

# William Stuart 1820-1888

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## Fishing net manufacturer

According to archaeological findings in early settlements, fishing has been an important activity in Scotland since around 7000 BC. Fishing net weaving is one of the country's oldest crafts. The invention of a machine to manufacture fishing nets, patented by Colonel J Paterson in 1812, revolutionised the production of nets. Paterson set up a net manufacturing company in Musselburgh in 1820.



In 1849, **William Stuart** and his older brother John bought Paterson's firm and patent from his estate. By 1869, in a new factory at Esk Mills covering 400 acres and employing around 800 spinners and weavers, J & W Stuart were said to be the main net makers in Scotland. Over the years, the company expanded successfully in Britain and overseas. During the Second World War, the company made anti-submarine net defences. External factors led to closure of many branches in the 1970s. In 1983 the firm, now Stuart/Bridport Gundry Co, moved to a new factory at Inveresk on the site of the old factory's drying green. A management buy-out in 1993 brought back the renowned family name of J & W Stuart Ltd. The company moved to Eyemouth in the Scottish Borders in 1998 but was dissolved in 2012.

William Stuart was born in Edinburgh in 1820 to wine merchant Alexander Stuart (1793-1873) and Mary Simpson (1792-1849). He was the second of three sons and one daughter.

William's marriage in 1855 to Susan Anne Bridges (1825-1868) of Baltimore led to seven children. On Susan's death, William commissioned sculptor Robert Thompson (1828-1894) to create the striking Palm Tree memorial with its carved traditional Egyptian false door, to allow the spirits of the deceased to leave, and its obelisks, deliberately broken off to represent lives cut short.

William's monument commemorates five of his children, a daughter-in-law and four grandsons, three of whom had military careers, one cut tragically short at the age of 20 in 1918 in action in France and another at the age of 34 on active service in 1940 in Israel.

Three plots to the west of William Stuart's is a memorial stone that includes William's parents, two of his siblings and a great-nephew in the Cameron Highlanders who was killed in 1916, aged 21, in an aeroplane crash near Corstorphine.