

JAMES FERGUSON REMEMBERED

Clive Davenhall

Information Services, Applications Division, The University of Edinburgh,
Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL, UK.
e-mail: acd@staffmail.ed.ac.uk

Abstract: The year 2010 marked the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of the astronomer, author and lecturer James Ferguson (1710–1776). Subsequently I visited the site of the churchyard where Ferguson is buried. He is mentioned in a plaque on the site and I thought that the details might be of interest.

Keywords: James Ferguson, London, Marylebone High Street, the Old Church Garden

1 THE OLD CHURCH GARDEN IN MARYLEBONE HIGH STREET, LONDON

James Ferguson died in London on 16 November 1776 (Davenhall, 2010). John Millburn, his most recent biographer, notes that he was buried in Old Marylebone churchyard, adjoining the Old Church in Marylebone High Street. Neither the church nor the churchyard survives. The church was demolished in 1949 and most of the churchyard is now a school playground. However, part of the churchyard was converted to a public garden, the ‘Old Church Garden’, and a plaque there lists several notable people buried in the churchyard, including Ferguson (Millburn and King, 1988: 250).

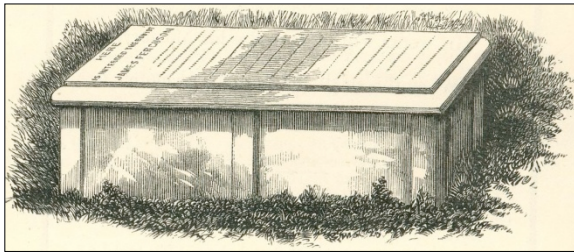


Figure 1: The sketch of James Ferguson's tomb included in Ebenezer Henderson's *Life of James Ferguson* (1867).

Of Ferguson's tomb there is, of course, now no sign. Fortunately Ferguson's first biographer, Ebenezer Henderson, included a sketch in his biography (see Figure 1) and recorded the inscription, which is reproduced in both his own book (Henderson, 1867) and by Millburn and King (1988: 251). Henderson also commissioned a wooden model of the tomb, but this is no longer extant (see Millburn and King, 1988: 316, note 5).

Writing in 1988 Millburn noted that the "... inscription, though not yet 40 years old, is already barely readable." (Millburn and King, 1988: 250). Perhaps it has been re-inscribed because I am pleased to report that the plaque, and the others in the garden, are now perfectly legible.

I visited the Old Church Garden, Marylebone in October 2010 by chance. I was in London on other business and in Marylebone High Street by accident. I saw the sign for the garden, went in, found the plaque and returned the following day to take photographs. The plaque commemorates "... some notable people buried here ...", including "James Fergu-



Figure 2: The plaque in the Old Church Garden off Marylebone High Street commemorating notable individuals, including Ferguson, buried in the churchyard.

son Astronomer 1776". Figure 2 shows the plaque and Figure 3 a view of the Garden. Both were taken on Sunday 24 October 2010.



Figure 3: A view of the Old Church Garden off Marylebone High Street.

2 REFERENCES

- Davenhall, C., 2010. James Ferguson: a commemoration. *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 13, 179-186.
- Henderson, E., 1867. *Life of James Ferguson, FRS, In a Brief Autobiographical Account and Further Extended Memoir*. Edinburgh. Modern reprint: 2010, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Millburn, J.R. in collaboration with King, H.C., 1988. *Wheelwright of the Heavens: The Life and Work of James Ferguson*. London, Vade-Mecum Press.

Clive Davenhall is currently a software developer in Information Services, Applications Division at the University of Edinburgh. Previously he was for many years an astronomical computer programmer at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh. He has a long-standing interest in the history of astronomy. He has contributed book reviews to the *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*

and entries to the *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Astronomers*. He was a Founder Member of the Society for the History of Astronomy in 2002 and has edited its *Bulletin* (previously *Newsletter*) since 2004. He is a member of the IAU Working Group for the Preservation and Digitisation of Photographic Plates.