Giles. The weather (Leith observations, found by ChatGPT): on 14 June 1907, the day of the birth at 9 p.m., it was 52°F with three-quarters cloud at 8 a.m. and 59°F and overcast at 6 p.m. On 4 July, the day she registered him, it was 50°F and overcast at 8 a.m. and 49°F with rain at 6 p.m. The registration hour is not recorded. The St Giles registrar was at 24 Forrest Road in the 1907 directories (found by ChatGPT): about 0.41 miles in a straight line from the hospital, and about 0.58 miles from 18 Lochrin Place, both an easy walk. She gave Gean Cottage as her

home, but that is the address she claimed, not proof she went back there, or that the baby did.

No legal adoption existed (added after review): legal adoption did not exist in Scotland until the Adoption of Children (Scotland) Act 1930. Before that, a child could only be handed to another family informally: nothing was filed and the birth entry never changed. That fits the records. Agnes registered him on 4 July 1907 under her own surname, as Lawrence Brown. At home he was Laurence B. Douglas, listed as Lizzie's son in 1911. When he emigrated in 1929 he travelled as Lawrence Brown, because his birth entry was still his only legal identity. The "B." in "Laurence B. Douglas" most likely kept that Brown, his mother's name, inside the name he used every day. The Brown name stayed with him all his life. The likeliest reading is that Agnes handed him to the Douglases directly.

Lizzie's own history: born 31 May 1874 at Gilmerton to Ann McDonald, domestic servant. The entry is marked illegitimate and names no father. She was raised by her grandparents and put their names in the parents' column when she married Robert Douglas in 1899. She had lived the same path Laurence did.

The neighborhood: every address for Lizzie is within a mile of the hospital: 4 Hatton Place (1899), 5 Beaumont Place (1901), 16 Lochrin Place (1911).

Agnes stayed near her son: Agnes did not go back to the estate for good. By 1911 she was a nurse at the Royal Edinburgh Asylum in Morningside. She married Thomas McKay McKenzie there on 28 August 1911, before the same registrar who had recorded Laurence's birth. In 1912 she was at 9 Stewart Terrace, and in 1915 at 62 Balcarres Street (1912 birth; 1915 army

papers). Each of these three places is only about 1.1 to 1.2 miles in a straight line from 16 Lochrin Place, where Laurence was living as Laurence B. Douglas in 1911. Gean Tree Cottage is about 25 miles away. (The Douglases moved to Dunfermline in 1912, so from then on Laurence was farther away.)

Part 5. The witness

Ever since Doug was young, his mother, Laurence's daughter, has said without hesitation that the father was a doctor at the estate, and that a gardener took him in. She said it for decades, long before any of these records were found.

The records identify a gardener and two distinct uses of “doctor”. They leave the identities and actions described by the family account open.

The doctor. There was a doctor in the estate owner's own family: Dr Binnie Dunlop, nephew of Sir Nathaniel Dunlop of Shieldhill.

The gardener. Alexander Archibald’s 1901 household address reads “Shieldhill.” The entry does not specify the building he occupied.

Mary Archibald, the gardener’s sister, lived at Gean Tree Cottages in 1901. Agnes gave Gean Cottage as her own address in 1907. Their proximity is worth investigating. There is no contemporary account of Mary sheltering Agnes or Alexander taking the baby.

The testimony directs the search to people and records. Identifying people who fit a description still leaves their individual roles to be established.

Part 6. The theory of the case

A July 1906 newspaper places Nathaniel welcoming visitors to Shieldhill. Binnie was the estate owner’s nephew. A dated visit by him in 1906 remains unverified.

Agnes, a young servant whose life centred on Shieldhill, became pregnant around September 1906.

Did the Archibald family help Agnes during her pregnancy? The census and the birth registration suggest where to look for an answer.

Agnes delivered her son in Edinburgh. Her reason for going there is unrecorded.

The 1911 census places the boy with Lizzie Douglas. When and through whom he reached her household is unknown.

A possibility to test: in the twenty days between the birth and the registration, Agnes may have stayed with, or visited, the Douglases near the hospital, to see that the baby was going to a safe home, before registering him on 4 July. No record yet shows Agnes there. But the Douglases can now be placed near the hospital at the time: a Robert Douglas, with an occupation matching Lizzie's husband, is listed at 18 Lochrin Place in the Edinburgh electoral rolls for both 1906–07 and 1907–08 (reported by ChatGPT; printed entries being checked). Measured from map coordinates, 18 Lochrin Place is about 0.19 miles (about 330 yards) in a straight line from the hospital door at 79 Lauriston Place, roughly a third of a mile, five to seven minutes, on foot by Lauriston Place and Tollcross. The 1879 hospital building still stands, now a hotel. That is next door to No. 16, where the 1911 census found Laurence, and well under half a

mile from the hospital. The hospital's record of where Agnes went on discharge would test the rest.

Binnie had addresses associated with Glasgow and Essex. Their dates do not establish when he travelled between them.

Part 6b. The case for Sir Nathaniel himself (added November 22, 2026)

Newspaper research since this presentation was first written makes Sir Nathaniel Dunlop, not his nephew, the stronger candidate on the documents.

He was there. The papers place him at Shieldhill among his servants and villagers: the New Year supper and dance in the mansion house for "tenantry, villagers, estate and house servants" (1902); the Girls' Friendly Society festival for young working women at Shieldhill on July 11, 1906, where "Mr Dunlop, on his arrival from the city, gave a cordial welcome to all," about two months before Agnes became pregnant; and the hall concert he chaired in 1907. No record yet places Binnie at Shieldhill at all.

The 1906 water-supply report establishes Nathaniel’s ownership of houses at Quothquan. It does not identify the proprietor or tenant of Gean Cottage by name.

His honorary law degree dates to April 1907, after the estimated conception. Newspapers later styled him “Dr”. Binnie held a medical qualification. The family recollection leaves both interpretations open.

His positions in shipping and the Clyde Trust attest to his means. No account, receipt or letter identifies a payment on Agnes’s behalf.

Against him: he was about 76 in the autumn of 1906 (he was 31 in the 1861 census). The papers place him in Glasgow on June 21 and July 2, 1907, and nowhere yet in Edinburgh during Agnes's stay there.

Part 7. What the defense would say

No record puts Binnie at Shieldhill or near Agnes. This is the biggest gap.

Estate gardeners lived on the estate. That was his job. The census gives the address as Shieldhill, not which building.

Agnes was the Archibalds' neighbor for 16 years. That Mary supervised the pregnancy is a reasonable guess, but no record says it.

Other men were at Shieldhill: the knight, staff, visitors, men in the village. The records name none of them either way.

The birth register itself shows Agnes was not unusual at that hospital: the very next entry, six days later, is another unmarried domestic servant who also delivered there. Unmarried servants going to the Edinburgh hospital was a known path.

Edinburgh has innocent explanations: a large teaching hospital that took unmarried women, distance from Agnes's own community, or a referral by a church, employer or midwife.

Doctors moved to England for jobs and marriages.

The family account is secondhand and over a century old. "A doctor" could describe many men.

The "B" in "Laurence B." most likely stands for Brown, his mother's surname, not Binnie.

No record yet shows how Agnes's side connected to Lizzie's side.

Part 8. Assessment

Sir Nathaniel is the stronger of the two estate leads because of the contemporary record of his presence. Binnie has the closer occupational fit. Neither man has a documented meeting with Agnes, and Laurence’s father remains unidentified.

Part 9. Records that could settle it

DNA: an autosomal test from Laurence's daughter, his closest living relative, compared against descendants of the Dunlop and Binnie families.

Royal Maternity Hospital register, June 1907 (Lothian Health Services Archive): referral, prior address, and who received the baby.

The hospital Register of Births (LHSA, LHB3/14): it can record where each mother went after the birth. Agnes's line could show where she, and perhaps the baby, went next.

Barbara Shirra, entry 840: another unmarried domestic servant, who delivered six days after Agnes and registered her daughter on the same day (4 July 1907, consecutive entries 839 and 840). Barbara was Edinburgh-born and in 1901 was a pupil at Dr Guthrie's Original Industrial School for Girls, which trained girls for domestic service and placed them in jobs. The school's registers (National Records of Scotland, GD425) could show where it placed her, and whether that was near Agnes or Lizzie. This is a lead into the servant network, not evidence of one.

A paternity decree: a sheriff-court action for support may appear as a Register of Corrected Entries note on Laurence's birth entry.

Poor law records: parish relief files often named the alleged father.

Kirk session minutes, Libberton and Quothquan: churches often recorded the man's name.

Shieldhill estate papers and the local press, 1906: guests, family visits, Binnie's movements.

Binnie's letters to Marie Stopes, 1916–1945, British Library Add MS 58564.

Conclusion: the evidence justifies a full investigation. It does not yet justify a conclusion.