

**William Simpson's Burial Ground
at St Ninians Glebe**

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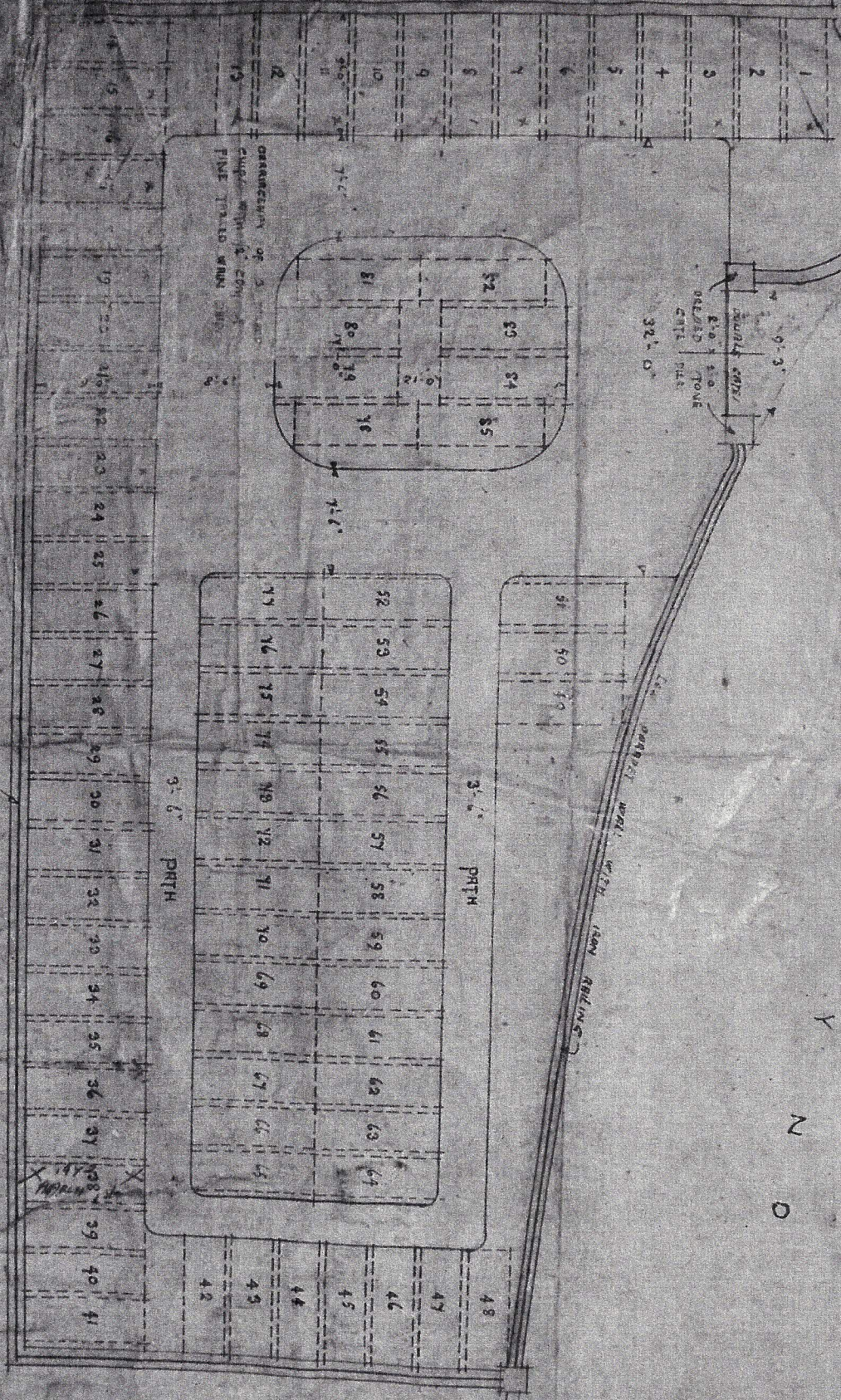
Frontispiece

William Simpson's Burial Ground (3 March 2015)

Proposed layout of William Simpson's Burial Ground (1934)



PERPET WALL WITH PLAIN W/ RAILING



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1. Introduction

This ground was used for the burial of deceased residents of William Simpson's Asylum, Plean, from 1934 until 1974. There are no identifying marks and no gravestones for any of the 75 persons buried there, although the south wall does contain one privately inserted memorial plaque. In this article I will outline the history of the ground and provide a list of those buried in it.

The principal materials which I have consulted in preparing this article are listed at the end under References. Individual items are referred to in the text by the number of the item in my list of references enclosed in square brackets. I am most grateful to the staff at William Simpons, Stirling University Archives, and Stirling Council Archives for giving me access to items which they hold and for allowing me to make extracts and to quote from them.

2. Historical background

William Simpson's Asylum opened in June 1836. It was established by the will of Francis Simpson of Plean (1760–1831) as a memorial to his son William, who died in 1827 aged just 22 years. Money and other resources were left for the Asylum, which was to be

‘for the reception residence and entertainment of indigent or reduced men of advanced age who may be destitute of the means of subsistence and incapable of procuring these means by industry recommending in preference persons who may have served in the Navy or Army.’⁽¹⁾

Simpson's Trustees were also anxious for the spiritual well-being of their charges and to this end were largely responsible for the establishment of Plean Church, which opened officially in March 1839.

Some deceased residents were buried privately but in most cases responsibility for their burial lay with the Trustees. As part of the original feu charter lairs in the churchyard at Plean had to be set aside for this purpose and burial ground was to be provided indefinitely for the Asylum's use. However, by the late 1920s burial space at Plean was running out with no possibility of extending the churchyard. The Trustees then purchased some lairs at St Ninians Parish Burial Ground, Bannockburn, where 14 deceased residents were buried between 1928 and 1933. Early in 1930 the Trustees proposed to purchase a block of 42 lairs at Bannockburn, but this was turned down by St Ninians

⁽¹⁾ Extract from Francis Simpson's will. The term *Asylum* was later replaced by *Home*. The institution continues today with a broader remit and is now known simply as *William Simpons*.

Parish Council, who would only offer 21 lairs. Their next scheme was to investigate the 'acquisition of part of the St Ninians Glebe Field adjacent to St Ninians Burial Ground' ([4] 12 March 1930).⁽²⁾

Following negotiations with the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland, the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane, and Stirling Town Council, who had also been interested in acquiring part of the Glebe, and 'sinking trial pits and testing' of the ground, the Trustees purchased from the General Trustees an area of about .425 acre at St Ninians Glebe, for which they paid £93:10:–. As a condition of the sale the portion to be used for the burial ground (just over a quarter) had to be enclosed by walls and railings; this cost a further £297:13:6, towards which Stirling Town Council contributed the sum of £107:11:–.⁽³⁾ At their meeting on 6 June 1933 the Trustees recorded that the ground was now ready for use. The first burial took place on 14 May 1934 and the last appears to have been on 29 March 1974, following which burials reverted to Bannockburn.

A plan of the ground, which was prepared in 1934 by architect and surveyor Wilson T. Stewart of Dundee for the Trustees, shows how they intended the ground to be used to provide 85 lairs (see second frontispiece photograph)⁽⁴⁾ – in the event, only odd-numbered lairs from 1 to 33 and even-numbered lairs 2, 4 and possibly 36 appear to have been used. The long south wall measures about 100' while the side walls measure about 36' (east) and 52' (west). With a little elementary surveying it should be possible to locate an individual from the lair number.

There are many entries in the Trustees' Minutes [4] which relate to the matters discussed above; here is a list of most of the relevant dates:

29/12/1926, 28/3/1927, 18/5/1928, 10/2/1930, 12/3/1930, 21/3/1930, 2/4/1930, 30/6/1930, 11/7/1930, 15/12/1930, 21/7/1931, 9/11/1931, 8/12/1931, 31/3/1932, 26/5/1932, 15/7/1932, 8/12/1932, 24/3/1933, 6/6/1933, 26/7/1933, 2/2/1934, 18/7/1934, 2/6/1936, 16/12/1936, 15/6/1937.

The Minutes of meetings of the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane also contain some relevant material: see [9] 10/3/1931, 14/7/1931, 8/9/1931, 10/11/1931.

(2) This refers to ground at St Ninians Old Parish Church. As stipulated in Francis Simpson's will, its minister, at this time the Rev. Edward Jones, was one of the Trustees.

(3) This payment by the Council was to allow them to proceed with proposed roadworks which would affect the Trustees' ground.

(4) This comes from [12]. There is a much larger and more elaborate plan [2], which has been annotated with the names of those buried up to 25/5/1945.

3. List of persons buried in William Simpson's Ground

The following list has been compiled from Stirling Cemeteries Register of Burials (1929–1999) [11] supplemented by information from records maintained at William Simpson's Asylum [1]. The information contained in the first four columns comes from [11], while that in the last two is from [1], with some amplification/correction from the other in both cases. The name of the undertaker can also be found in [11]. The place of death is recorded in [1]: Asylum/Home/Plean (synonymous) or Stirling Royal Infirmary, which are indicated in the table below by H or S respectively; in some cases [1] also supplies the date of death. The date given in the first column below is presumably the date of registration, which may differ from the date of death or the date of burial; it therefore seems desirable to include the three date columns. Names which appear in [11] but not in [1] are marked with (*); all of these have been located in [3] and/or [6]. It is curious that there is one case which appears in [1] but not in [11]. Of course, a blank in any column means that the relevant information was not found in either [1] or [11]. Some of the lair numbers given in [11] for later burials are suspect (see my footnotes). It is possible that [1] was in part constructed retrospectively from other records. Anyone interested in details of particular individuals should also consult [3] and [6].

Date	Name	Age	Lair	Died	Buried
1934 May 14	Wilson, William	65	1	H	14/5/34
1934 August 31	Paterson, William	70	1	S	1/9/34
1934 September 7	Morrison, Henry	67	1	H	7/9/34
1934 November 15	McDonald, Adam	79	1	H	15/11/34
1935 March 21	Swift, Frank	76	3	H	22/3/35
1935 April 6	McQuilken, Archibald	76	3	H	6/4/35
1935 September 23	Martin, W. ⁽⁵⁾	69	3	H	21/9/35
1935 December 30	Lawrie, Thomas	68	3	S	30/12/35
1936 March 2	MacFarlane, John	78	3	H	2/3/36
1936 March 23	Hamilton, John	75	5	H	23/3/36
1937 February 24	Graham, Andrew	82	5	H	24/2/37
1937 March 8	Duncan, Alexander	74	5	H	8/3/37
1937 March 30	Mitchell, George	88	5	H	30/3/37
1937 May 18	Melrose, James	66	5	H	19/5/37
1937 June 22	Brown, James	80	7	H	22/6/37
1937 September 29	Landels, Charles A.	71	7	H	29/6/37
1937 November 5	Neil, Rankine ⁽⁶⁾	93	9	H, 3/11/38	5/11/38
1938 April 15	Monkhouse, George	83	7 ⁽⁷⁾	H	15/4/38
1938 December 12	McGregor, Alexander	80	9	H, 7/12/38	10/12/38
1940 February 10	Palmer, William	66	9	H, 8/2/40	10/2/40
1940 February 20	Chalmers, William	70	9	H, 18/2/40	20/2/40
1940 October 29	Dunn, John ⁽⁸⁾	84	11	H, 27/11/40	29/11/40
1940 November 19	Guthrie, David	87	11	H, 17/11/40	19/11/40
1941 April 14	Robertson, William ⁽⁹⁾	76	11	H, 11/4/41	11/4/41

⁽⁵⁾ This entry in [11] has been amended by pasting over the original. The name of the deceased is given there as David Stewart, but this is the name of the undertaker.

⁽⁶⁾ Note that [11] gives the year as 1937 while [1] gives it as 1938. Since entries in [11], which covers several cemeteries, are alphabetical and then chronological, it is hard to see how [11] could have the wrong year. However, it is surprising that Lair 9 was used when Lair 7 had only been used twice, especially as the next burial (Monkhouse) was done in Lair 7. Lair 7 appears to have been problematic: it is recorded in [1] that it was 'full' after just 3 burials with the note: 'could not get deep enough for (4)'.

⁽⁷⁾ This appears as 7? in [11]. Perhaps the anomaly of Lair 7 reappearing was noted (see footnote (6)).

⁽⁸⁾ Note that [1] gives the month as November, but this would not be in sequence with the next burial.

⁽⁹⁾ Wm. Robertson appears twice in [1], once in Lair 9 and once in Lair 11, but with

Date	Name	Age	Lair	Died	Buried
1942 July 28	Andrews, George G.	57	11	H, 25/7/42	27/7/42
1943 January 11	Robertson, Peter C.	75	13	S, 7/1/43	
1943 December 17	Scammell, Henry	83	13	H, 15/12/43	
1944 November 28	Austen, Henry P.	90	13	H, 24/11/44	
1945 February 27	Dawson, James	82	13	H	27/2/45
1945 May 21	Smith, James	75	15	H	21/5/45
1945 May 24	Livingston, Robert	89	15	H	24/5/45
1946 February 15	Johnston, William Christie	77	15	H	15/2/46
	Bayne, John D. ⁽¹⁰⁾	75	15	H, 23/8/47	25/8/47
1948 March 26	McKenzie, John M. ⁽¹¹⁾	53	17	S	27/3/48
1948 September 27	Dudgeon, William L.	77	17	H	27/9/48
1950 April 26	Diamond, James	82	17	S	26/4/50
1950 December 27	Ross, Alexander	72	17		27/12/50
1951 April 5	McQueen, Alexander	92	19	H	6/4/51
1952 February 26	McKillop, Ronald	69	19	H	26/2/52
1952 April 14	Wright, William	89	19	H	14/4/52
1952 May 8	McInnes, Hugh ^(*)	75	19		
1952 October 17	Towers, Alexander ^(*)	81	21		
1953 July 30	Sloey, Peter ^(*)	72	21		
1953 October 15	Simpson, James D. ⁽¹²⁾	85	21	S	15/10/53
1954 January 4	Brogan, Edward	71	21	H	4/1/54
1955 March 1	Kennedy, Ralph W. ⁽¹³⁾	71	23	H	1/3/55
1955 April 26	Ogilvie, David	82	23	H	26/4/55
1956 February 8	Hervie, Peter	80	23	H	8/2/56
1956 February 23	Marshall, John	77	25	S	23/2/56
1957 January 3	Somerville, James Scott	81	25	H	3/1/57
1958 January 21	Preston, Francis	58	25	H	21/1/58
1959 February 17	Devereux, Howard	88	25	H	17/2/59
1959 February 23	Cahill, William	66	27	S	23/2/59
1959 July 1	Kendrick, Samuel	88	27	H, 28/6/59	
1959 September 19	Young, Robert	81	27	H	19/9/59
1959 October 12	Jude, Jerimiah	84	27	S	12/10/59

11/4/41 as date of death in both cases.

⁽¹⁰⁾ I have found no trace of this entry in [11]. Some details are taken from [6].

⁽¹¹⁾ Mackenzie in [1].

⁽¹²⁾ Named as Simpson, David in [1].

⁽¹³⁾ This entry has the title Captain in [1]. He was a Master Mariner [6].

Date	Name	Age	Lair	Died	Buried
1960 September 9	Coghlan, Michael ⁽¹⁴⁾	67	29	H, 8/9/60	9/9/60
1960 October 31	Norton, Hugh ^(*)	80	29		
1960 December 23	Downie, James	80	29	H, 21/12/60	23/12/60
1961 May 27	Sturt, George		29	H, 23/5/61	27/5/61
1961 November 17	Silk, Benjamin Henry	86	31 ⁽¹⁵⁾	H, 15/11/61	17/11/61
1962 February 16	Roper, Ernest A.	76	31 ⁽¹⁵⁾	H, 13/2/62	
1963 January 7	Whelan, Peter	82	? ⁽¹⁶⁾	H, 3/1/63	7/1/63
1963 May 1	Alexander, William	75	33 ⁽¹⁷⁾	S, 27/4/63	1/5/63
1964 July 10	McInnes, Neil ^(*)	74			
1964 July 28	Carse, Daniel Fraser ^(*)	88			
1965 February 20	Drummond, Colin	67	4 ⁽¹⁸⁾	S	20/2/65
1965 April 2	Muir, Andrew	68	3 ⁽¹⁹⁾	S	2/4/65
1965 September 25	Kemp, James ^(*)	88	4		
1968 October 3	Heblik, Augustyn ⁽²⁰⁾	69	2	S, 29/9/68	3/10/68
1969 April 15	Hutchison, John	85	2	H, 10/4/69	15/4/69
1969 May 2	Thoms, Robert	70	2	H, 29/4/69	2/5/69
1972 March 1	Steele, James ^(*)	70	36		
1972 August 28	Irvine, James ^(*)	84			
1974 March 29	Elliot, Andrew ^(*)	78			

⁽¹⁴⁾ Coughlan in [1].

⁽¹⁵⁾ The lair number is given as 30 in [1], which seems unlikely given the practice of using odd numbered lairs.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The lair number is given as 7 in [11] and 30 in [1]; it should probably be 31. Also, in [1] this entry appears before that of Roper, although the dates are as given here.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The lair number is given as 31 in [1].

⁽¹⁸⁾ The lair number is given as 2 in [1].

⁽¹⁹⁾ The lair number is given as 2 in [1], which is probably correct, since Lair 3 already held 5 persons.

⁽²⁰⁾ Augustine in [1]. The lair number is given as 5 in [11], which cannot be correct.

4. Some other relevant information

From the start the Trustees arranged for the council staff who tended the main cemetery at St Ninians Old Parish Church to look after their ground. In 1971, for example, they paid the Council £7.50 for their work, which was not always sufficient: for example, it is recorded in [8] (4 May 1972) that the Home Gardener was to 'do up and rake over the ground at the Graveyard.'

Throughout the eight years or so that I have been aware of the Simpson Ground, one of the stone pillars on which its gates are mounted has been out of position. I was therefore interested to read in [8] (11 March 1972) that 'a vehicle had evidently struck one of the gateposts at the entrance and it was now off its hinges.' The estimated cost of repair (£28) was considered excessive and it was decided to 'get the mason who works at the church to square up the gatepost' ([8] 4 May 1972).

It was noted above that the Ground is quite anonymous and contains just one memorial plaque; this commemorates Benjamin Henry Silk (1875–1961) (see listing above).⁽²¹⁾ The Trustee's Minutes record a request from Mrs Weston, daughter of Mr Silk, 'to erect a stone in the Home's private burial ground in memory of her late father' ([7] 27 November 1961). At this time they also gave some consideration to erecting a general monument to those buried there which would also serve to identify the Ground. However, this idea was abandoned for financial reasons and Mrs Weston was allowed to proceed with her plan subject to their approving of her design ([7] 29/1/1962, 9/11/1962, 4/2/1963). The position of the plaque seems to be consistent with Mr Silk's being in Lair 31 rather than Lair 30 (see footnote (15)).

The costs of running the Asylum/Home were becoming increasingly onerous from the late 1950s and economies were being sought. It appears that the Trustees tried first to sell the Ground to Stirling Town Council and, when this proposal was rejected, to hand it over to the Council without charge provided the Council paid the legal expenses and the right of their residents to be buried there was preserved ([7] 16 July 1959); again they were refused ([7] 8 February 1960).

Little seems to have been made of the rest of the land purchased by the Trustees at St Ninians. Because it was not fenced off from the rest of the Glebe, the two parts had to be rented out together, but plans to do this appear to have fallen through. The

⁽²¹⁾ As an illustration of the information available in [3] and [6] I note: Mr Silk was born on 1 March 1875 in the Parish of Bermondsey; he had two children and was twice a widower; he was a civilian and worked as a tailor's cutter; he was admitted to the Home on 29 March 1954, apparently from a Glasgow hospital, having resided in Springburn.

Trustees' Minutes record an application from a local man, Mr Boyd, to have the use of the ground 'for grazing or keeping poultry' ([5] 28 January 1947). This was agreed provided Mr Boyd enclosed the area at his own expense; he was to have it rent-free for 2 years and then at £2 per annum or as negotiated. Stirling Council did acquire a portion of the unused ground in connection with the construction of the inner relief road (A9, Burghmuir Road), paying the Trustees £50 ([7] 4 February 1963).

A curious matter exercised the Trustees and the Kirk Session of St Ninians Old Parish Church for much of the 1960s. At the Trustee's meeting on 27 November 1961 the minister, Mr Dick,⁽²²⁾ sounded out the Trustees on 'whether they might be prepared to consider conveying a small part of the ground at St Ninians Church on terms to be adjusted to enlarge the car park in connection with the Church', to which 'the Trustees agreed to give favourable consideration' [7]. The matter was discussed from time to time, a suitable portion of ground was identified, the parties agreed, lawyers were brought in, but then, by May 1969, the Kirk Session had decided not to proceed with the acquisition. Their decision is recorded in both sets of Minutes, but no reason is given. See: [7] 27/11/61, 21/7/64, 10/8/67, 5/2/68, 12/6/68, 17/7/68, 13/2/69, 14/7/69; [10] 7/6/64, 15/3/65, 27/4/65, 14/9/67, 6/6/68, 13/3/69, 15/5/69.

5. A question

I have found no record of the Trustees' decision to abandon use of their Burial Ground at St Ninians in 1974. Why did they do this? The plan shows the ground laid out with 85 lairs and their usual practice was to commit up to five individuals to a lair, which should have ensured adequate space for a further 70 to 100 years or more.

In connection with the parking proposal, 'Mr Dick mentioned that part of the burial ground adjacent to St Ninians Church was very wet and unsuitable for committal purposes' ([7] 27 November 1961). As footnote (6) suggests, parts of the ground may have had underlying rocks which would have prevented full exploitation. Such problems may have influenced the decision, but I wonder if the development of the road system in Stirling was a decisive factor. In particular, the inner relief road, which opened in 1965, passes within a few yards of the Ground (see first frontispiece photograph), disturbing the pastoral setting of peace and tranquility which had endured there for many years.

⁽²²⁾ Rev. David Dick was minister at St Ninians from 1940 until 1968 and *ex officio* a Trustee.

References

At the time of writing there is an on-going programme at Stirling University Archives to catalogue and conserve the papers of William Simpson's Asylum/Home; the Simpson material listed below is currently located at the University.

William Simpson's Asylum/Stirling University Archives material

1. (WS/1) Burial Ground St Ninians Glebe, record of burials (1934–1969).
2. (WS/2) (Among other papers) A colour plan of the burial ground of the Asylum's inmates at St Ninians Glebe.
3. (WS/12) Particulars of inmates (1900–1968).
4. (WS/28) Minutes of the meetings of the Trustees of Pleant Trust (Sederunt Book No 4, Pleant Trust)(1923–1938).
5. (WS/34) Minutes of the meetings of the Trustees of Pleant Trust (Sederunt Book No 5, Pleant Trust)(1939–1957).
6. (WS/38) Descriptive roll of inmates (1836–1968).
7. (WS/39) Minutes of the meetings of the Trustees of Pleant Trust (Sederunt Book No 6, Pleant Trust)(1957–1972).
8. (WS/40) Minutes of the meetings of the Trustees of Pleant Trust (Sederunt Book No 7, Pleant Trust)(1972–1978).

Stirling Council Archives material

9. Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane Minutes, (1929–1934); CH2/722/33.
10. St Ninians Kirk Session Minutes, (1959–1970); CH2/337/67.
11. Stirling Cemeteries Register of Burials 1929–1999; PR/SG/7/6–8.
12. [St Ninians] William Simpson Asylum Lairs, 1934; MP/ST/72.

Other material

Francis Simpson's will (Inventory; extract registered trust disposition and settlement; codicil) is available through ScotlandsPeople (SC67/36/13).

— *Finis.* —

(July 2019)