

THE GIBB FAMILY LUGHT-THIE GIBB

Born in Greenock, Scotland, in 1792, Duncan Gibb arrived in the booming port of Liverpool in the 1810s alongside many of his countrymen, hoping to flourish through Liverpool's prosperity.

Working as an agent for ship owners Pollock, Gilmour & Co he was shipwrecked in 1812 in the North Atlantic and press-ganged by privateers, until he and his crew managed to overthrow their captors and were rescued by *HMS Queen Charlotte*. After this he travelled to Canada, but after setting sail for England the vessel got trapped in ice in the Gulf of St Lawrence. The crew were rescued by local people, and spent the winter on a remote island, dressed in seal skins and surviving on seal meat.

While he continued to conduct lucrative business for Pollock, Gilmour & Co, by 1821 Duncan was in business for himself, owning the ship *Sir Howard Douglas* and the brigs *Industry* and *Commerce*.

He was soon building two ships a year, trading with Quebec and Nova Scotia, and by 1830 he was a hugely prominent figure in the shipping world. One of his friends was Canadian merchant Samuel Cunard, who founded the shipping company that would go on to become the Cunard Line.

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'A summer escape in the countryside of the Isle of Man... must have seemed like a fine idea to the ship owner.'



That same year he married Janet Blake in Liverpool, her family descended from Robert Blake, one of England's most famous admirals. The early 1830s saw Duncan expand into Africa and the Far East.

It was 1838 when Duncan spotted the cottage at Poplar Grove and so began the Gibb family's close affinity with the town of Ramsey and the surrounding area. Liverpool at the time wasn't the healthiest place to live, with regular outbreaks of cholera. A summer escape in the countryside of the Isle of Man, across the Irish Sea, must have seemed like a fine idea to the ship owner.

Duncan and Janet had four girls - Elizabeth, Catherine, Janet and Mary - before they bought the Grove, with their fifth child, a boy called Duncan, arriving in 1839. The children spent the summers of their youth in the Isle of Man, as shown by the 1841 census for Lezayre, which records the Grove as a holiday home and counts the family as living there, along with an English governess, two maids (one Scottish and one English), and an English manservant. The census also mentions a Scot, Robert Ross, who may have looked after the property when the Gibbs were in Liverpool.

Two years later, a second son, James, was born, but he died just months later while the family were on holiday in the Island. He was buried at St Mary's Chapel, Ballure, just south of Ramsey.

By the 1850s, Duncan had turned his attention to investing in Manx property. He bought a small field alongside the Grove in order to square off 'the park'; and two small fields across the road. He rented property and land at Ballachrink, to the south-east nearer to Ramsey, along with three acres at the Dhoor in Andreas, north of Ramsey.

This gave him 12 acres of land to farm immediately around the Grove, and a further 25 acres at Ballachrink, which he later purchased. He then started buying properties and farms around the Island, including 616 acres in Lonan.

Top far left - The family outside on a summer's day, wearing typical Victorian dress

Below far left - The Gibb sisters, Alice and Janet, with their mother and brother William

Below left - An early photograph of the drawing room, around 1880. Many of the objects in this view are still present

Below - The Gibb sisters later in life



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Duncan, who reports say twice declined a knighthood, retired from shipping in 1862, selling the family home in Liverpool and taking up permanent residence at the Grove.

He lived there for just five years, enjoying the life of a gentleman farmer, until his death in 1867, when he joined his baby son in the graveyard at Ballure.

Following Duncan's death, his widow - Granny Janet - became head of the house, living at the Grove with her two daughters, Auntie Janet and Aunt Mary, son Duncan, and her sister Mary Ralph, who was known to the family as 'Aunt Ralph'.

In 1877, Duncan Jnr, who had been invalided home from India where he had worked for the East India Company, married Sara Ann Turnbull in Port Erin and they had two

daughters, Janet Ann (born 1878) and Alice (born 1880), and a son, William (born 1886).

Duncan had never fully recovered from his ill-health and he passed away in 1887, leaving his wife with two small girls and a baby boy. With no suitable school for the girls to attend in Port Erin, Granny Janet suggested that if her daughter-in-law would entrust the girls to her care, she would employ a governess to oversee their education. This left Sara time to earn a living and focus her attention on raising baby William, who went on to attend King William's College in Castletown and pursue a career at sea.

Below left – 'Granny' Gibb (1809-1897). The matriarch of the family, she oversaw the Gibb sisters' childhood

Below right – Alice Gibb (1880-1971). Although she was the younger of the two sisters, she was perhaps the more adventurous



GIBB FAMILY CHRONOLOGY

1700s

1792 - Duncan Gibb born in Greenock, Scotland

1830 - Marries Janet Blake of Liverpool

1837 - Queen Victoria ascends the throne

1838 - Duncan visits the Isle of Man and buys Poplar Grove cottage

1840 - The Gibb family start spending summers in the Isle of Man, with the cottage renamed 'the Grove'

1862 - Duncan sells his business to protégé Donald Kennedy and retires to the Grove

1867 - Duncan dies, aged 75; His widow, Granny Janet, becomes family matriarch, living at the Grove with her sister Aunt 'Ralph' and her two unmarried daughters, Aunt Mary and Auntie Janet

1800s

1877 - Duncan Gibb Jnr marries Sara Ann Turnbull and they go to live on Calf of Man

1878 - Janet Gibb born at Port Erin

1880 - Alice Gibb born at Port Erin

1887 - The Grove becomes Janet and Alice's permanent home after their father Duncan Gibb Jnr dies

1892 - Death of Aunt Mary

1897 - Death of Granny Janet; Auntie Janet becomes head of house

1900s

1901 - Queen Victoria dies, succeeded by her son, Edward VII

1914 - World War I starts, with Alice Gibb volunteering for work at the Chilwell Munitions Factory

1933 - Death of Auntie Janet; Gibb sisters continue to live at the Grove

1971 - Death of Alice Gibb

1974 - Death of Janet Gibb

1976 - Ownership of the Grove transfers to Manx National Heritage

1978 - The site opens to the public as the Grove Rural Life Museum