

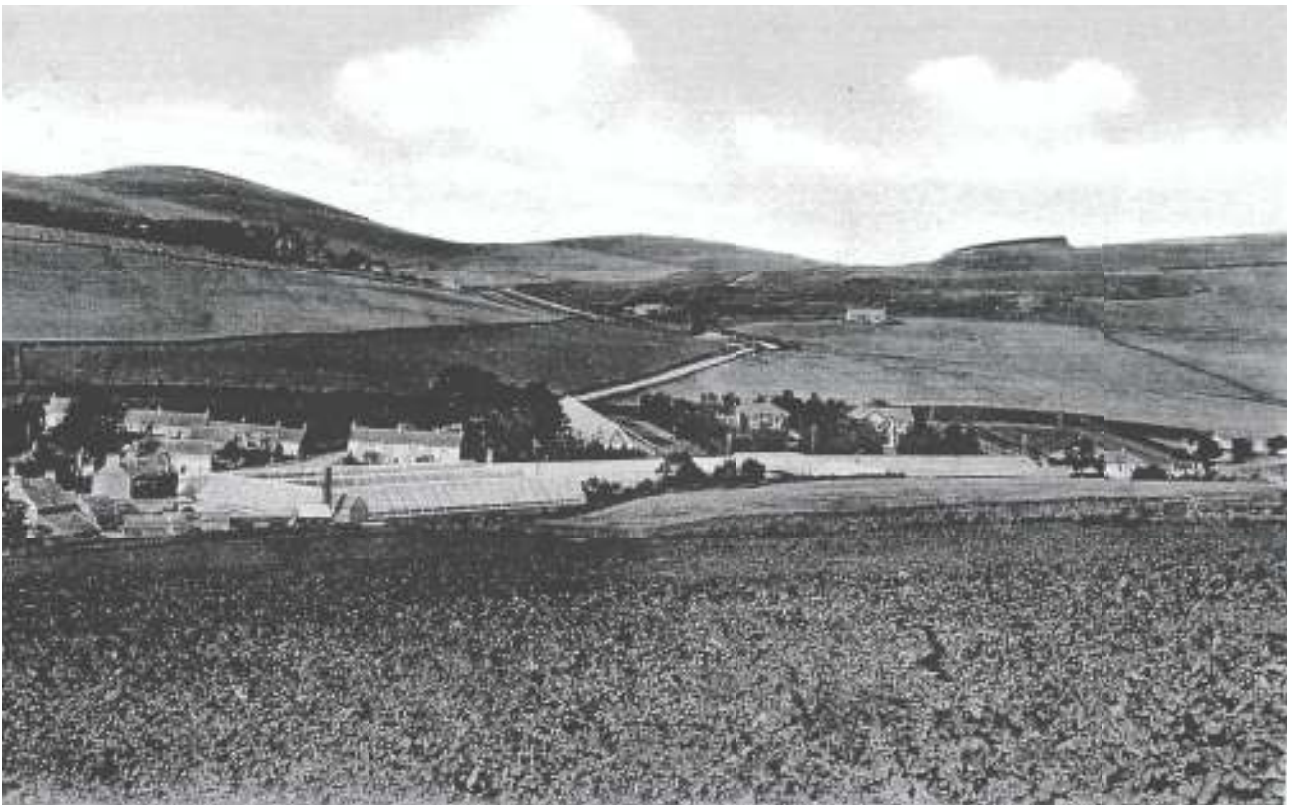
Chapter 5

Tweed Vineyards And William Thomson

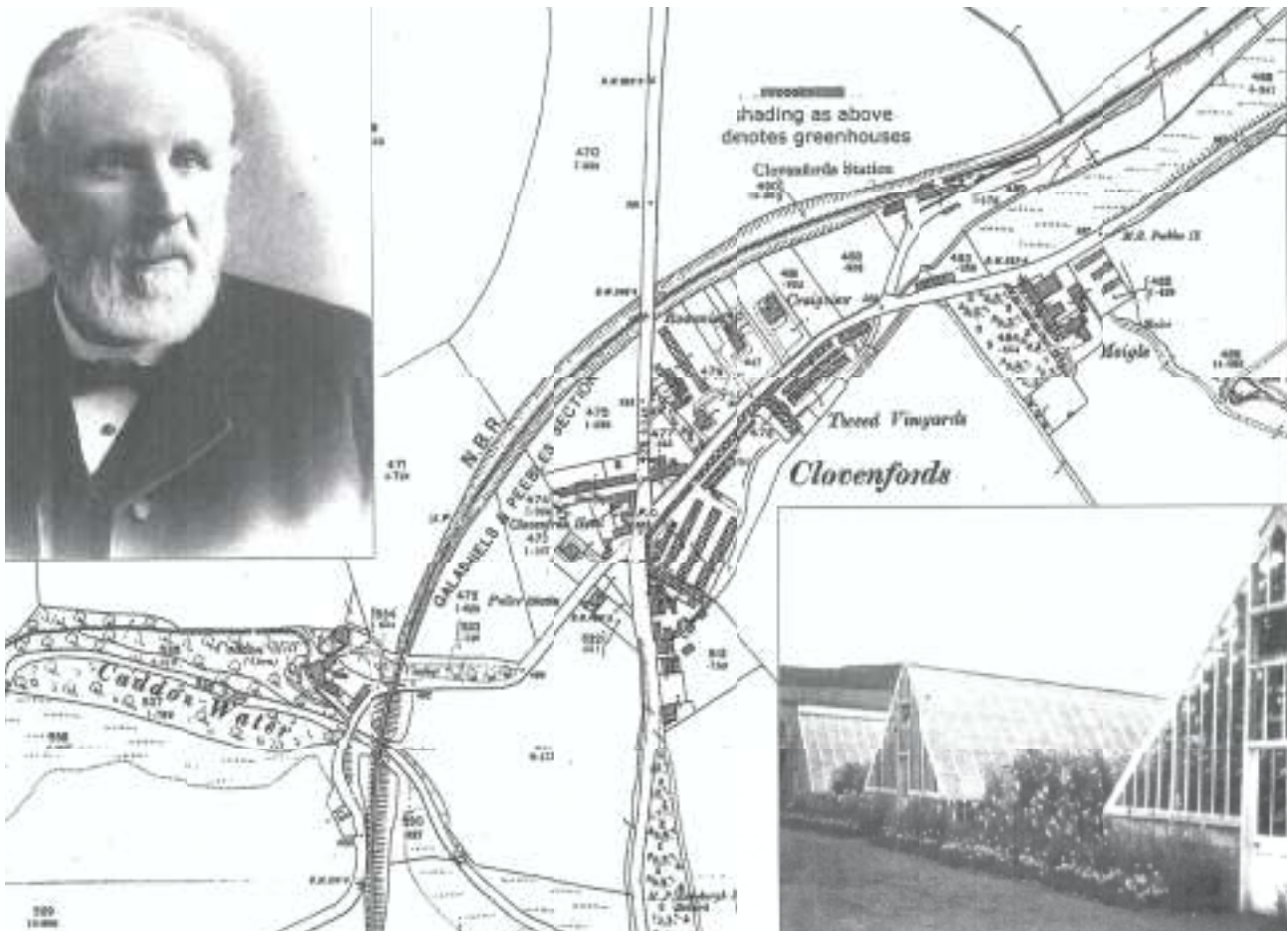
"Sweet Clovenfords, where clustering vines
Perfume the balmy air
Where silvery Tweed 'mid woodlands shines,
And Caddon's banks are fair"

Formerly the glory of Clovenfords, Tweed Vineyards, once a famous vinery producing high quality grapes and known world wide. The compelling history of Tweed Vineyards goes back over 140 years. Grapes had been grown in the British Isles since Roman times. Later the monasteries were the great centers for gardening and undoubtedly some of these grew vines in very sunny positions, especially in the South of England, they also experimented in ways of cultivating vines. Clovenfords Vineyards was created by Mr William Thomson, who was born in Cavers Carrie in the parish of Bowden, Roxburghshire, Scotland, on the 27th March, 1814, and who was baptized at Bowden Parish Church. William Thomson, a man of vision, belonged to a generation of gardeners and nursery managers who served the needs of great estates of Victorian days, and whose clients liked to experiment in the growing of fruit trees and plants not indigenous to the British climate. William had an excellent background in viniculture and as Head Gardener to the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch, at Dalkeith Palace, the Duke was one of the most important property owners in the British Isles. After six years as head gardener, the Duke suggested that William take a trip to the continent accompanied by two younger gardeners to further their knowledge of the lucrative commercial business of producing grapes. In August 1861, they left Leith for Holland by steamer. After touring Holland they continued on to tour Belgium. They extended their journey by touring Germany, and ending their expedition in Paris. Whilst in Paris, William requested the Duke to dispatch to him three bunches of Muscat grapes which he entered into the competition for the Grand Gold Medal of the Central Society of Horticulture of France. William was scoffed at and one leading German grower sneered. 'The Scots dare to try to grow grapes in

the vind and the snow in their barbaric country, under the glass! This Duke sends, a vild clansman, to gay Paris in the hope of vinning the gold medal? They must be crazy.' Nevertheless William's grapes won, and he was presented with no less a person than the Emperor of France with the highly prized Vinicultural Gold Medal. By 1866, William had 13 years experience under his belt, during which time he always took great care to see that his vines were efficiently ventilated and kept to the correct temperature in the coldest of weather and he managed to overcome many of the problems that were caused by disease, William successfully experimented with his own mixture and use of manure. In his time at Dalkeith, Thomson developed four seedling grapes which went into commerce, the Golden Champion, the Duchess of Buccleuch, White Lady Downes and the Duke of Buccleuch.

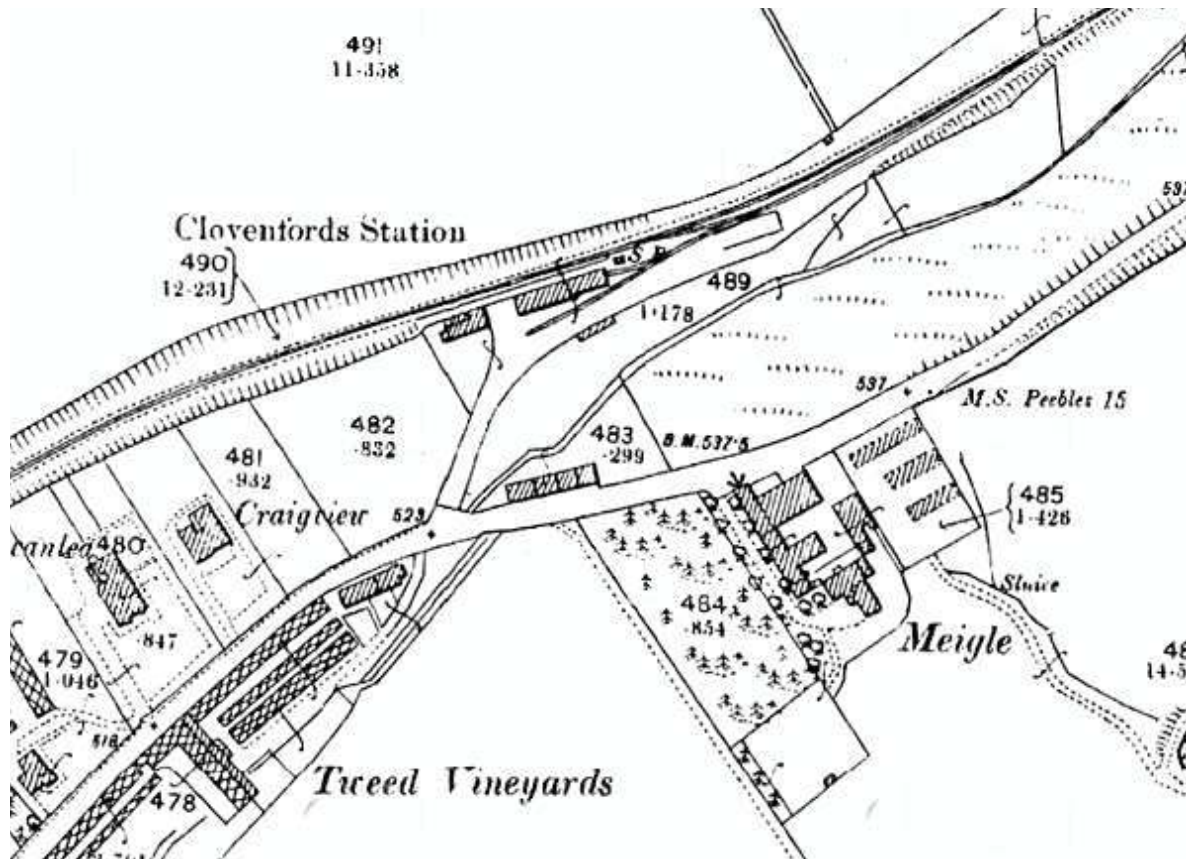


Showing Clovenfords & Tweed Vineyards
The road leading out of Clovenfords, centre of picture, in stage coach days was known as Edinburgh Road. Now named Bowland Road.



Plan Of Clovenfords, Vineyards & Railway Station. Insets Top Left, William Thomson. Bottom Right, 200ft Long Vinery Hothouses.

William Thomson's sons William (junior) born 20th Dec. 1849, and John born 18th Dec. 1851, had both been born in England. Son William, became disenchanted with his work in the National Bank, so he requested his father to set him and his brother John into the vineyard business. William agreed to his son's idea with the intention of continuing to work for the Duke and leave the new vineyard venture to his sons, together with an experienced foreman named Peter Stewart. William senior then began the task of scouring the countryside for a location suitable for the vineyard business. The location, as shown on the map below, soon became obvious, for on the 18th July 1869, the North British Railway Line opened a railway line, running from Peebles, via Innerleithen and Clovenfords to Galashiels. North British Railway also provided stations at Walkerburn, Thornilee, Clovenfords and Galashiels.



O.D. Survey Map Clovenfords Dated 1899

Showing importance Of Being The ideal Short Short Distance For Carting Coke And Wooden Boxes Of Grapes From Vineyards To Railway Station.
The Railway Station Was Closed On 5th February 1962. Now a Private Residence.



Clovenfords Railway Station In 1950's
(Copyright Bill Lynn - From Bill Lynn Collection)

This meant that the Tweed towns had now been given a direct service south to London and the great industrial towns of the Midlands, a vital reason why William decided that Clovenfords would be the ideal location for his new vinery. A railway station near the vinery would be an essential for dispatching the grapes by rail to Covent Garden Market and other British markets which at that time, took about eighteen hours. A railway station would also be needed to deliver the many tons of coke required to fire the furnaces to heat the many hothouses and forcing houses. Again the Clovenfords sidings were ideal for carting the coke the short distance to the vineyard. A further reason for William's decision to locate at Clovenfords was because conveniently for him, his brother-in-law, Mr Allan Stirling was a builder and contractor living in Galashiels. He knew he could rely upon him to take care of all the required building work and hothouses etc, not only for the vineyard, but as land in Clovenfords in 1870 was relatively cheap, he would also be able to build houses for the Thomson family and his supervisors. (In 1870, there was no more than 20 houses in Clovenfords.) Within three months, Peter Stewart the foreman, became so obstinate and bad-tempered, William senior had no other alternative than to discharge him, and rather than run the risk of a failure, William decided to resign as Head Gardener with the Duke of Buccleuch, and put all his energies into his new family business. William found his employers to be most agreeable to his wishes and on leaving Dalkeith, the Duke and Duchess, organized a farewell dinner at the Waterloo Hotel, Edinburgh. The Duke presented William with 200 gold sovereigns, and William's spouse with a handsome tea-service, William's daughter Jessie, received gold diamond brooches. In November 1869, five acres of land was bought for the vineyard complex. Work was commenced the following year on building the gardeners bothy (work hut), hot houses, forcing-houses, and boiler-houses including the installation of five miles of hot water pipes, all necessary for the art of horticulture and gardening management for the new Tweed Vineyards.



**Muscat grapes Inside The Hothouse Abutting
The Stone Wall Adjoining Vine Street. (A7)
The White Vinery Wall Can Still Be Seen**



Inside Hothouse As Shown Above.

During the early days of construction, William supervised the work by traveling from Dalkeith, where he still lived, to Bowlands Railway Station on the Galawater line, then walking from Bowlands to Clovenfords. One day on his walk he met a shepherd and as they journeyed together in conversation, William said, "Tell me, what's going on in the neighborhood?" to which casually the shepherd replied with a chuckle in all innocence, "Well have ye not heard o' the daft sod that's cum oot here to cover a field wi' glass to grow grapes?" One can only guess that William would smile good humdly and answer, "Och yer can't account for some people's taste these days." Incidentally, this story was recounted many times at the Thomson's dinner parties.

By now new homes had been built for the Thomson family. William, his daughters, Barbara and Jessie and his son John, (sadly, William's spouse had died of spinal disease in 1863, and buried in Dalkeith) took up residency at Vineries House, also housing within, the Registered Offices for William Thomson & Sons, who had both been taken into partnership with their father. His son William resided at Craigview, 5 Vine Street, whilst his brother John lived next door residing at Rowanlee, 7 Vine Street. A gardeners bothy (workplace), and three boiler houses were also built. Some years later, the Head Gardener moved into his new home, Vine Cottage. Within two years of the vineries being open, a workforce of some ten full time gardeners plus some casual laborers were producing a variety of grapes including Gros Colman and Muscat Alexandria. The Tweed Vineyards of Scotland became the Crème de la Crème of the grapevine, eventually producing 12,000 - 14,000 pounds of the finest quality, grown under vast high pitched roofed glasshouses heated by 5 miles of hot water pipes to provide the correct temperature. All this successes was only accomplished by William Thomson's remarkable knowledge and talent for viniculture. Wagon loads of sumptuous Muscat and Gros Colman grapes would be delivered by rail from the Clovenfords sidings to Covent Garden, Harrods of London, Jamieson's of Edinburgh and many top stores in Scotland, especially prior to the Christmas trade. Thomson grapes were famous throughout

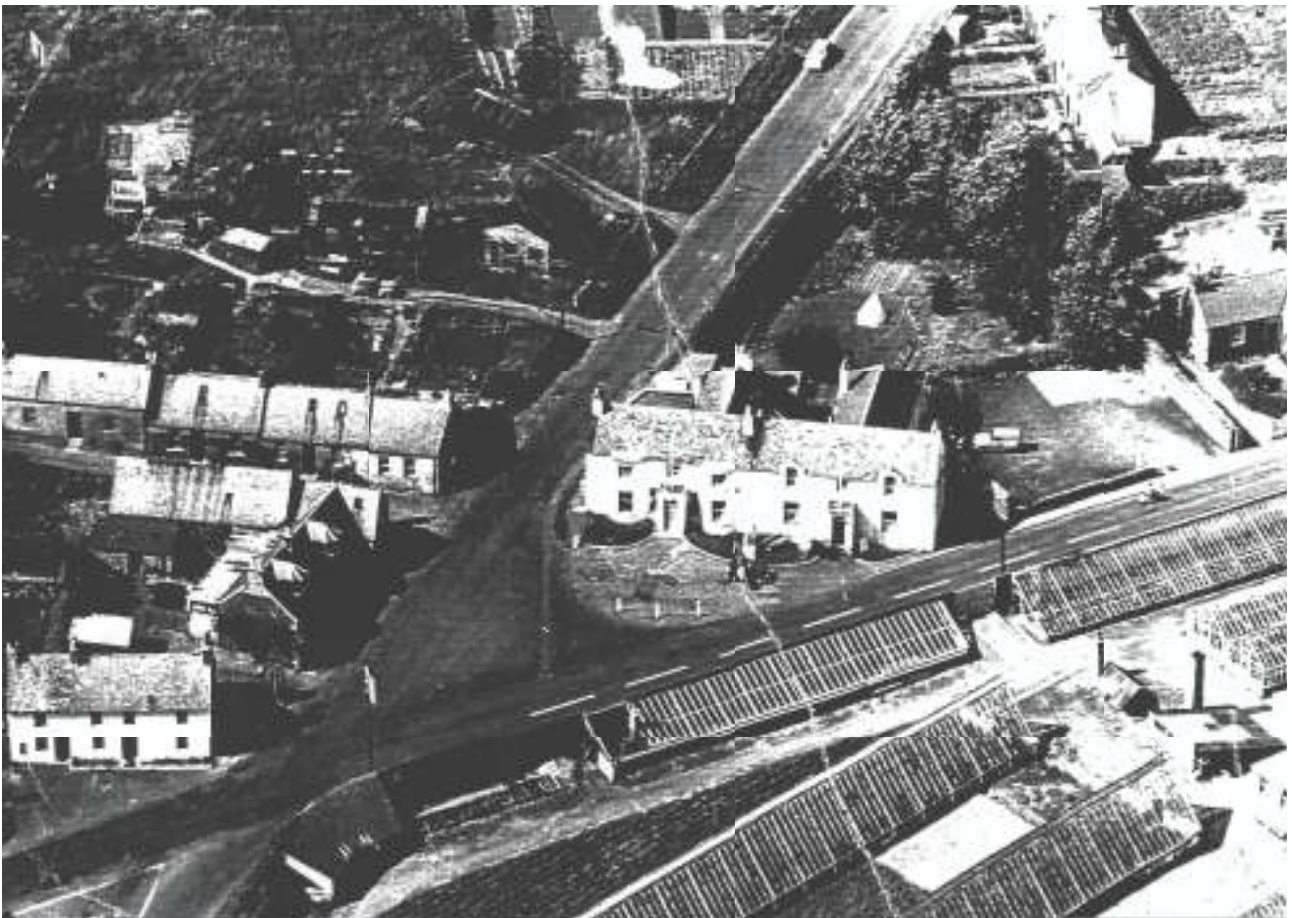
Scotland, especially in Edinburgh and Glasgow and they even received weekly standing orders for single bunches of grapes from wealthy and discerning customers alike. By 1871, William Thomson and Sons were carrying on the viniculture industry with great vigor and were as productive as they had ever been which had brought employment and prosperity to Clovenfords.



Another View Of Clovenfords & Tweed Vineyards Amid a Background Of Hills

From correspondence I received from Howard Thomson, the great grandson of William Thomson, the information included the following: The main blocks of hothouses, were three lofty 200ft(60.96m) x 24ft(7.32m) hothouses, named Burn House, Mid House, and Down's House linked by a corridor house at the lower end leading to three other all named hothouses. These were all planted with Gros Coleman vines and were the grapes which provided the Christmas trade. The Muscats were in main 200ft(60.96m) lean-to houses at the top end of the Vineyard which were harvested in September. All the large hothouse had a name, there was also the Propagating Houses to grow future vines. Howard also pointed out wrongly named Vine Street houses shown on the earlier 25" Ordnance Map.

Unfortunately by the spring of 1888, the price of grapes fell dramatically affecting the world market, and this coupled with mass produced imports, the Clovenfords vineyards production began to wane. The Thomson family were not to be beaten though, and they continued to maintain there business and increased their cultivation of other fruits, and a thriving trade growing a distinguished variety of flowers in demand from the floristry trade. They had already developed the very first successful commercial fertilizer business which they continued with fresh vigor. The fertilizer was bagged in the Clovenfords vineyard, and sent out from warehouses in Leith to seedsmen and the nurserymen all over the world. From his autobiographical notes, William Thomson stated, "If the price of grapes had continued as they were when I first came here, I would have made money fast, but they are now just about half the price when we sold our first few years crops".



**Arial View Of Clovenfords & Tweed Vineries
(Photograph, Courtesy Of Billy Anderson)**

Wm. Thomson & Sons, Limited, TWEED VINEYARDS, CLOVENFORDS.



Clovenfords Grapes,

Famous for quality for over 35 years; ready from July till January.

Palms

and various other plants grown in quantity.

Tomatoes

of finest quality.

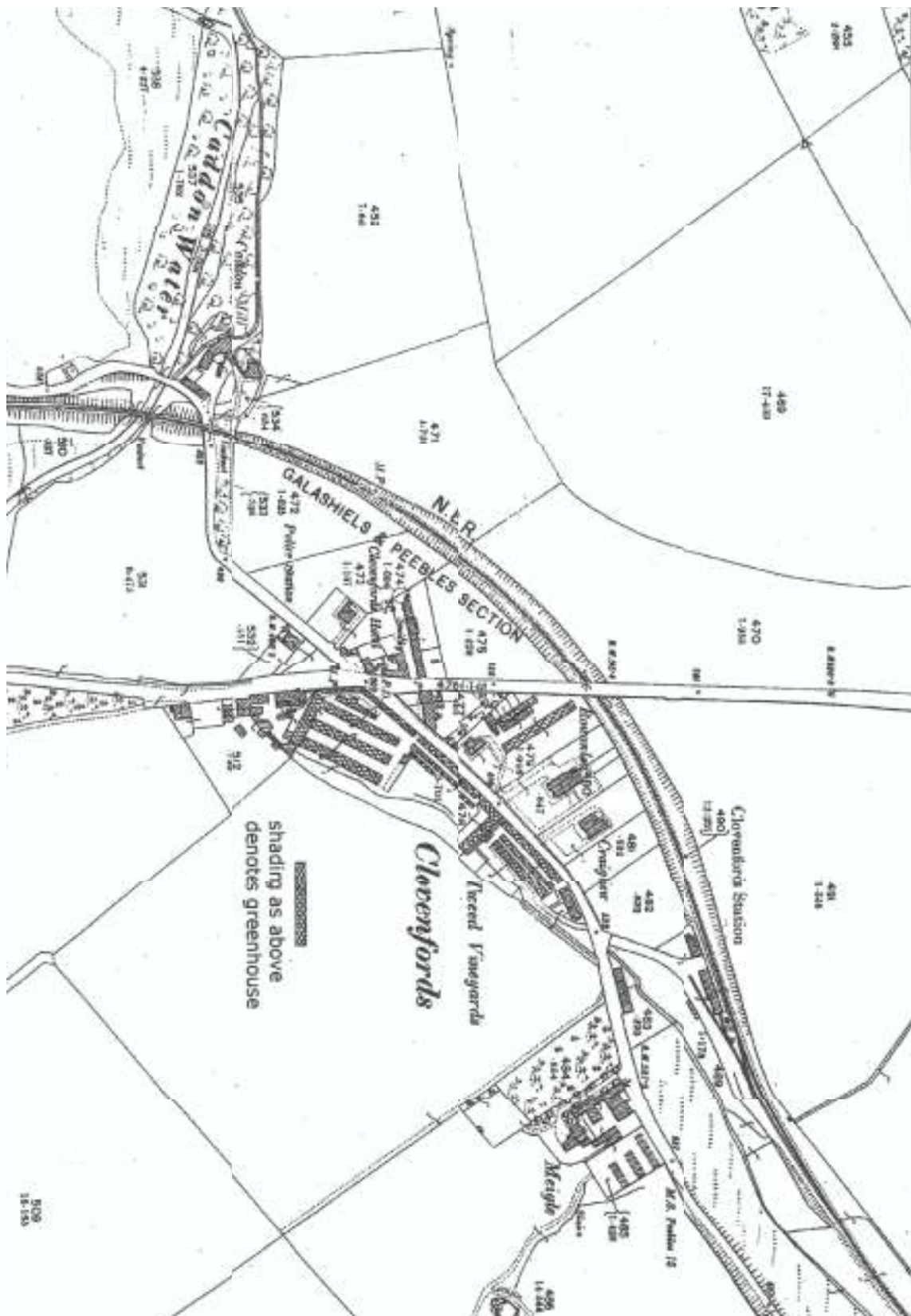
Thomson's Celebrated Manures

for Vines, Plants, and Vegetables.

PRICES AND PARTICULARS ON APPLICATION.

VINERIES, PLANT HOUSES, Etc.,
OPEN TO VISITORS.

Vineyards Poster, Advertising The Variety Of Products On Sale. Note: Open Invitation To The Public To Visit The Vinery.



Ordnance Survey Map Clovenfords. Dated 1899

Note: The positions of 2 houses, 5 and 7 Vine Street, named Craigview and Rowanlee were incorrectly named. The names were reversed correctly in O.D survey map of 1897.
Note: On the North side of Vine Street there were two hothouses, shown crosshatched.

In his time William Thomson was a much respected member in the horticultural circles, just like John Claudius Loudon, another famous Scottish gardening journalist; both men horticultural writers of their day. William Thomson's writing helped to publicise his business. He edited for a time the "Scottish Gardener" described as a magazine of horticulture and floriculture. His interests naturally included fruit, vegetable and rose culture, about which he could competently write about. Thomson was the author of a publication on the culture of the grapevine, published in 1862, when he was still employed by the Duke of Buccleuch, and which had run through six editions by 1869. As a young man of 24, he began judging in what was to become an infinite number of flower shows and horticultural exhibitions; his last judging appointment was at Earles Court, London, in 1892. In the Spring of the following year, his son John, was seized with pleurisy, and died at only 44 years old. This came as a great blow to William, who for a long time was in less than robust health and unable to sleep at nights, but after the treatment by his physician Dr Murray, and supported by his family and close friends he recovered in health and spirit so much so, William continued socializing in the village. On the 31st of December, he had been invited to a gathering of school children around the Christmas tree at the Caddonfoot School. William shared in their enjoyment that evening, presenting them with Christmas presents. Nobody realized this was to be his last public appearance. A few days later after dinner one day in January, William set out with his little dog, Willia for their usual walk. The road was rough with a slight covering of snow over a layer of ice, he missed his footing and slipped on the hard ground. Recovering from his ordeal he continued his walk, but on his return home he became very cold. His doctor visited him that evening, but the shock on his system became too much for even his strong constitution. By the next day pneumonia and jaundice had set in. Ten days after that fateful fall, William Thomson, creator of the Tweed Vineyards died on the 12th January, 1895, aged 82.



**William Thomson, Creator Of Tweed Vineries
Died on the 12th January, 1895, aged 82.**

1895, the year weather was severe over Scotland with heavy drifting snow with a harsh Victorian winter known as 'The Great Frost of 1895'. On a cold day of driving snow, on Wednesday the 16th January, 1895, William Thomson was layed to rest in the churchyard at Caddonfoot Parish Church, overlooking the River Tweed.

William Thomson's death was regarded as a national event and an obituary appeared of him, not merely in Scottish newspapers but in the London Times.

One noted London writer of William Thomson's obituary wrote: "William Thomson created around him a little town of industry, where formerly there was the usual country inn, a blacksmith's shop, and a joiners shop" the Tweed Vineries resulted in "people coming from all parts of the world to see the place."

For ninety years the Tweed vineyards had flourished under four generations of the Thomson family, but eventually in 1959, William Thomson & Sons, sold Tweed Vineyards to Mr Robert Affleck, a local market gardener who continued to grow the Muscat variety of grapes.



Mr Robert Affleck

From 1959, Robert Affleck became the New Owner Of Tweed Vineyard.

The picture above shows Robert proudly showing the high quality of Muscat grapes grown in sadly the last greenhouse.

Time took its toll, and although bunches of Muscat grapes were produced as late as 1992, in the last remaining Tweed Vineyard hothouse, the one abutting the Vine Street wall. Robert Affleck together with a well know and popular villager, Stan Anderson, experimented and even produced a few dozen bottles of Clovenfords wine using grapes from the Tweed Vineyard.

Eventually though, all of Mr Robert Affleck's efforts was to no avail. The Tweed Vineyards death knell had already fallen. Tweed Vineyards, which had yielded countless thousands of bunches of Gros Coleman and other famous varieties of grapes fell out of use and into disrepair.

The rest of the site remained an eyesore, glass strewn, dilapidated, and uncared for, and yet although badly damaged, one large long glasshouse (Vine Street wall) had survived. I remember this well as I used to take a short cut from Meigle Row, and through the Tweed vineyards site, this was when the burn flowed freely through the site before being diverted into a conduit of concrete pipes. The vandalised workmen's bothy also still remained.

In 1998, the Scottish Borders Council bought almost a third of the dilapidated vineyards and demolished all of it. Vineries House was also demolished to make way for new road improvements. Eventually new homes of 'Thomson Court' and 'The Vineries' were built, breathing new life into the once very famous vinery of the Scottish Borders. Only the name remains the same, Tweed Vineyards.

William Thomson's daughter Barbara added a postscript to William's 'Autobiographic My Life And times' which read:

"After my brother William's death, my dear father was for a time in rather less robust health than usual, and did not sleep at all well, but after treatment by his

kind friend, Dr Murrey, he recovered in health and spirit. His usual change to Bridge of Allen and baths and water there completed his cure, and for the next fifteen months, indeed up to the day of his accident, was in perfect health and mind and body vigorous. His last public appearance were when he presided at the social gathering of the Draughts Club on Thursday evening 27th December, at the Church on the last Sunday of the year, when he presented school children with treats around the Christmas tree. My father during his early days of his illness wished much to see his dear brother, our Uncle David who not well, came on the 7th January and was with us to the last."

"Sadly, no more will,
Clustering vines
Perfume the balmy air"

SEQUEL TO TWEED VINEYARD

In 1995, the Clovenfords & District Community Council became aware that the Tweed Vineyard's site was about to be sold. With the backing of the School Education Authority and Clovenfords District Councillor Riddle Dumble (now deceased), who had worked tirelessly for a new school, the Community Council sent a deputation to the then Chief Executer of the Scottish Borders Council asking for consideration to be given for the site to be used to build the much needed new Clovenfords Primary School. The request was refused out of hand.

The Scottish Borders Education Department pressed on regardless and with the full support of parents, the community, the Clovenfords Community Council and the Scottish Borders Council and its partners, in 2012 Clovenfords Primary School was built. A stupendous new school for its pupils, and staff, for the whole community to be proud of.

To commemorate the site of the Tweed Vineyards the Community Council commissioned a plaque which was made by the Scottish Borders Sign Shop. I wrote the dialogue and supplied the illustrations and the sign shop made the plaque of aluminum, fixed to a strong wooden board and faced with a sturdy perspex sheet.

The completed plaque was fixed to an original stone pillar of the Tweed Vineyards, sited now at the entrance to 'Thomson Court' and 'The Vineries'.



Pictures Of The Plaque, Portraying The History of The Tweed Vineyards (Photograph copyright Bhing Quayle)



Picture Of Top Of Wooden Grape Packing Case Uncovered During Survey Work By Scottish Borders Planning Department.

(On View In The Centenary Notice Board)