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THE BURNS SOCIETY OF GREENOCK

Once again the age-old question has arisen as to which Burns Club is the oldest. The question arose in the first edition of the Burns Chronicle in 1892 and has been brought up on numerous occasions since. Elsewhere in this issue the subject has been raised again. I was recently invited to view the Greenock Club's artifacts including the cover of their first minute book (minus the minutes) presumably missing since 1926. I was interested however in a minute of 1826 which may shed some light on the argument, the following is an extract:-

"The Burns Society of Greenock met in the Tontine Hotel on July 21st, 1826 to commemorate the death of Robert Burns and to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of this institution which has now reached its twenty-fifth year of existence, having met for the first time on the 21st July, 1801 and celebrated the birthday of the poet for the first time in the year 1802.

The Burns Society of Greenock met in the Tontine Hotel on July 21st 1826. To Commemorate the death of Robert Burns and to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of this institution which has now reached its twenty-fifth year of existence, having met for the first time on the 21st July 1801 and celebrating the birthday of the poet for the first time in the year 1802.

Mr. Crawford addressing the late secretary said he had now a very pleasant duty to perform in the name of the Burns Society of Greenock namely the presentation of a handsome silver snuff box as a token of respect and admiration for Mr. Campbell and as a mark of appreciation of his effort in the interest of the Society, extending over the long period of 15 years during the greater portion of which time he had acted as clerk in a manner which both to his own credit and that of the Club.

The snuff box which is of solid silver of a chaste design was supplied by Mr. George Buchanan, Jeweller and bear this inscription:-
Mr. Arch Campbell

For fifteen years an office bearer in the Burns Society of Greenock on the occasion of his leaving town on this the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Society, 21st July 1826.

When Mr. Campbell rose to receive...

Facsimile from the 1826 minute.

The above appears to indicate the Burns Society of Greenock was founded in 1801. Where is the snuff box now?

---

GIFT OF LETTERS

It is with much satisfaction that we report the gift of two original letters written by Robert Burns, during his stay in Dumfries to Maria Riddell. The letters in good condition together with documentation were received recently by the Federation secretary, Anne Gaw from a direct descendant of Maria Riddell as a gift to the Burns Federation. Both letters are well known and recorded and appear in James Mackay’s “Complete Letters of Robert Burns” page 601 (Number 517) and page 611 (Number 685D). No decision has been taken by the Burns Federation as to how or where these historic documents will be retained or displayed. It is expected that a decision will be taken at the next Executive meeting which will be held in Arbroath in March. There is however a general feeling that such letters should be made available for public view and not locked away out of sight.

- EDITOR

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“YORK REVISITED”

The St. Andrew’s Society of York are organising a “YORK REVISITED” Reunion for members of the Burns Federation, Burnsians and friends. The Reunion will take place from 8th to 10th October, 1993 and be held in York with accommodation in the Langwith College, York University, where delegates stayed during the 1989 Conference. Although this is not an actual Burns Conference it will be run on similar lines with the usual Friday and Saturday evening functions with alternative entertainment to dancing organised.

As the Reunion is solely a “Social” weekend options for the Saturday morning and afternoon will be offered. Cost of University accommodation (limited to 270) based on bed and breakfast £23.00 per person per night. An extra charge of £9.00 per person for a limited number of en-suite facilities. The Reunion Fee has still to be fixed, details later. Enter the date in your diary now. For further details contact:- ALEX C. LAYHE, 61 EASTFIELD AVENUE, HAXBY, YORK. YO3 3E2. Telephone: 0904-769390.
RICHMOND’S “HIGHLAND MARGARET”?  

John Richmond, Burns’s Mauchline crony, is aptly assessed by James L. Hempstead in a recent issue (Burns Chronicle, August 1992, page 26). He conjectures, “If Richmond’s story about Highland Mary is true, it means that Burns was so besotted that he was prepared to marry someone who was known to be a mistress of another, and that Gavin Hamilton employed a woman of easy virtue as a servant in his household. The story is extremely difficult to believe.”

Richmond left Mauchline for Edinburgh in November 1785, before Burns became seriously involved with Mary Campbell. He would have made her acquaintance while she was a servant of Gavin Hamilton, from February till August that year; but his attentions were at the time directed towards Betty Miller, Christina Morton, and Jean Armour.

If Mary Campbell was, as Richmond alleged, overtly and immorally associated with Captain Montgomerie, brother of the laird of Coilsfield, it is surprising that such a cause celebre was ignored by the church authorities. Mauchline Kirk Session, however, did in fact concern itself with a case which is suspiciously similar to that reported by Richmond. On 22 July 1784 Margaret McCrae was summoned to appear before the session, but did not do so until a fortnight later she admitted being with child and named the father as Mr Thomas Montgomerie, brother to the laird of Coilsfield. This was denied by Mr James Montgomerie, brother of the accused, who was now in Virginia; Margaret McCrae with her newborn child left Mauchline for Monkton, where she later named two others as putative father. All of which suggests, like the person named by Richmond, “her character was loose in the extreme.”

Burns may perhaps have been briefly attracted to Margaret McCrae shortly after coming to Mossgiel early in 1784. Richmond, who was absent from Mauchline in 1786 when Burns was so closely involved with Mary Campbell, seems as a consequence to have mistaken the identity of ‘Highland Mary’. The story that Richmond told thirty years later is of that other Highland lass, Margaret McCrae. Mary Campbell could not have had an affair with Captain Montgomerie, who had gone to Virginia; was unlikely to have been similarly involved with one of James Montgomerie’s other three brothers; the only Mary Campbell in the Mauchline session records (11 Fed. 1784) was a married woman in her fifties appearing as a witness.

John Richmond’s nephew characterised his uncle as “one of the greatest of liars”. Regarding Highland Mary he was more likely just confused.

John Strawhorn


BI-CENTENARY FUND - STAMP APPEAL

Burnsians at home and particularly overseas can help swell the Federation’s Bi-Centenary Fund by collecting used foreign postage stamps. The used stamps will eventually be sold to collectors with the proceeds going towards the Fund. The stamps should be sent to myself at the following address - 28 Stranka Avenue, Paisley, PA2 9DW, Scotland. All contributions will be acknowledged in this magazine. The following have so far sent stamps for the Fund:- Mrs. Outi Pickering, Finland. Charles Wilson, South Africa. Urs Kalberer of the Swiss Burns Society. May Dickie, Australia, The Robert Burns Club of Milwaukee, USA, and Marion Allan, Australia.

EDITOR

CORRECTION

With reference to the article “Robert Burns’s Breaking of the Rules” - Burns Chronicle, Vol. 2, November 1992, Number 2. Please note that on page 49 the reference to “Thrummy cap and the ghast” was incorrect. It was John Burness who wrote “Thrummy Cap” not James Burnes.

John Burness was a member of another branch of the family and not so nearly related to Robert Burns as James Burnes.
Dr. W. Watson Buchanan, Professor of Medicine and Director of the Rheumatic Diseases Unit in the McMaster University Faculty of Health Sciences in Hamilton, Ontario is already well known to readers of the Chronicle from his excellent article in Volume 100 (1991), 'Robert Burns's Illness Revisited'. Now we are delighted to have from the pen of this prolific writer and great lover of Scots poetry a long list of articles we hope to publish in due course: 'The Illness of Robert Burns's "Elder Brother in the Muse": Robert Fergusson (1751-1774)' [with Patrick J. Rooney and Andrew L. MacNeill]; 'References to the Problems of Ageing in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Poetry'; 'The Rowan Tree'; 'Alexander McLachlan (1818-1896): The Robert Burns of Canada' [with Walter F. Kean]; and 'Sair Jyns and the Cleiks: Scotland's New Pests', an attempt to give an overview of arthritis and rheumatism in Lallans. Readers of the Chronicle have a feast in store!

---

THE ILLNESS OF ROBERT BURNS'S
'ELDER BROTHER IN THE MUSE':
ROBERT FERGUSSON (1751-1774)

W. Watson Buchanan, Patrick J. Rooney and Andrew L. MacNeill

INTRODUCTION

A dinner was held in the Men's Union of Edinburgh University on Wednesday 16 October 1974 to which was invited a bemused President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and other even more bemused notable dignitaries representing various aspects of contemporary Edinburgh life. That a dinner should be arranged to commemorate the bicentenary of the death of the poet Robert Fergusson was first proposed by Dr. George Philp, then Chairman of the Lallans Society, and in due course with the support of the Saltire Society, the Association for the Scottish Literary Studies and the Clan Ferguson Society the occasion was celebrated. The dinner was meant to be a convivial occasion in keeping with the poet's sociable nature. These bodies also believed that the laying of wreaths on the poet's grave in the Canongait Kirkyard and a Commemorative Service in Scots taken by the late Rev. A. S. Borrowman, Secretary of the Lallans Society, in the Kirk of the Greyfriars Edinburgh were appropriate to the occasion. The dinner was appropriately held in Edinburgh, where the poet had lived and worked and which he loved so much. Indeed, Robert Fergusson was essentially a product of the Auld Reikie of the eighteenth century, with all its gaiety, squalor, drunkenness and literary culture.
The citizens of Edinburgh failed to appreciate the brilliance of their own city's poet, and when the twenty-eight year old Robert Burns from Ayrshire visited Edinburgh in 1787 he wrote to the Bailies of the Canongait, Edinburgh:

**Gentlemen,**
I am sorry to be told that the remains of Robert Fergusson the so justly celebrated Poet, a man whose talents for ages to come will do honor, to our Caledonian name, lie in your church yard among the ignoble Dead unnoticed and unknown. — Some memorial to direct the steps of Lovers of Scottish Song, when they wish to shed a tear over the "Narrow house" of the Bard who is now no more, is surely paying a tribute due to Fergusson's memory: a tribute I wish to have the honor of paying.—

I petition you then, Gentlemen, for your permission to lay a simple stone over his revered ashes, to remain an unalienable property to his deathless fame.—

I have the honor to be Gentlemen, your very humble servant,

ROBERT BURNS

On the tombstone Burns wrote:

No sculptured Marble here, nor pompous lay, 'No storied Urn nor animated Bust: This simple stone directs pale Scotia's way, To pour her sorrows o'er the Poet's dust.

And on the reverse side is the simple inscription: 'By special grant of the Managers to Robert Burns, who erected this Stone, this Burial Place is to remain for ever sacred to The Memory of Robert Fergusson'.

This gesture signified the deep debt which Burns had for his 'elder, brother in the muse'. Fergusson was an inspiring influence on Burns, and possibly had the more inventive mind. Fergusson was to Burns in Scottish poetry as Marlowe was to Shakespeare in English tragedy. Fergusson wrote a purer Lallans than Burns, and his poetry has suffered neglect owing to the close succession of his great disciple who never, however, failed to acknowledge his debt.

That a poet of the quality of Fergusson should have been neglected by the citizens of Edinburgh with its pretensions to literary culture at the time seems almost incredible in retrospect. One would have thought that Burns's generous gesture in raising a memorial stone over Fergusson's unmarked grave would have prompted the Edinburgh citizenry to erect some kind of memorial to him in the new town of Edinburgh. Fergusson's poetry was, unlike Burns's poetry, Großstadtpoesie, the poetry of urban life, and the city involved was Edinburgh. Tragically the anglicisation of Edinburgh was well advanced even in Fergusson's time, and today despite the renaissance in Scottish life and letters, is virtually complete. Perhaps Fergusson's Jacobite sympathies also contributed to his lack of appreciation among the Edinburgh establishment:

Blach be the day that e'er to England's ground Scotland was eikit by the Union's bond.

Apart from Fergusson's importance to Scottish poetry, his life and mode of death are of considerable medical interest. Fergusson died in the Edinburgh lunatic asylum or Bedlam in Bristo in 1774. The circumstances of his tragic death at the early age of twenty-four stimulated Dr Andrew Duncan, who visited the hapless Fergusson in the Asylum during his illness, to draw attention to the 'deplorable situation of Pauper Lunatics, even in the opulent, flourishing, and charitable Metropolis of Scotland' and to recommend to His Majesty's Sheriff's Depute in Scotland and the establishment of four national asylums (2). However, the cause of Fergusson's illness and death is by no means clear (34). We therefore considered it of interest to review the poet's life history and attempt a retrospective diagnosis.

**FERGUSSON'S LIFE**

Robert Fergusson was born in Edinburgh on 5 September 1751 of Aberdeen parents, his elder brother and sisters having been born in Aberdeen. As a child he was 'exceedingly delicate' (5) and was unable to attend school till the age of six. Davison (6) writes, 'During the years of his early infancy, his constitution was so extremely delicate, that his life was frequently despaired of...'. It appears that even at the tender age of six Fergusson's intelligence was well above average, and after six months he was sent to the High School in Edinburgh to learn Latin. Davison notes:
while he continued at this excellent seminary, the infirm state of his health prevented him from giving proper attendance. His powers, however, were so active, that even under the disadvantage attending this broken kind of study, he equalled any, and surpassed members of his class-fellows.

During his period at the High School it appears that young Robert acquired a loving for books, and 'his chief delight was in reading the Bible'. He being a Presbyterian, it is not surprising that it was a book in the Old Testament, namely the Proverbs of Solomon, which attracted him most. It appears that the Proverbs affected him deeply, as Dattson records:

One day he entered his mother's chambers in tears, calling her to whip him. Upon inquiring into the cause of this extraordinary behaviour, he exclaimed, 'O mother! he that spareth the rod, hateth the child.'

After four years at the High School in Edinburgh, Robert was successful in obtaining a bursary to study at Dundee High School for a period of two years. His parents were anxious he take up divinity, and at the age of thirteen he entered St Andrews University, where it appears he was somewhat negligent of his studies. According to Chambers, 'His qualifications were other than those of the graver and more solid cast'—namely, those of 'a sprightly fancy and flow of sarcastic humour'. Certainly his elegy on the death of the professor of mathematics and his subject suggest this.

He could, by Euclid, prove lang sine,  
A ganging point compos'd a line,  
By numbers too he cou'd divine,  
Whan he did read,  
That three times three just made up nine,  
But now he's dead.

Nevertheless, Thomson records that the professor of natural philosophy, Dr William Wilkie, chose Fergusson to read his lectures to his class when sickness or other causes prevented his own performance of the duty. Dr Irving ridiculed the idea of a youth of sixteen 'mounting the professorial rostrum' to deliver lectures.

In 1767 Fergusson's father died, and because of the loss of family revenue Fergusson had to leave the University without obtaining a degree. At this time he left to stay with a rich uncle in Old Meldrum, Aberdeen. After six months he suddenly after a quarrel and returned by foot to Edinburgh. It is not clear precisely who was to blame, and it is possible that Fergusson expected his rich uncle to provide for him without his having to do anything in return, an attitude which is certainly all too prevalent in modern Scotland! When he returned to his mother's home in Edinburgh, he was worn out and took several days to recover. His vexations over his uncle's meanness was expressed in two poems: The Decay of Friendship and Against Repining at Fortune. Both of these poems are in English, and neither can be considered in any way as good as his poems in Scots.

Having arrived back in Edinburgh, Fergusson took the only job he could find and became a writer or copyist in the office of the Commissary Clark, a post he held until a few months before his death. Like many other such posts in eighteenth-century Scotland the post was poorly paid.

LIFE STYLE

Kinghorn and Law in a recent review of Robert Fergusson's life and poetry suggest that this post, which was monotonous, ill-paid and unworthy of his abilities, suited his temperament and offered him the opportunity to write poetry. It may also have allowed him ample relaxation time to indulge in the convivial life of the Edinburgh taverns. There is good evidence that Fergusson spent much of his free time in the taverns of Edinburgh. These taverns were small, crowded places, which were used daily as eating places and which opened in the evening around 8.00 p.m. for eating and drinking. The more sober citizens would leave at the 'ten hour's drum', but the less responsible would often remain till the next morning. The taverns were also the homes of Edinburgh clubs, which are best described in Walter Scott's Guy Mannering. Fergusson was a member of a typical club of that period, the Cape Club, in which everyone had a pseudonym. Because of his skill as a singer Fergusson was known as 'Sir Precentor'. It appears that his favourite song which he was often called upon to sing was 'The Birks of Invermay'.

Fergusson himself gives a good description of the contrast between the warm, cosy clubs and a wet, cold Edinburgh winter's night in his poem Caller Oysters:

When big as burns the gutter rin
Gin he hae catcht a droukit skin
To Luckie Middlemist's loup in
And sit fu' snug
O'er oysters and a dram o' gin
Or haddock lug.

When auld Saunt Giles, at aught o'clock
Gars merchant louns their chopies lock
There we adjourn wi' hearty jock
To birle our bodies

75
And get wharewi' to crack our joke
And clear our noddes.
Fergusson was clearly aware of the ill effects of alcohol, and considered the eating of oysters while drinking a preventative against drunkenness.

A' ye wha canna stand sae sicker,
Whan twice you've toom'd the big ars'd bicker,
Mix caller oysters wi' your liquor,
And I'm your debtor,
If greedy priest or douthy vicar
Will thole it better.
It is difficult to know how dissipated a life Fergusson led, and although Irving (8) and Peterkin (10) stressed his dissolute ways, Chambers (7) maintained the convivialities of Fergusson have been generally described as bordering on excess, and as characterising himself in particular, amidst a population generally sober. The sober truth is that the poor poet indulged exactly in the same way, and in general to the same extent, as other young men of that day.
The boisterous social life of Edinburgh at the time of Robert Fergusson included sexual dissipation. It is clear from what he says himself in Auld Reikie that the marriage vows were often broken,

Now some to porter, some to punch,
Some to their wife, and some their wrench,
and that prostitution was rampant.

Near some lamp-post, wi' dowy facer,
Wi' heavy een, and sour grimace,
Stands she that beauty lang had kend,
Whoredom her trade, and vice her end
But see wharenow she wuns her bread,
By that which Nature ne'er decreed;
And sings sad music to the lugs,
'Mang burachs 0' damn'd whores and rogues
Whane'er we reputation loss,
Fair chastity's transparent gloss!
Redemption sennil kens the name
But a's black misery and shame.

Whether Fergusson participated in this sexual permissiveness cannot be ascertained from either his own writings or from biographies of his life (6-18). However, Grahame (12) records that the name and address of a prostitute was known to Fergusson, for in an effort to cure his landlord of drunkenness and religious hypocrisy Fergusson stole a parcel from him and later returned it with a letter purporting to come from a well-known Edinburgh prostitute. His own love life is enigmatic, although it is known he had his Stella, a married woman and poetess, as Burns has his Clarinda (9), but he does not mention her in any of his poems. Fergusson wrote only one love poem, The Lee Rigg, and his comments on the marital state in An Eclogue while amusing suggest a healthy male chauvinism:

Ah! Willie, Willie, I may date may wae,
Fae what beted me on my brid' day;
Sair may I rue the hour in which our hands
Were knit thegither in the haly bands;
Sin that I thrave sae ill, in troth I fancy
Some fiend or fairy, nae sae very chamcy
Has driven me by paucky wiles uncommon,
To wéd this fliting fury of a woman.

CHARACTER

From his biographers one gets the impression of Fergusson as a gay, vivacious, irresponsible young man who was fond of playing practical jokes. Chambers describes him having a 'sprightly fancy and flow of sarcastic humour'(7) and when asked if he remembers him James Inverarity, the poet's nephew, replied 'Bob Fergusson! That I do! Many's a time I've put him to the door—Ah, he was a tricky callant (i.e., likeable lad) but a fine laddie for a' that!'(7). Ruddiman (1) says:

he possessed an amazing variety of qualifications. With the best of good nature and a great degree of modesty he was always sprightly, always entertaining - when seated, with some select companions, over a friendly bowl, his wit flashed like lightning, struck his hearers irresistibly, and set the table in a roar.

His penchant for playing practical jokes is recorded by Sommers (11):

Such were his vocal powers and attachment to Scots songs, that in the course of his convivial frolics, he laid a wager with some of his associates that if they would furnish him with a certain number of printed ballads (no matter what kind), he would undertake to dispose of them as a street singer in the course of two hours. The bet was laid: and the next evening, being in the month of November, a large bundle of ballads were procured for him. He wrapped himself in a shabby greatcoat, put on an old scratch wig, and in this disguised form, commenced his adventure at the weigh house, head of the West Bow. In this going down the Lawmarket and High Street, he had the address to collect great multitudes around him, while he amused them with a variety of favourite Scots songs, by no means such as he had ballads for, and gained the wager by disposing of the whole collection. He waited on his companions, by eight o'clock that evening, and spent with them, in mirthful glee, the pro-
ceeds of his street adventure.

His character is well reflected in his poetry, the fundamental quality of which is gaiety (1). This comes through both as satire but without malice as in his poem To the Principal and Professors of the University of St Andrews, on their Superb Treat to Dr Samuel Johnson.

For ne'er sic surly wight as he
Had net wi' sic respect frae me
Mind ye what Sam, the lying loun!
Has in his Dictionar laid down?
That aits in England are a feast
To cow an' horse, an' sican beast,
While in Scots ground this growth was common
To gust the gab o'man and womb.

Fergusson's humour comes through in such unlikely situations as the serious preparation for the Election of the Town Council. The poem describes how Johnny, who is hoping to be elected, puts on his best clothes and freshly combed wig. His coat is brought from the 'kist' (i.e., chest) and shaken to get rid of the vermin:

The coat ben-by i' the kist-nook,
That's been this toummonth swarmin,
Is brought yence mair thereout to look,
To fleg awa the vermin:
Menzies o'moths an' flaes are shook
An' the floor they howder,
Till in a birn beneath the crook
They're singit wi' a scowder
To death that day.

Fergusson in his poems also evinces sympathy for the underprivileged, and in his Ode to The Bee he describes how terrible life could be for the elderly in the eighteenth century:

Auld age maist feckly glowrs right dour
Upo' the ailings of the poor,
Wha hope for nae comforting, save
That dowie dismal house, the grave.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

There are several descriptions of Fergusson's personal appearance.

Chambers (1) states:
In stature Fergusson was about five feet nine, slender and handsome. His face never exhibited the least trace of red, but was perfectly and uniformly pale, or rather yellow. He had all the appearance of a person in delicate health. His forehead was elevated, and his whole countenance open and pleasing. He wore his own fair brown hair, with a long massive curl each side of the head, and terminating in a queue, dressed with a black silk riband. His dress was never very good, but often much faded, and the white thread stockings which he generally wore in preference to the more common kind of grey worsted, he often permitted to become considerably soiled before changing them.

Campbell (1) also comments on his eyes, 'His countenance was somewhat effeminate but redeemed by the animation imparted to it by his large black eyes', as does Sommers (11):

Toil aged and the hair feckly glows right dour
Upo' the aildings of the poor,
Wha hope for nae comforting, save
That dowie dismal house, the grave.

His complexion fair, but rather pale. His eyes full, black and piercing. His nose long, his lips thin, his teeth well set and white. His neck long, and well proportioned. His shoulders narrow and his limbs long and well proportioned. His shoulders narrow and his limbs long, but more sinew (i.e. sinew) than fleshy.

The portrait by Alexander Runciman in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh emphasises his large prominent eyes, and suggests a possible degree of bilateral exophthalmos. The prominence of the eyes, however, may be exaggerated in the style of the art fashion of the day.

ILLNESS

Fergusson died at the age of twenty-four. In view of this, the output of his poetry is remarkable:
fifty-three poems in English and thirty-one in Scots. At the same age Burns would have left behind only four poems. The illness which finally proved fatal appeared to begin in the Autumn of 1773 when Inverarity (19) noted that the poet ‘retired to the country in pursuit of that peace of mind he had in vain sought for in the town’, but ‘the same disease of mind which drove him into the country in three days drove him back again to the town, where he continued to fall prey to the horrors of melancholy’. Inverarity also quotes Ferguson as writing in October 1773 to a friend, ‘the town is dull at present. I am thoroughly idle, and that fancy which had often afforded me pleasure, almost denies to operate but on the gloomiest of subjects’.

Although in general Fergusson’s poems are not intimate, in two poems published in the last months of 1773 there is a suggestion that he may have been despondent and have had forebodings of death. For instance, in My Last Will, he writes prophetically, ‘fearing death my blood will fast chill, I hereby constitute my last will’. In his poem To my Auld Breeks he gives a glimpse of himself:

You’ve seen me round the bickers reel
Wi, heart as hale as temper’d steel,
And face sae open, free and blyth,
Nor thought that sorrow there cou’d kyth;
But the niest mament this was lost,
Like gowan in December’s frost.

There is some evidence that even before 1773 Fergusson may have been psychologically distressed. Campbell (8) relates:

It happened in the autumn of 1774, while on a visit to a friend in the neighbourhood of Haddington, that one day as young Fergusson was sauntering near the churchyard of that town, that a person of a sudden joined him, who accosted him in a polite and familiar manner. The solemnity of the scene naturally suggested a conversation, rather of a moral cast, which by degrees became abstract and gloomy. This stranger turned out to be a pious Divine, of the sect called Seceders from the Church of Scotland; this name was Brown, author of several works in Divinity, well known among the true believers of that sect. Mortality and a judgement to come were the topics our Divine chose to expatiate on, and bring home to Fergusson. These topics seemed to sink deep in the mind of our poet, and they parted; the one convinced that he had found a lost sheep, the other that he had been led too far astray, to find favour in the sight of the Chief Shepherd of Israel. He returned to his mother’s house in all the agonies of religious horror; and soon sunk into a state of complete despondency.

According to Campbell this incident occurred in the Autumn of 1774, but Irving in his biography maintains this occurred two years earlier. According to Irving (6):

The first marks of insanity, according to Inverarity, betrayed themselves one day when he accosted his friend Woods, the actor, and in a very excited condition announced that he had just discovered one of the miscreants who had crucified our Saviour, and was on his way to lodge an information against him with Lord Kames.

This incident, if indeed true, does not suggest a frivolous practical joke. Davison also records that in December 1773 Fergusson was observed to be more serious and thoughtful than formerly: and in the month of March succeeding, I also met with him. He was then very poorly, and, in the course of a long walk, he freely communicated the state of his mind, and also the situation he had been in for some time. (8) Another incident is recorded in which Fergusson was startled by a starling which had fallen down his chimney:

In the room adjoining to that in which he slept, was a starling, which being seized one night by a cat that had found its way down the chimney, awakened Mr Fergusson by the most alarming screams. Having learned the cause of the alarm he began seriously to reflect how often he, an accountable and immortal being, had in the hour of intemperance set death at defiance, though it was thus terrible, in reality to an unaccountable and sinless creature. This brought to his recollection the conversation of the clergyman which, aided
by the solemnity of the midnight, wrought his mind up to a pitch of remorse that almost bordered on frantic despair. Sleep now forsook his eyelids: and he rose in the morning, not as he had formerly done, to mix again with the social and gay, but to be a recluse from society, and to allow the remembrance of his past follies to prey upon his vitals. All his vivacity now forsook him: those lips which were formed to give delight, were closed as countenance sat horror plumed. (15)

According to Irving (8), Fergusson sunk into a state of religious despondency; but previous to that event his body was emaciated by disease, and his mind totally unhinged. His relations began to observe in his behaviour something of an infantine cast; he talked in an incoherent manner and often manifested an entire vacillation of thought. Persons in his condition must generally have some leading object to engross their attention, and religion happened to present itself to him. His favourite studies were now neglected; he laid every other book aside, and made the Bible his constant companion. Such of his manuscripts as were in his own possession, he committed indiscriminately to the flames, and was heard to declare, that he felt some consolation in never having written anything against religion.

Early in 1774 it appears that the bard had sufficiently recovered to attend an election in 'one of the eastern counties'. It appears that there was a great deal of drink consumed, and Chambers (7) censored his 'being involved in riotous scenes'. It appears that on his return from the election to Edinburgh he caught 'that baneful distemper' (8). Peterkin alleges that Fergusson on his return to Edinburgh was 'under the influence of medicine for his recovery from the consequence of ebriety and folly' (10) without naming specifically the unfortunate complaint with which Fergusson was afflicted.

It is clear that throughout the remaining months he lived in 1774 that Fergusson was in poor mental and physical health. His name appeared no more in the attendance book of the Cape Club, and at a sederunt of this Club on 2 July 1774 the following resolution was passed:

the remainder of the fines of the absentees from this meeting... for the benefit and assistance of a young gentleman, a member of the Cape, who has been a considerable time past in distress, and the gentlemen present in the Grand Cape made a contribution themselves for the same purpose.

In the Caledonian Mercury of 9 July 1774 an anonymous poem signed W suggests Fergusson might have been improving:

An may thy friends the joyful News believe!
Dost thou to perfect sense and feeling live?
Has Pain, Despair, and Melancholy fled,
that shook their gloomy Horrors round thy Bed?
Has eason chok'd the troubles of the Brain,
and fix'd her native empire there again?

But later in the same paper on the 28th of the same month it is reported that the poet 'has been seized with a very dangerous sickness', and this is confirmed in the minutes of the Cape Club of 3 September 1774: 'he had been very ill' (14).

Nevertheless, it appears that he did improve sufficiently at times to go out drinking with his friends and on one of these occasions, Sommers (11) records, he was 'taking a glass with a few friends and had the misfortune to fall from a staircase, by which he received a violent contusion on the head' (11). Ford (15) describes the incident as follows:

his feet caught in a stair carpet, and he was thrown to the bottom of his steps, receiving such injury about the head that he bled profusely. When borne home to his mother's house he could give no account of what had happened, being in a state of total insensitivity. His reason was now to an almost hopeless degree destroyed. He passed days and nights in total abstinence from food, sometimes muttering dolefully to himself, and at other times becoming so outrageous that it required the intervention of his poor mother was plunged, and her inability to render him the assistance his condition demanded, she was obliged to take steps for his removal to the public asylum. His conveyance thither was effected by a kindly stratagem. On pretence of taking him on an evening to visit a friend, some of his more intimate acquaintances placed him in a sedan chair, and conveyed him to the place which he had long feared would be his final abode.

Sommers (11) records as follows:

During the first night of his confinement he slept none: and when the keeper visited him in the morning, he found him walking along the stone floor of his cell with his arms folded, and in sullen sadness, uttering not a word. After
some minute's silence, he clapped his right hand on his forehead and complained much of pain. He asked the keeper who brought him there; he answered - 'Friends,' 'Yes, friends indeed,' replied Robert; 'they think I am too wretched to live, but you will soon see me a burning and shining light.' 'You have been so already,' observed the keeper, alluding to his poems. 'You mistake me,' said the poet; I mean, you shall see and hear of me as a bright minister of the Gospel.'

Sommers (11) records that when the keeper in the asylum brought the poet a plate of porridge Ferguson set it aside and said, 'but I will thank you if you will give me a glass of whisky for I am very cold.' the keeper, however, could not grant this request. Two incidents are recorded of his 'madness' during his captivity (15). On one instance, recorded by Gray (13), he had been sitting reading when a cloud overshadowed the moon, and Ferguson exclaimed loudly, 'Jupiter, snuff the moon! Thou stupid god, thou hast snuffed it out'. However, this hardly indicates gross insanity. On the other instance, Ferguson plaited a crown from the straw of his cell, and put it on his head, strutting around proclaiming himself 'A King! A King!' In view of his penchant for practical jokes this does not, as his biographers have suggested, necessarily indicate insanity.

Two records of visits shortly before his death are available. Chambers (7) records:

A few days before his dissolution his mother and sister found him lying on his straw bed, calm and collected. The evening was chill and damp; he requested his mother to gather the bed-clothes about him, and sit on his feet, for he said they were so very cold as to be almost insensible to the touch. She did so, and his sister took her seat by the bedside. He then looked wistfully in the face of his affectionate parent, and said, 'Oh mother, this is kind indeed.' Then addressing his sister he said 'Mighty you not come frequently, and sit beside me; you cannot imagine how comfortable it would be; you might fetch your seam and sew beside me.' To this no answer was returned; an interval of silence was filled up by sobs and tears. 'What ails ye?' inquired the dying poet: 'wherefor sorrow for me, sirs? I am very well cared for here - I do assure you. I want for nothing - but it is cold. It is very cold. You know, I told you, it would come to this at last - yes, I told you so. Oh, do not go yet - do not leave me!' the keeper, however, whispered that it was time to depart, and this was the last time Ferguson saw those beloved relatives.

Sommers also recorded his visit with Dr John Aitken:

We got immediate access to the cell, and found Robert lying with his clothes on, stretched upon a bed of loose uncovered straw. The moment he heard my voice he arose, got me in his arms and wept. The doctor felt his pulse and declared it to be favourable. I asked the keeper (whom I formerly knew as a gardener) to allow him to accompany us into an adjoining back court, by way of taking the air. He consented. Robert took hold of me by the arm, placing me on his right, and the doctor on his left, and in this form we walked backward and forward along the court, conversing for nearly an hour; and in the course of which many questions were asked both by the doctor and myself, to which he returned most satisfactory answers; but he seemed very anxious to obtain his liberty. The sky was lowering, the sun being much obscured. Led by curiosity, and knowing his natural quickness, I asked him what hour of the day it might be. He stopped, and looking up with his face towards the south, while his hands were clasped paused a little and said it was within five minutes of twelve. The doctor looked at his watch and exclaimed, 'It is just six minutes from twelve'.

Before Sommers and Dr Aitken left they asked the keeper 'if he would allow us to give the poet of ale or spirits. The former he said we might give him, but the latter was prohibited'. Sommers and Dr Aitken obtained a glass of ale and some rolls and cheese, which 'Robert partook of heartily, and declared himself wonderfully refreshed'. Having promised to visit him again in a day or two, Sommers records, 'He calmly and without a murmur, walked with us to the cell, and upon parting, he reminded the doctor to get him soon at liberty and of mine to see him next day'.

However, neither of these wishes was to be granted for a few days later Sommers received 'an intimation from the keeper, that Robert Ferguson had breathed his last, without the smallest symptom of pain'. In the Minute Book of the Charity Workhouse Ferguson's death is recorded somewhat laconically and chillly on 16 October 1774, 'Mr Ferguson, in the cells'. It is noteworthy that only he had Mr before his name.

**CAUSE OF ILLNESS AND DEATH**

In retrospect it is extremely difficult to know what was wrong with Robert Ferguson. Not only does the total output and quality of his poetry indicate high intellectual capacity, but the fact that
he completed eighty-four poems in a period of three years also strongly suggests hypomanic energy. The content of these poems at this time is witty and humorous, indicating a constant elation of mood. This period was followed by a significant fall in output accompanied by constant black depressive episodes, as witnessed by all his biographers. The poetry he did produce in this period does to some extent reflect this change in mood, although in general his poetry, unlike that of Burns, shows little evidence of despondency. The one feature of Ferguson's poetry which above all characterises it is its humour and mirth. During the months of his depressive illness Ferguson did not compose, and he consequently provides no insight into his mental anguish.

There is evidence that Ferguson's depression at times bordered on psychotic. The episodes, if true, of his reaction to his conversation with a minister in the graveyard, his belief in knowing someone who had crucified Christ, and the distress when a starling was caught in the chimney of his house, certainly indicate disturbance of rational thought. The incident in the asylum when the light of the moon was overshadowed by a cloud has been cited to indicate disorder of thought (15), but could simply reflect his obviously extensive literary background. The other incident when he put a crown of straw on his head, crying out that he was a king, could well have been meant by the bard as a practical joke.

While there is no doubt that he was depressed, it is difficult to know whether this was endogenous or organic. In view of his life history the illness he suffered may well have simply reflected a manic-depressive psychosis. In this psychotic thoughts are not uncommon in childhood, but the adjustments of puberty and adolescence may be accompanied by outbursts of excitement or by agitation and depression (20). The poet's preoccupation with religious matters and his feelings of unworthiness are entirely consistent with a manic-depressive state, but this unexpected death cannot be attributed to this disorder. Although suicide is common in manic-depressive psychosis and particularly so during the recovery phase of a depressive illness, there is no indication from any of the biographers that Ferguson took his own life. It is possible that he had contracted syphilis (10). However, in view of the fact that on average general paralysis of the insane requires upwards of ten years after the primary infection to make its appearance (21), it is unlikely that Fergusson died as a result of syphilis. In addition, his judgement and memory and social habits remained unimpaired right up to the day he died. It is possible that he might have had congenital syphilis, but his portrait shows none of the stigmata of this disease. However, it is possible that Fergusson could have contracted either gonorrhoea or syphilis which might have distressed him and contributed significantly to his depressive illness.

Any differential diagnosis of Ferguson's illness must take account of the fall which he suffered two months before his death. He had been out drinking and may have fallen as a result of inebriation. However, it is possible that he may have had a subarachnoid haemorrhage which caused his fall, and his subsequent violent and confused illness when he required physical restraint is consistent with this diagnosis. Certainly it is recorded that Ferguson complained of very severe pain in his head on admission to the asylum, and such headache is the characteristic feature of this illness. His sudden death could also be explained on the basis of a massive subarachnoid haemorrhage, since fatal recurrence of subarachnoid haemorrhage may occur up to twenty years after the initial bleed. Psychotic episodes do occur after subarachnoid haemorrhage, but Ferguson's affective disorder antedated this episode by many months.

It is unlikely that head injury per se could explain Fergusson's subsequent illness and sudden death. A post-concussional syndrome may explain his early course, but there is no reason to attribute his death to this and there is no record of his having post-traumatic amnesia. Although late death from head injury is possible due to chronic subdural haematoma formation, the recovery of his thought and physical function prior to his death argue strongly against this diagnosis. A similar argument can be put forward against any space-occupying lesion of the brain.

None of the above conditions take account of Ferguson's drinking habits. The amount of alcohol he consumed is not known with any accuracy, but in his poetry he makes evident his intimate awareness of the effects and evils of drink. It seems likely that with his gay and social personality and enjoyment of tavern life, which contrasted so strongly with the dull boredom of his daily work, his drinking habits would not have been moderate. Davison (6) certainly comes to the same
conclusion:
Wisdom, however, is manifested in the discreet use of intoxicating beverage. Under its influence, the most delicate sensibility, the most rigid virtue, and inflexible firmness, cannot preserve a man from folly and from crime. In the gay season of youth, its power is doubly blaelful. Fergusson is a striking example. His understanding powerful, his heart generous even to weakness; his feelings delicate, elevated, honourable; his mind ardently glowed with the sublime emotions of religion: yet in the midst of the scenes of dissipation to which he was exposed, and in which he was admirably calculated to shine, his best qualities were humbled in the dust. Urged by the maddening draught, prudence, reason, principle, all fell prostate before the potent poison: he indulged in the gratification of animal passion, until his hapless career was closed in madness.

If indeed, his alcoholic consumption were excessive when he was in his hypomanic period, then during his depression it is likely that his consumption would have been more excessive. Certainly it is stated that his body was emaciated, which is consistent with the malnutrition of a chronic alcoholic. Although tuberculosis was rife in the eighteenth century there is no history to suggest chronic respiratory tuberculosis. The agitation which followed some time after his fall could have been precipitated by his enforced abstinence from alcohol both at home and in the asylum. Sudden death in chronic alcoholism is also common from sudden gastrointestinal haemorrhage, alcoholic cardiomyopathy and from pneumonia.

In conclusion, we would suggest that the likeliest causes of the poet's illness and death are a combination of manic-depressive psychosis and chronic alcoholism, combined with either a subarachnoid haemorrhage or a lobar pneumonia. It may be as Sydney Goodsmir Smith suggested 'I'll wark chappin at a deid man's yett' (1), (i.e., little point on knocking at a dead man's coffin) but at least we have the consolation of knowing that the tragic circumstances of Robert Fergusson's death in the city asylum were to lead to improvements in facilities for the treatment of mental illness in Scotland. Perhaps also the words of Robert Burns lamenting the untimely death of Robert Fergusson in his Epistle to William Simson may strike a chord in the conscience of the citizens of the city he so immortalised in his poetry which has since apparently forgotten him almost entirely:

O Fergusson! thy glorious parts
Ill suited law's dry, musty arts!
My curse upon you whustane hearts,
Ye E'nbrugh gentry!
The tybe o what ye waste at cartes
Wad stow'd his pantry!

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7. R. Chambers, The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson, with a Memoir of the Author, and Notes illustrating Local and Personal Allusions (Edinburgh, 1840).
10. A. Peterkin, The works of Robert Fergusson, to which is prefixed A sketch of the Author's life (London: Oddey, 1807).
11. T. Sommers, The Life of Robert Fergusson, the Scottish Poet (Glasgow: Steward, 1803).
16. J.A. Fairley, Bibliography of Robert Fergusson with a Prefatory Note (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1915).
The following comments were intended to be made some time ago, before the sad and unexpected death of Mr. Clark Hunter, of Paisley Burns Club, a fellow Burnsian and an authority on the Bard. I thought it incorrect etiquette to have these comments made known at the time of his death so I made a respectful request to Editor Peter Westwood to drop the entire article.

However, in the light of Jim Mackay’s recent article ‘Three Heroines of Burns’ appearing in volume 2 (new series) The Burns Chronicle, where he makes reference to Greenock Burns Club (page 43) and to Mary Campbell, I feel that I cannot now stand idly by listening to his assumptions.

Mr. Clark Hunter in challenging Greenock’s seniority had the courage to visit the Mother Club’s Museum, to meet our people and to view our artifacts. If Mr. Mackay were to do likewise he could peruse - at his leisure - such evidence as the minute (a copy submitted to the Editor) which is further proof of our early existence.

35 Kelly Street, Greenock. PA16 8TP.

Dear Sir,

The following are comments on the article ‘A Century of Honest Doubt’ written by Mr. Clark Hunter and published in Burns Chronicle 1991. This article is the latest of many attempts to establish Paisley Burns Club as senior in origin to Greenock. Correspondence relating to previous vain attempts is carefully filed in the Greenock club room.

I, as librarian of Greenock Burns Club, offered Mr. Hunter a warm and courteous welcome to our little museum on two separate occasions, gave him every assistance in his perusal of our artifacts, even dismantling some, enabling him to make a closer inspection and to take notes. We in Greenock will oblige any person who has the slightest interest in Robert Burns, our door is for ever open, as we have nothing to hide. I did not ask the purpose of his visit, nor did I know of his intentions until we received a letter from him, stating that he had written an article challenging Greenock Club’s seniority. He intimated that he was prepared to discuss some points with any two Greenock members, but at no time did he offer us a copy of his article. The Management Committee of the Greenock Club, after discussion, decided to ignore his request knowing that it would be ‘old hat’ and too boring to enter into again. There are minute books in existence belonging to a Paisley club dating no further back than 1805 and continuing only to the year 1836, when for some unknown reason this club ceased to function, leaving the township of Paisley without a Burns club for a period of thirty eight years. The present Paisley club was not constituted until the year 1874.

Greenock on the other hand, have minutes which continue from 1801 until the present day, all of which we can produce except the first ten years. This precious little book which contained a record of the Club’s early beginnings was in fact in the club’s possession until 1926, when it mysteriously disappeared.

It is on this issue that Mr. Hunter basis his argument. Great efforts were made during this anxious time to recover our loss and much correspondence relating to its disappearance is also contained in our files. These letters were offered to Mr. Hunter at the time of his visit but he declined to read them.

He impudently goes on to sum up his evidence to date, by firstly declaring as flawed, a framed newspaper cutting, advertising a visit to Alloway in 1803. We of the Greenock Club are well aware and have been for many years, that this cutting was not taken from The Greenock Advertiser. It should be obvious to anyone who makes a study of the cutting and of the old Advertiser’s that the printing types are of an entirely different kind. It is however, a genuine newspaper cutting and has been vouched for by Mr. James C. Simpson, J.P., Past President of Gourock Burns Club and former editor of Gourock Times. Mr. Simpson has been in the printing business for all his life. Further proof of its authenticity is the newspaper packing behind the frame. This tells the story of a French ‘man of war’ which entered a Caithness Bay and sailed off smartly on the arrival of the Caithness Fencibles. In the year 1803 the volunteer regiments of the various Scottish shires were at their peak and well armed by the county landowners and superiors. A photo-copy of this story can be produced on demand.

Secondly, our challenger emphasises the loss of our first minute book 1801 - 1810 and suggests its
non existence. I have known persons who have seen and handled the book before its loss was discovered in the autumn of 1926. Of the many letters before me as I write, I quote from one written by Charles L. Brodie, Honorary Secretary, Greenock Philosophical Society. He writes, "I am able to verify that the book was in the club room in 1912. It was there too in 1914. I know at least five people who saw and knew the book".

There is also a letter from Mr. Kerr Bruce, Broughty Ferry, who writes "I had the book in my possession for a short time while I was preparing the Centenary History of the club".

Dr. George F. Black, New York Public Library, New York City, writes "In searching for material for my Burns Bibliography I discovered in (The Weekly Visitor or Ladies Miscellany) vol. 3, p.328 published in New York in 1805, a reprint of the lines spoken at the Burns birthday anniversary in Greenock in January of the same year. The lines begin -

"Ye votries of the Nine, ye select few"

I thought it would interest your club to know this".

John D. Ross, LLD. author of some twenty-seven publications on the Poet and perhaps the most versatile and brilliant exponent of Burnsiana this century, visited the Greenock club in 1926. When approached at a later date regarding the loss of the minute book he denied ever having seen it. Yet, his following publication included information which could only have been obtained from 'oor wee book'.

In category three of his research summary - indeed throughout his entire article - he makes many presumptions, dictionary definition of which is:

To take for true without examination or proof. He also chose to disregard a club minute dated 21st July, 1826 which has been examined by experts and declared to be authentic. An extract from this extremely valuable document reads as follows: "The Burns Society of Greenock met in the Tontine Hotel on 21st July, 1826 to commemorate the death of Robert Burns and celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of the institution which has now reached its twenty fifth year of existence, having met for the first time on 21st July, 1801 and celebrated the birth of the Poet for the first time in 1802". The long, hand written, minute goes on for three pages describing in great detail the happenings of the entire evening.

"The traditions of Greenock Burns Club have not been critically examined until now" quoth Mr. Hunter. I can assure him that they have indeed often by Paisley Burns Club - and by much more qualified persons than he. I have no reason to doubt the sincerity and honesty of the prominent persons and also the fact which I have mentioned in these comments. Neither should Mr. Clark Hunter or Mr. Jim Mackay.

Yours faithfully,

ROBERT PEAT.

Librarian and Past President, Greenock Burns Club.

SPONSORS WANTED

22 Cargenbridge Avenue
Dumfries DG2 8LP
Tel: Dumfries (0387) 61033

Dear Sir,

Readers may be interested to hear of a project planned by Dumfries Howff Club for the Bi-Centenary Year in 1996.

As a lasting memorial to Burns, the Club is proposing to place commemorative plaques at the graves of each of his contemporaries buried in St Michael's Kirkyard, the positions of which are marked on the refurbished indicator plaque and stone adjacent to the church.

Each oval shaped 12" x 7" plaque, cast in stove enamelled black on an aluminium base will be suitably inscribed in Roman lettering. 45 plaques are planned and each has been costed at £40.00. This includes an element for future maintenance.

The Club would like to offer interested Burnsians an opportunity to participate in the scheme as a project 'sponsor'. Each sponsor's name will appear in a descriptive booklet which will be published in the Bi-Centenary Year.

Intending sponsors should remit their cheque for £40.00 in favour of Dumfries Burns Howff Club, to the undersigned at the above address, together with a note of their name and address. All requests will be acknowledged.

D. C. Smith, Hon. Secretary

See Article Page 54 "The Burnsian".

84
The Burns Monument Trustees announced in January details of a £1.4 million restoration plan for Burns Cottage, Alloway. The cottage will be upgraded to provide visitors from all over the world with a more authentic and informative vision of Robert Burns' life.

Funding partners for the project include the Burns Monument Trustees, Enterprise Ayrshire, Kyle & Carrick District Council, The European Regional Development Fund (through Strathclyde Integrated Development Office) and formal approval of grants from the Scottish Tourist Board and the Friends of Thatched Houses is awaited.

Phase one of the project has commenced and arrangements are being made to accommodate the summer tourist season, avoiding disruption for visitors.

Overall completion is scheduled for December 1993.

Commenting on the project, Major Richard Henderson, Lord Lieutenant for Ayrshire and Arran and Chairman of the Burns Monument Trustees said "As Chairman of the Trustees of Burns Monument, I am delighted with the progress which has been made on this exciting project. It is the hope of the Trustees that the refurbishment of the cottage will not only preserve and enhance the poets memory, but will also result in an increase in the numbers who visit the cottage and our museum."

Messrs Gordon Lyle Associates of Edinburgh, heritage planners and design consultants have been appointed to undertake the interpretive work and James F. Stephen of Glamis, Angus will be the project architect.

Major Richard Henderson, Lord Lieutenant for Ayrshire and Arran and Margaret Davidson, Enterprise Ayrshire examining the plans to restore Burns Cottage.

THE RESTORATION PROJECT

Improvements to the cottage will include both external and internal renovation work. Phase one of the programme will concentrate on external works which will enhance the building to look more like a traditional eighteenth century cottage.

The cottage roof will be re-thatched in traditional Scottish style, complete with a wooded ridge. In addition, improvements will be made to surface water drainage and ventilation, a small section of wall
BURNS' COTTAGE
will be taken down and re-erected. Re-rendering will be carried out where required and the colour scheme will be changed to be in keeping with the period.

Phase two of the project will focus on a new interpretive presentation. A kailyard, a typical eighteenth century vegetable garden, and a stackyard, will be created out of the existing lawn located to the front of the cottage. Here visitors will be able to view the type of vegetables which Robert Burns would have eaten and examples of the tools, which would have been used to cultivate the garden.

A new entrance to the cottage will also be created, leading from the car park.

Moving into the barn, visitors will also be able to enjoy an audio-visual presentation, which will explain the history of the cottage and show in detail what life would really have been like for Robert Burns and his family.

Improvements will also be made to the byre, and the north room, which will be reconstructed to show a typical scene of the Burns family having a meal.

Great attention will also be paid to the reconstruction of the kitchen, where Robert Burns was actually born. For example the ceiling will be removed to build a half-loft above the box-beds. Throughout the cottage general details and finishes will be improved, such as stripping and replacing plaster, timber beams, doors and window frames will be painted and various artifacts will be carefully placed in the kitchen and the byre.

**THE BURNS INDUSTRY GROUP**

The Group was established in February 1992 to co-ordinate the promotion of Burns Tourism in the South West of Scotland.

The Group, which is chaired by Douglas Hemmings of the Burns Monument Trustees, comprises representatives of all four Ayrshire District Councils, Nithsdale District Council, Dumfries & Galloway Regional Council, Enterprise Ayrshire, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Tourist Board, Ayrshire Tourist Board, Dumfries & Galloway Tourist Board, Dumfries & Galloway Enterprise, the Burns Federation, the National Trust for Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and National Museums of Scotland.

The main aims of the group are to ensure the advancement of Burns sites in Alloway, Ayrshire and Nithsdale through an integrated development programme, to plan and implement a Burns marketing plan and formulate an events and arts programme with particular emphasis on the 1996 bicentenary of Burns’ death.

*Margaret Davidson, Enterprise Ayrshire, examining the restoration plans for Burns Cottage in Alloway – the Birthplace of Robert Burns.*
Mr. Colin Campbell, Scottish Tourist Board Development Manager and Vice Chairman of the Burns Industry Group, said:

"The group believes that tourism associated with Burns can attract additional spending of £1.3 million to Ayrshire and Nithsdale, with the consequent creation of 40 full time jobs that is what the Burns Industry Group will seek to achieve."

Since its formation, the group has been working on a number of projects and activities, including the adoption of a new logo. More recently however Enterprise Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Tourist Board, have on behalf of the group, commissioned consultants to undertake an events study, which will examine possible activities which could be staged in 1996 - the Bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns.

The Paisley Burns Club
INSTITUTED 1805

A Januar Nicht Greetin'

The Auldest Burns Club meets this nicht
In Toon Ha' trig, whaur's Wilson's bricht
New Suite, stappit wi' chiels in black
Jaikets, brogues an' kilts. Tongues'll clack
Wi' tasht tales e'er Haggis plaiter's
Fiddled in wi' Chef as waiter
While guests an' hosts alike, wi' glee
Toast "the Chieftain" in barley-bree.

The Auldest Club, like Rab, will pray
This nicht that sune will come the day
When man tae man the world owre
Micht brithers be, by Giftie's power.
Nae mair'Il Serbian guns an' greed
Keep Bosnian bairns frae eatin' breid.
May "ethnic cleansing" - cursed phrase -
Die wi' the dawn o' better days.

The Auldest Burns Club, wi' leal he'rts,
Tae a' its fiers in fremmit pairts,
Sen's salutations, thocht sincere,
This Jaunwar nicht as, ever dear,
Rab's Mem'ry - the principal Toast,
Is gi'en by John, oor lawyer Host,
O' muckle frame an' vaunty voice -
This nicht the sangs'll be Pres'dent's choice!

25th January, 1993
T.G.II

Some Haggis Season
Heresy frae Macjimp

Richt weel I ken your sonsie face
Great Chieftain o' the puddin' race,
But whiles I wish they'd slow the pace
O' Suppers, Balls an' Denners,
Though some may gie ye pride o' place
I fear the skunners.

In fact:

I dinna like your sonsie face
Great Chieftain o' the puddin' race
Ye pit ma waim a' oot o' place
And gaur me shitter,
I'd raither ha'e a farr an' cheese
And stimp o' bitter.
BE INSPIRED — VISIT US AT THIS HALLOWED PLACE

BURNS COTTAGE
ALLOWAY
Built 1757. Updated Museum and tasteful giftshop - well laid out 2 acre garden.

BURNS MONUMENT & GARDENS
Built 1823. With unique views of the Auld Brig o’ Doon - with most peaceful garden on the Doon & Burns Country.

BURNS MONUMENT

Admission Charge Covers Both Properties.

from Ayrshire Scotland’s Holiday Country.

Heart of the Burns Country, Ayrshire is an ideal location for holiday touring and sightseeing.

You’ll discover scenic coastline, peaceful and unspoilt countryside, magnificent castles, gardens and country parks; interesting museums including many of the places associated with the Bard, Championship Golf Courses, Leisure Centres, harbour and watersport facilities, a varied selection of eating out establishments and much much more when you visit this beautiful part of Scotland.

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It is with the greatest of pleasure that I record the celebration of the Diamond Wedding, last September of Honorary President of The Burns Federation LEW W. REID and his wife EVA. Burnsians worldwide will join with me together with readers of the “Burns Chronicle” in wishing them both many more years of happiness. No couple could be more dedicated to the life and works of Robert Burns than Lew and Eva, their entry in any “Who’s who in the Burns World” would indeed be lengthy, for example:-

LEW - Burns Federation, District Representative and member of the Executive from 1968 to 1982. Appointed Honorary President of The Burns Federation at the Annapolis (USA) Conference 1983. Founder member of the Gainsborough and District Caledonian Society Number 887 1952. Past President 1953-54, 1962-65, 1969-70, 1986-87, currently Hon. Secretary/Treasurer. Founder member of Clumber Burns Club Number 922 1973 and a Past President and Life Member. Member of the Scottish President Association Number 917, Past President and currently Hon. Secretary/Treasurer.

EVA - Founder member of Gainsborough and District Caledonian Society Number 887, 1952, Past President 1967-69 and former Hon. Secretary and Treasurer. Founder member of Clumber Burns Club Number 922, 1973, Past President and Life Member, Past Hon. Secretary. Member of the Scottish President’s Association Number 917.

A recent comment from Lew “We are still alive and enjoying our life together, I am now 82 years young and Eva is now 87 years young”.

Peter J. Westwood
Editor.
Members of Irvine Lasses Burns Club were saddened to learn of the death on 28th October, 1992 of their founder member, ROSALIND KEYTE. Rosalind was 100% English by birth but 100% Scottish by inclination. On a visit to Burns Cottage some years ago she heard the story of Robert Burns and immediately fell in love with him. She took back with her to England a book of the works of Burns and proceeded to read it by referring to the glossary for every word she did not understand, a daunting task for a Londoner but surely an example for Scots who claim they don’t understand the language.

When she and her husband Howard moved to Irvine some 19 years ago she hoped to join a Burns Club but was dismayed to find that all the Clubs in Irvine were male only. That was when the idea of Irvine Lasses Burns Club was conceived and there was no happier woman than Rosalind when the inaugural meeting was held. She gave devoted service to the Club as secretary and committee member and was a popular entertainer when members went out on visits.

She attended a number of Federation Conferences and revelled in the companionship. In recent years, due to Howards poor health, they returned south of the border to live in St. Annes on Sea to be near their son and his family, but Rosalind still kept in touch with what was going on in the Lasses Club and in the Burns movement through the Burns Chronicle and Burnsian. Rosalind’s name will continue in the movement which she so loved as the Rosalind Keyte Cup competed for annually in the National Schools Recitation Competition.

The Irvine Lasses have lost a loved and respected founder and many of us mourn a loyal and devoted friend.

Our sympathy is extended to her husband Howard, her son Geoffrey, and daughter in law Judith and family.

Anne Gaw

MARGARET “PEGGY” CHALMERS ANNIVERSARY OF DEATH

This spring marks the 150th anniversary of the death of one of Burns’s most intimate friends - MARGARET CHALMERS, whom he himself described as “one of the most accomplished of women”. In 1787 and 1788 he corresponded with her and made her the subject of two songs: “Where, braving angry winter’s storms” and “My Peggy’s face, my Peggy’s form”. His friendship with her was one of the finer episodes in his life.

The actual date of her death is not recorded in the many volumes of Burnsiana, however a notice appeared in the “Inverness Courier” shortly after her death, on 3rd March, 1843 of Mrs Lewis Hay, her married name, and the notice was reprinted in the “Scotsman” on 1st April, 1843 as follows:-


It may interest the lovers of Scottish poetry to know that Mrs. Hay was one of the special favourites of
Burns during his Edinburgh sojourn, and to her are addressed some of the most excellent of his letters in his printed correspondence. This accomplished lady was then unmarried, and is addressed by the poet as "Miss Margaret Chalmers." Next to Mrs. Dunlop, Miss Chalmers seems to have stood highest in Burns's estimation, and the unreserved disclosures which he made to her of his feelings and sentiments and private views are the best evidence of the entire confidence which he reposed in her admirable good sense, taste and judgment. Mrs. Hay was also celebrated by Burns in his song-

"My Peggy's face, my Peggy's form,  
The frost of hermit age might warm."

Burns, it will be recollected, was fond of displaying the little knowledge of French which he had picked up by a fortnight's tuition from his old preceptor Murdoch; and on this head Mrs. Hay used to relate an amusing anecdote, which we give in the words of Mr. Campbell the poet. "One of his friends (Mrs. Hay, then Miss Chalmers) carried him into the company of a French lady, and remarked with surprise that he attempted to converse with her in her own tongue. Their French, however, was mutually unintelligible. As far as Burns could make himself understood, he unfortunately offended the foreign lady. He meant to tell her that she was a charming person and delightful in conversation; but expressed himself so as to appear to her to mean that she was fond of speaking; to which the Gallic dame indignantly replied that it was quite as common for poets to be impertinent as for women to be loquacious."

Miss Chalmers was the youngest daughter of James Chalmers who, having been compelled to relinquish his estate at Fingland (parish of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire), rented a farm for some years on the river Ayr near Mauchline. It is not known whether Burns first met her in Mauchline or at Harvieston or in Edinburgh. Her close friendship with Charlotte Hamilton, sister of Gavin Hamilton, makes it seem likely that they would meet at Mauchline, but Burns says in his song "Where, braving angry winter's storms" that in the shade of the Ochils her charms "First blest my wondering eyes. This, however, may be poetic licence, and cannot be taken as conclusive evidence. In any case it was during Burns's visit to Edinburgh in 1786-87 — Miss Chalmers was then living there with her mother — that their friendship matured and reached its full flower. In January 1788 Burns wrote with great feeling about her to Clarinda: "The name I register in my heart's core is Peggy Chalmers. Miss Nimmo can tell you how divine she is." He is said to have proposed marriage to her. The poet Thomas Campbell told Dr. Carruthers that she informed him Burns had made her a proposal of marriage. In December 1788, however, she married Lewis Hay, and set up house within the Forbes Bank premises in Parliament Square. Little is known of her life from this point. Her husband died in 1800, leaving her with six young children. She lived for some time subsequently in Edinburgh, at Buccleuch Place; her name does not appear in the Edinburgh directory after 1820, so we assume that she left then for Pau, where she lived until the date of her death.

Robert Chambers printed the following description of her character by a relative:-

"In early life, when her hazel eyes were large and bright and her teeth white and regular, her face must have had a charm not always the result or the accompaniment of fine features. She was little, but her figure must have been perfect... Her conversation was cheerful and intelligent. She rarely talked of books, yet greatly liked reading. She spoke readily and well, but preferred listening to others. In short, the character given by M. de Grignan of Madame de Sévigné, in a letter announcing her death, would give a more exact idea of Margaret Chalmers than anything I can write. As with Madame de Sévigné, her religion not only supported her under affliction, but guided her whole conduct. She judged correctly of light literature, yet her general reading was serious and instructive. Her heart was warm, her temper even, and her conversation lively. I have often been told that her gentleness and vivacity had a favourable influence on the manner of Burns, and that he appeared to advantage in her presence."

The text of twelve of the poet's letters to Margaret Chalmers appear in James Mackay's "The Complete Letters of Robert Burns" together with the following comment:-

Cromek states that Burns's letters to Margaret Chalmers were 'thrown into the fire by the late Mrs. Adair of Scarborough' (her cousin, Charlotte Hamilton) but omits to mention whether his text was taken from the charred fragments rescued from the fire, or from partial transcripts made before the originals were destroyed. Allan Cunningham states that 'nothing was saved except such fragments as were found among the Bard's memoranda', but this seems doubtful. Several of the fragmentary letters are dated, whereas Burns very seldom dated his drafts.
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Enquiries to:
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"freedom and whisky
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The title of this article from 'Love's Delightful Fetters (That) Chain the Willing Soul', a quote from Robert Burns's poem, Mark Yonder Pomp. Robert Burns was a great proponent of freedom. For him, freedom was a cherished ideal and he did not use words like 'slavery' and 'chains' lightly. However, when speaking of Love, he used the same words in a positive sense, to describe a force to which both male and female should cheerfully submit. What does this mean?

Sigmund Freud once said that everyone wants to be dominated, but it is what we choose to dominate us that reveals our character. Robert Burns could have spent all his energy pursuing money, fame, power, religious persecution, or many other things, but he chose to be dominated by Love (with a capital L) and his poetry and songs express this.

Robert Burns had an inner sense of self-worth and human dignity - 'the pith o sense an pride o worth' - that he considered 'natural' - an innate part of human nature. He felt that the desire for freedom and the adhorrence of slavery was part of the human condition. In Man Was Made to Mourn - A Dirge, he wrote:

If I'm design'd yon lordling's slave—
By Nature's law design'd—
Why was an independant wish
E'er planted in my mind?
If not, why am I subject to
His cruelty, or scorn?
Or why has Man the will and pow'r
To make his fellow mourn?

He believed in political freedom, religious freedom, and sexual freedom. And he felt that this desire for freedom was mirrored in the world of nature, where all - people, trees and animals - are equal. In On Scaring Some Water-Foul in Loch Turit, he wrote:

Common friend to you and me,
Nature's gifts to all are free...
And in his poem, Castle Gordon appear these lines:

Woods that ever verdant wave,
I leave the tyrant and the slave:
Give me the groves that lofty brave
The storms of Castle Gordon.

Robert Burns did not scorn money; on the contrary, he worked at two jobs near the end of his life, as a farmer and as an exciseman, to make ends meet. In his youth, he tried a flax dressing apprenticeship in hopes of making a better living than farming. He was not disturbed by poverty, but did regret the hardship it put on his family. In Poortith Cauld (cold poverty), he wrote:

Yet poortith a' I could forgive,
An 'twere na for my Jeanie.
But he goes on to say that while he wants money, he does not want to be a slave to it:

The warld's wealth when I think on,
Its pride and a' the lave o't—
My curse on silly coward man,
That he should be the slave o't!

Even cowardice, he believed, was more hon-
ourable than slavery, since it shows the desire for freedom. In *Scots Wha Hae*, the approach of ‘proud Edward’s power’ signals ‘chains and slaverie’. Burns says, ‘Wha sae base as be a slave? – Let him turn, and flee!’ Otherwise, the Scots should die rather than see their ‘sons in servile chains’. In *On Scaring Some Water-Fowl in Loch Turrit*, he tells the birds to flee the human tyrant: ‘And the foe you cannot brave, Scorn at least to be his slave’. This is a recurring theme in Robert Burns’s poetry. He often uses the term ‘coward slave’, but when he does distinguish between the two, it is better to be a coward and run away than a willing slave.

So why the change in his attitude towards slavery and chains when it came to Love? For Robert Burns, Love (with a capital L) made life bearable and worthwhile. In *Man Was Made To Mourn—a Dirge*, the old man tells the younger that death is the recompense for a miserable life, but the words Burns wrote would apply equally to Love:

*The poor, oppressed, honest man*

*Had never, sure, been born,*

*Had there not been some recompense*

*To comfort those that mourn!*

Robert Burns was literally doomed to a life of poverty, hardship, overwork and poor health, which led to his early death at the age of thirty-seven. Yet his life was joyous. He had many friends of both sexes, a happy family life and several love affairs. He made people happy wherever he went. He was not a dour Scot. No one met Robert Burns and went away depressed, with the possible exception of Willie Fisher.

Passion was an important part of Love for Robert Burns. The nobility had its arranged marriages and code of acceptable behaviour, but the peasant class had an honest passion, had a lust for life and married for Love. Burns always felt that the nobility had lost out on something very important.

In *Kissin My Katie*, he describes a day of honest work followed by a night of honest loving:

*O, merry hae I been teethin a heckle*

*An merry hae I been shapin a spoon!*

*O, merry hae I been cloutin a kettle,*

*An kissin my Katie when a’ was done!*

*O, a the lang day I ca’ at my hammer,*

*An a’ the lang day I whistle and sing!*

*O, a’ the lang night I cuddle my kimmer,*

*An a’ the lang night as happy’s a king!*

And again, one has the contrast between the city and the country, and, in this case, between the city woman, who is concerned with fashion and hairstyles and who marries a man because he is rich and has an old family name, and the country woman, in her simple clothes but with a sunny personality and an unbounded passion. Burns describes the city woman in *Poortith Cauld*:

*Her e’en sae bonie blue betray*

*How she repays my passion;*

*But prudence is her o’erword ay:*

*She talks o rank and fashion.*

Not exactly a ray of sunshine! Now contrast this with the country woman, in *Mark Yonder Pomp*:

*But did you see my dearest Chloris*

*In simplicity’s array,*

*Lovely as yonder sweet opening flower is,*

*Shrinking from the gaze of day?*

The poem begins:

*Mark yonder pomp of costly fashion*

*Round the wealthy, titled bride!*

*But, when compar’d with real passion,*

*Poor is all that princely pride.*

It was no wonder to Burns that while the lord married a woman for the size of her dowry, or tocher, he would have his affairs with the country woman. In *My Lord A-Hunting He is Gane* (and he’s not hunting what his lady thinks he’s hunting), one reads:

*My lady’s white, may lady’s red,*

*And kith and kin o Cassillis’ blude;*

*But her ten-pund lands o tocher guid*

*Were a’ the charms his lordship lo’ed*

*Out o’er yon muir, out o’er yon moss,*

*Whare gow-cocks thro the heather pass,*

*There wons auld Colin’s bonie lass,*

*A lily in a wilderness.*

*Sae sweetly move her genty limbs,*

*Like music notes o lovers’ hymns!*

*The diamond-dew in her een sae blue,*

*Where laughing love sae wanton swims!*

In *Lovely Davies*, Burns describes her:

*Her smile’s a gift frae ‘boon the lift,*

*That makes us mair than princes.*

*A sceptred hand, a king’s command,*

*Is in her daring glances.*

*The man in arms ‘gainst female charms,*

*Even he her willing slave is:*

*He hugs his chain, and owns the reign*

*Of conquering lovely Davies.*

He describes the charm of the country woman in *Sae Flaxen Were Her Ringlets*:

*Sae flaxen were her ringlets,*
Her eyebrows of a darker hue,
Bewitching o'er-arching
Twa laughing een o bonie blue.
Her smiling, sae wyling,
Wad make a wretch forget his woé!
What pleasure, what treasure,
Unto those rosy lips to grow!

Like harmony her motion,
Her pretty ankle is a spy
Betraying fair proportion
Wad make a saint forget the sky!

Robert Burns felt there was no loss in dignity for both men and women to be a slave to Love, for it was a willing slavery. Since the marriages were not arranged but freely contracted, the chains were willing chains. And the reward was when the woman said ‘she lo’es me best of a’.

Hers are the willing chains of love
By conquering beauty’s sovereign law,
And ay my Chloris’ dearest charm—
She says she lo’e me best of a’.

And in the bondage of Love, people find a freedom of expression that makes the rest of life worthwhile and bearable. In Their Groves o Sweet Myrtle he wrote:

The slave’s spicy forests and gold-bubbling fountains

The brave Caledonian views wi disdain:
He wanders as free as the winds of his mountains,
Save Love’s willing fetters— the chains o his Jean.

In By Allan Stream, the poet says that even the beauties of nature cannot compete with the beauties of Love:

But can they melt the glowing heart,
Or chain the soul in speechless pleasure,
Or thro each nerve the rapture dart,
Like meeting her, our bosom’s treasure?

And he is insistent that the woman should be the slave to Love, not to the man (Scottish women are not famous for being doormats):

‘Husband, husband, cease your strife,
Nor longer idly rave, sir!
Tho I am your wedded wife,
Yet I am not your slave, sir.’

One can tell that Robert Burns liked women in the names he chose— ‘my Katie’ (not Katherine), Jeanie, Jessie, and Annie. Robert Burns saw Love as a liberating slavery which raised people above the drudgery of everyday life. No matter how hard the days were, the nights would be worthwhile. ‘Love’s delightful chains’ chain the soul in speechless pleasure’ and he would always be ‘a slave to Love’s unbounded sway’.

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THE SONGS OF ROBERT BURNS
BY DONALD LOW

There is a strong case for stating that the magic of Burns the Poet after the publication of the Kilmarnock Edition was readily eclipsed by Robert Burns the National Song Writer and Archivist of Scotland’s Musical Heritage.

Today, unfortunately, a singer adopting the original melody to which Burns wrote his famous lyrics will be given grudging applause and mutterings will be heard declaiming ‘It’s no’ near as guid as the original auld tune’.

The difficulty of adapting fiddle and pipe tunes to suit the human voice range, the great interest in Burns as a metaphor for lost nationhood, together with cheap printing and popular performances a century ago resulted in a plethora of new musical arrangements.

Many were far from the original tunes and today many of Burns lyrics appear stilted. The Poet was to write late in his life “Until I am complete master o’a tune, in my own singing, I can never compose (verse) to it”.

In 1903 Greenock-bom James C. Dick published a mammoth volume of the collected tunes to which the Poet composed his lyrics and annotated from Burns copious notes on the origins. To hear the Poet’s lyrics sung to these original tunes a few times is to wonder why folk were so perverse as to bother making changes. And it explains why, for example, in the popularly sung “Bonnie Wee Thing” Burns appears, with emphasis, to glorify being “Wee” as paramount. When sung to the original obviously it was the “Bonnie” aspect that was his inspiration.

Burns suffers from his biographers and the redoubtable Mr. Dick censored much of the collection, stating that it was less than suitable for polite society whatever he conjured that to be.

Ninety years has elapsed since anyone has had the courage and dedication to restore to the nation
our musical heritage and particularly to show the great merit of Burns, the songwriter.

The publication of “THE SONGS OF ROBERT BURNS”, edited by Donald Low, repairs that omission in grand style. The collection includes the many manuscripts that have turned up, or been removed for reason of not being genteel enough for publication over the two centuries. Donald Low’s studies of Burns are well known but this is his greatest achievement and a study of the original airs together with Burns’ lyrics will give an understanding of why Burns, when sending “Rothiemurchas Rant to George Thomson noted “The air puts me in rapture: in fact unless I am pleased with a tune I can never make verses to it”.

The Publishers, Routledge, have made an excellent presentation but, unfortunately, at a cost of £120 the volume will remain a must for Clubs and Libraries only.

S. K. Gaw

CENTENARY PLAQUE UNVEILED

On 11th May, 1992, a plaque to commemorate the Centenary Dinner of the Strathearn Burns Club was erected in the foyer of the Drummond Arms Hotel, Crieff. Present on this occasion and pictured from left to right, are Mrs Dorothy Stewart, Treasurer; Mr. William McAvoy, Honorary President; Mr. Edgar Hunter, President; Mr. Michael Kidd, Secretary.

On January 21st, 1989, the Strathearn Burns Club, No. 42, celebrated its centenary at its annual dinner in the Drummond Arms Hotel in Crieff. On this occasion the toast to the “Immortal Memory” was proposed by Prof. David Daiches.

On 25th January, 1889, the formation of the Burns Club in Crieff was announced in the “Strathearn Herald” as follows:

“Burns’ Anniversary - A Burns Club was last night inaugurated here, and the gathering proved very successful.”

The Centenary Dinner, at which over one hundred were present, was also a great success, and the membership resolved, with the concurrence of the proprietor of the hotel, to mark the occasion with a plaque. This was formally “unveiled” on 11th May, 1992, in the foyer of the Drummond Arms.

Michael G. Kidd

CHRONICLE BINDERS

Binders for the Burns Chronicle incorporating The Burnsian are now available from Head Office, Kilmarnock, price £3.50 post paid UK. The Binders will hold 8 issues (2 years) of the magazine.
Certain eras in history have become indistinguishable from the major events which occurred during their run. This holds especially true for each century from the beginning of the early modern era, around 1500, right through to the twentieth century. The sixteenth century could be characterized by reformation, counter-reformation, and incessant warfare. The seventeenth century bore witness to national crises in England, Scotland, the German States, the Netherlands, and most of the remainder of Western Europe. In the eighteenth century similar problems became more global in nature as the independent nations of the future began to flex their muscles and Western Europe began to industrialise. Both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed new age-old problems becoming increasingly complex and thoroughly international in scope.

Although the global picture in 1992 bears little or no resemblance to that of 1500, it is true that the connecting centuries have experienced one major and continuing theme: that of revolution. In each century since 1500 there have been two or more examples of active and organised resistance or opposition to a higher and usually more powerful authority. Armed or unarmed, successful or unsuccessful, justifiable or not, religious or secular, the age of revolution which began in the sixteenth century has continued down to the present day. The era for which the age of revolution has become most synonymous, however, is the eighteenth century. Not only did revolutions during that period become, by and large, a global phenomenon, but they also transgressed boundaries other than physical. As revolutions became increasingly interdisciplinary and intense, so did their commentators. Supporters and critics, both engaging in forms of political protest, revelled in wide circulation of their materials due to increased popular literacy and owed much to an even greater degree of political consciousness.

The eighteenth century bore witness to at least four types of revolution: physical, technological, intellectual and cultural. In order to comment on either one or all of the phenomena, individuals did not have to be acutely aware of the precise occurrences in every nation – and indeed one might suggest that would have been impossible even for the most learned members of any given society. What was necessary, however, was for individual commentators to be able to observe and analyse the effects of the various revolutions on their particular societies. For example, if tales of a successful American revolt against British authority were to create rumbles of discontent among the various classes in other nations, political and social commentators could grasp such an opportunity to espouse their particular prejudices only if they were aware of the method and means of manipulating the dissatisfied crowd. In other words, the commentators had to be aware of methods by which they might appeal to possible disgruntled hordes lest political and/or social treatises fall on deaf ears. This, of course, assumes that the average individual in the eighteenth century showed some interest in either domestic or international politics. If, indeed, the average farmer or labourer of the period showed little concern for matters which did not affect his own personal livelihood, then the task of the commentator was made that much more difficult.

We will assume, therefore, that the relative success or failure of political or social commentator in the eighteenth century depended on his ability, or lack thereof, to communicate with a mass of people whose response was bound to be largely uncertain. It is into this category that a man such as Robert Burns must be placed. It will become evident not only that his writings largely consisted of social and political protest but also that, as he was very much a man of his environment, he was able to express his feelings clearly to all levels of Scottish society. In order that the popularity of Robert Burns can be understood, however, it is of the utmost importance to have some knowledge of the nature of Scottish society in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Historians have generally considered the second half of the eighteenth century as the period in which Western Europe experienced a technological and agricultural revolution. The more generic term often cited in the past was the 'Industrial Revolution'. Not wishing to be weighed down by semantics, it suffices to say that the term 'revolution' in the sense it is used is misleading, for it implies a sudden and universal phenomenon.

The inhabitants of eighteenth century Scotland would have had little difficulty arguing that the experience was neither sudden nor universal. It may not even be accurate to label eighteenth century Scotland as a society in transition firstly because the nation was an agglomeration of several quite different societies and secondly because as a nation she did not have complete control over her own destiny. This is not meant to suggest that Scotland never experienced an industrial revolu-
tion, but rather that there were several barriers to immediate and extensive industrialisation.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Scotland was a nation whose economy was dominated by its agrarian sector and whose social structure was little changed from its past in that the landowning class still dominated both politically and economically.\(^1\) There seems little reason to dwell on the eccentricities of that numerically inferior group of people, although commentators such as Robert Burns loved to make public their contempt for that class (and Burns succeeded in *The Twa Dogs*) we are better off studying the numerically superior class in order to define Burns as a product of his environment. The main focus, therefore, should be on the 'average' eighteenth century Scotsman.

It is probably safe to assume that the majority of Scots in the eighteenth century, regardless of their geographic location, were mainly concerned with their own well being. It has been suggested in the past that they were interested very little in the affairs of civil or national government.\(^2\) Basically, this owed much to the fact that their monotonous existence did not allow them the time to be concerned with affairs of state. One does not need to become involved with endless lamentable tracts regarding the meaner folk before clearly understanding that the average Scot did not have much in his favour. As the main industry was agriculture, it makes perfect sense that examples be drawn from that area. It is clear from an analysis of such factors as rents and wages that the average farmer was fighting an uphill battle as rents were high and wages were extremely low. To complicate matters even further, the majority of land under cultivation was only marginally fertile at best. The system employed, known as the infield-outfield system, did not allow for regeneration of the soil because the infield, that area reserved for crops, was kept under perpetual tillage.\(^3\) Marginal land, poor returns, rack-renting, low wages, overwork and other uncertainties such as bad weather or crop failures all combined to make the lot of the average farmer a meagre one.

It was into this sort of arrangement that Robert Burns was born. The numerous biographies of Burns all make note of the fact that his father, William Burns, died both worn out from overwork and bankrupt. If this had been an isolated incident, or if the number of instances in which someone suffered a similar fate were too few to mention, then one might be able to blame the individuals involved for their own downfall. However, such was not the case. That the social order which existed in eighteenth century Scotland weighed heavily in favour of the monied class is not a moot point, but not all of the blame can be placed on that class either. It is important to remember that, whether in industry or agriculture, continued success depends on innovation, the technical skills to utilise those innovations, a relative level of solvency to afford the costs and, most importantly, the willingness to innovate. In one sense, then, the existing social order was to blame for the downfall of many of the tenant farming class because that existing order, so it appears, wished to perpetuate their status-quo. In another sense, however, that very rigidly structured society was held captive by the fact that, as one authority believes, Scotland had to import trained personnel since the availability of domestic technical skill was negligible.\(^4\)

This should not be interpreted as an apology for the social arrangement which existed in eighteenth century Scotland because there seems little doubt that it was inherently inflexible. It also permeated all areas of Scotland. As mentioned, Scotland was not exactly a homogenous society. Not only were there Highlanders and Lowlanders, but there were also the inhabitants of the Isles, the midland areas, and of the northeast, the last group a seemingly curious blend of the others. Regardless of geography, however, the same social order existed, oblivious of the historic differences of the various peoples. For this reason the lot of the average Scot in the Isles was comparable to that of the average Lowland peasant. One authority has noted that what was expected of the lower orders was deference and obedience.\(^5\) Commonsense would lead one to believe, however, that it would be very difficult continually to maintain respectful regard for someone with whom perpetuating the status-quo has come to mean forced compliance.

The political picture, as one may expect, was a virtual mirror image of the social one in that it was both extremely restrictive, giving the average Scot little or no say in its operation, and did not heed the facts of historical geography. While it may be true that the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 had the potential for introducing Scotland to all sorts of new and promising horizons, it is also true that it was a union for better or for worse. Unfortunately for Scotland and the economic well being of her people, from 1707 onward she was at war when England was at war. A natural consequence of war is that it severely disrupts foreign trade. The best example from the eighteenth century to illustrate the fatal blow dealt to Scottish overseas trade regards Scottish involvement in the American Revolution. From 1707 to the outbreak of war with the United States, the importation and re-exportation of tobacco dominated Scottish overseas trade, and there seems little reason to doubt that the
Union of Parliaments benefitted Scotland immensely in that respect. However, in 1776 the amount of tobacco imported from the United States was cut drastically; whereas, in 1775, 46 million pounds had been imported, by 1777 only 294,896 pounds were imported.\(^6\) One does not have to be an economic wizard to realise the ruinous effects that such an action would have had on the Scottish economy did not go belly up with great haste owed much to two factors: industrial diversification in the form of an increasingly capable linen industry, and innovative thought represented by the location and development of alternative markets.\(^7\)

If one wished to be obtuse, one would suggest that had it not been for the onset of the American Revolution, Scotland would not have striven for diversification and innovation. Such an assertion is worth very little consideration. The fact was that following 1707 it would usually be the case that, like it or not, 'as went England so did Scotland'. Having the power base located in another country was not the problem, for Scots had been living with that ever since 1603. The problem was the intense restriction of the political system and its primarily Anglo focus. Consider the facts: Scotland was accorded representation in the Westminster Parliament of only 16 out of 206 seats in the House of Lords and 45 out of 568 in the House of Commons.\(^8\) In Ayrshire, where Burns grew up, there were, according to one authority, more qualified freeholders (those eligible to vote) than in any other country, but only 205 out of a population of 65,000 were entitled to vote as late as 1782.\(^9\) The conclusion is obvious: even approaching the end of the so-called 'age of revolution', Scotland had surrendered its sovereignty and was therefore the object of total political and social inequality.

This was the world in which Robert Burns grew up. It was a quasi-Darwinian world in which not even the fittest were guaranteed survival. It was, however, a world in which much could be observed and even interpreted if one could maintain the quest for knowledge through discovery. Evidently Burns was able to achieve this. One should not be misled and assume that Burns was alone commenting upon the inadequacies and inequalities of the existing social order, for, indeed, there were others. In a way Burns expanded on the work of countless others before him. Employing similar methods, such as social commentary, he utilised the talents of an educated observer to suit those methods to a world quaking in revolution. That there existed so much social inequality and political corruption merely added fuel to a burgeoning literary fire.

While Burns may have been consumed with social and political imbalance, it may not be entirely precise to label Burns as having been a poet of the 'common man'. This would suggest that he wanted to stand the members of the establishment order on their collective heads. That does not seem to have been his intention, for that would only have created a new order closely resembling the old; in other words, it would have perpetuated the evils of imbalance rather than alleviating them. It is true that Burns wrote for a local audience in that they shared a common interest in current issues and events relevant to their daily lives,\(^10\) but there would have been little use in writing for the inflexibility haughty, if he sought change. Social revolution from the bottom up was not his aim but, rather, the attainment of a social equilibrium through the realisation of a collective experience. One may argue that the attainment of such a goal still constituted social revolution in that the well established social order would be toppled. However, even the most superficial perusing of the various works published by Burns shows that, while he may have been writing in a period characterised by the effects of numerous revolutions on their given societies and hence a period characterised by a social revolution, he was more concerned with the 'effects' and less with the actual 'revolutions'. It was, therefore, his goal to minimise the effects on society of an age of revolution by making people aware of the fact that 'we are all in this together.'

The preceding is clearly the message in To A Louse, one of the celebrated Kilmarnock Poems. The story line of this poem is a relatively simple one in that Burns discovers a louse crawling on the bonnet being worn by a lady as she sits in church:

> Ha! whare ye gaun' ye crowlin' ferlie?
> You impudence protects you sairly;
> I canna say but ye strunt rarely
> Oure gawze and lace,
> Tho faith! I fear ye dine but sparely
> On sic a place.

It must be understood that a louse was not exactly something that anyone would wish to have invade his privacy as it was, and is, a parasite usually associated with animals. The fact that it was crawling on a 'lady', as opposed to a 'wench', seemed even further cause for alarm. Burns, unaware of the social standing of the woman, but assuming much from her outward appearance, properly castigates the vermin:

> Ye ugly, creepin, blastit wonner,
> Detested, shunn'd by saunt an sinner,
> How daur ye set your fit upon her--
> Sae fine a lady!
> Gae somewhere else and seek your dinner
On some poor body.

Swith! in some beggar's hauffet squattle;
There ye may creep, and sprawl, and sprattle,
Wi' ither kindred, jumping cattle
In shoals and nations;
Where horn nor bane ne'er daur unsettle
Your thick plantations.

Bums then lets the creature know that its minutes are numbered, as he plans to rid the lady of her unwelcome guest:

Now haud you there! ye're out a sight,
Below the fatt'rils, snug and tight,
Na, naither! ye'll no be right,
Till ye've got on it—
The vera tapmost, tow'rin height
O Miss's bonnet.

My sooth! right bauld ye set your nose out,
As plump an gray as onie grozet:
O for some rank, mercurial rozet,
Or fell, red smeddum,
I'd gie you sic a hearty dose o't,
Wad dress your droddum!

Bums still conveys a sense of surprise at the impudence of the insect, and while he lets the creature know its proper place, he ceases to elevate the lady to a higher social standing and lets her know, in no uncertain terms, what has transpired:

I wad na been surpris'd to spy
You on an auld wife's flainen toy;
Or aiblins some bit duddie boy,
On's wyliecoat;
But Miss's fine Lunardi! fye!
How daur ye do't?

O Jeany, dinna toss your head,
An set your beauties a' abroad!
Ye little ken what cursed speed
The blastie's makin!
Thae winks an finger-ends, I dread,
Are notice takin!

The final stanza packs the popular Burns punch:

O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithersee us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
An foolish notion:
What airs in dress an gait wad le'a us,
An ev'n devotion!

In other words, one may imbue oneself with all forms of social airs and graces, but the same misfortune might befall any one of us. It is clearly the 'we are all in this together' theme. Burns hopes that the lady has realised that it is essential we help each other along in this life because, if we gain a better understanding of each other, it will minimise the artificial gap between the various classes.

A similar vein courses through The Cotter's Saturday Night. There is, however, one major difference in this poem, and that is the absence of any form of satirical wit. It seems evident that the poem was meant to show others what the life of the average Scottish peasant was like. Therefore it must have been aimed at the higher orders in Scottish society, because the lower orders knew perfectly well what their life was like. It is an unusual poem in that, while a sombre mood pervades a great deal of it, there is also an undercurrent of hope and sentiment and, of course, social commentary. The final trait, however, sneaks up on the reader as Burns begins with the potatoes instead of the meat:

II November chill blaws loud wi angry sigh;
The short'ning winter-day is near a close;
The miry beasts retreating frae the plough;
The black'ning trains a craws to their repose:
The toil-worn Cotter frae his labor goes—
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o' er the moor, his course does
hameward bend.

III At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree:
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stracher through
To meet their dad, wi flichterin noise and glee.

The short'ning winter-day is near a close;
The misty beasts retreating frae the plough;
The black'ning trains a craws to their repose:
The toil-worn Cotter frae his labor goes—
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o' er the moor, his course does
hameward bend.

IV Belyve, the elder bairns come drapping in,
At service out, amang the farmers roun;
Some ca' the plough, some herd, some tentie rin
A cannie errand to a neebor town:
Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman grown,
In youthful bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
Comes hame; perhaps, to show a braw new gown,
Or deposits her sair-won penny-fee,
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

It is clear that the family is not so lucky as to be among the ranks of the financial well-to-do, but it is also clear that the family is a tightly knit one in spite of the obvious sense of tormenting monotony. Robert Burns is very careful in The Cotter's Saturday Night not to unveil a sense of hopeless resignation within the family but, rather, he soon
reveals to us the manner in which the family enlivens with potential hope and promise:

VII But hark! a rap comes gently to the door;
    Jenny, who kens the meaning o' the same,
    Tells how a neighbor lad came o'er the moor,
    To do some errands, and cooony her hame.
    The wily mother sees the conscious flame
    Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek;
    With heart-struck anxious care, inquires his name,
    While Jenny halfkins is afraid to speak;
    Weel-pleas'd the mother hears, it's nae wild,
    Worthless rake.

VIII Wi kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;
    A strappin youth, he takes the mother's eye;
    Blythe Jenny sees the visit's no ill taen;
    The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi joy,
    But blate an laithfu, scarce can weel behave;
    The mother, wi a woman's wiles, can spy
    What makes the youth sae bashfu and sae grave;
    Weel-pleas'd to think her bairn's respected like the lave.

IX O happy love! where love like this is found:
    O heart-felt raptures! bliss beyond compare!
    I've paced much this weary, mortal round,
    And sage experience bids me this declare,
    'If Heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure spare,
    One cordial in this melancholy vale,
    Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair,
    In other's arms, breathe out the tender tale,
    Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the ev'n ing gale.'

In these lines we glean the style of social commentary utilised by Burns in that he is letting the higher orders know that no station in life is so low as not to experience certain meaningful human interactions which portend a better future.

The meat of the poem is saved for the final course when Burns blends social and political commentary:

XIX From scenes like these, old Scotia's grandeur springs,
    That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad:
    Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
    'An honest man's the noblest work of God';
    And certes, in fair Virtue's heavenly road,
    The cottage leaves the palace far behind;
    What is a lordling's pomp? a cumbrous load,
    Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
    Studied in arts of Hell, in wickedness refin'd!

XX O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!

For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content!
And O! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From Luxury's contagion, weak and vile!
Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much lov'd Isle.

XXI O Thou! who pour'd the patriotic tide,
    That stream'd thro Wallace's undaunted heart,
    Who dar'd to, nobly, stem tyrannic pride,
    Or nobly die, the second glorious part:
    (The patriot's God, peculiarly Thou art,
    His friend, inspirer, guardian and reward!)
    O never, never Scotia's realm desert;
    But still the patriot, and the patriot-bard
    In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard!

Burns has informed the higher orders in Scottish society, those wielding economic and political power, that the real locus of Scottish nationalism and hence the power base of those higher orders are the so-called lower orders. That class of people represented in The Cotter's Saturday Night are promoted to us as the backbone of Scotland; the reference to William Wallace makes that sentiment clear.

While The Cotter's Saturday Night may have blended social and political commentary quite well, the most effective combination of those two forms is to be found in The Twa Dogs. It was mentioned earlier that Burns displays a notable contempt for the numerically inferior class in that tale, but closer examination reveals that that work drips with a sarcasm not seen in too many of his other works. The human race is seen through the eyes of two dogs, one of whom is supposedly aristocratic while the other might be a "cotter's" dog. Luath, the poor dog, tells Caesar, the rich dog, how the poorer folk seem strangely contented:

  An' when they meet wi'sair disasters,
  Like loss o'health or want o masters,
  Ye maist wad think, a wee touch langer,
  An' they maun starve o' cauld and hunger.
  But how it comes, I never kent yet.
  They're maistly w01lderfu' contented;
  An' buirdly chiels, and clever hizzies,
  Are bred in sic a way as this is.

The reply by Caesar is almost one of amazement, and he reasserts the lowly position of Luath:
I've notic'd, on our laird's court-day,  
(An monie a time my heart's been wae),  
Poor tenant bodies, scant a cash,  
How they maun thole a factor's snash:  
He'll stamp an threaten, curse an swear  
He'll apprehend them, poin'd their gear;  
While they maun stan, wi aspect humble,  
An hear it a', an fear an tremble!  
I see how folk live that hae riches;  
But surely poor-folk maun be wretches!  

The sarcasm really begins to flow in the form  
of a role reversal when Luath intimates that mem­  
bers of Parliament are concerned about the poor  
and Caesar replies that Luath is grievously mis­  
led:  

Haith, lad, ye little ken about it:  
for Britain's guid! guid faith! I doubt it.  
Say rather, gaun as Premiers lead him:  
An saying aye of no's they bid him:  
At operas an plays parading,  
Mortgaging gambling, masquerading:  
Or maybe, in a frolic daft,  
To Hague or Calais takes a waft,  
To mak a tour an tak a whirl,  
To learn bon ton, an see the world.  
For Britain's guid! for her destruction  
Wi dissipation, feud and faction.  

One would expect the aristocratic dog to up­  
hold the position or standing of the government,  
but Caesar does exactly the opposite just as he  
later in the poem seems to condemn the actions of  
the idle rich while simultaneously crediting the  
poor for their hard work:  

A countra fellow at the plough,  
His acre's till'd, he's right eneugh;  
A countra girl at her wheel,  
Her dizzen's dune, she's no unco weel;  
But gentlemen, an ladies worst,  
Wi ev'n down want o wark are curt.  
They loiter, lounging, lank an lazy;  
Tho deil-haet ails them, yet uneasy:  
Their days insipid, dull an tasteless;  
Their nights unquiet, lang an restless.  
An ev'n their sports, their balls an races,  
Their galloping through public places,  
There's sic parade, sic pomp an art,  
The joy can scarcely reach the heart.  
The men cast out in party-matches,  
Then sowther a' in deep debauches;  
Ae night they're mad wi drink an whoring,  
Niest day their life is past enduring.  

The conclusion reached by the two is that they  
are happy that they are not men, but dogs. This  
must have been a slap in the face for the higher  
orders, not only in that they were labelled as lazy  
and tasteless and thoughtless by a dog, but also  
because Caesar placed the meaner sort on a higher  
plateau – a rude awakening indeed!  

It is often difficult to analyse the works of  
Burns that focus more on politics than on society.  
This owes much to the fact that, as one authority  
has suggested, his works do not make clear his  
political leanings.  

The reference to the 'Glorious Revolution' of  
1688 is an important one, for that revolution res­  
cued England and Scotland from Stuart despot­  
ism. Therefore, Burns is not in love with the idea  
of actual revolution but, rather, with the promises  
that such revolutions extol for future generations.  
In other words, if societies in the future will be  
freed from tyranny only through the process of  
revolution, if that is the only method by which  
people can obtain their just liberties, so be it.  

What should be clear, then, from the majority  
of the works of Robert Burns is that he was not  
obessed with the idea of 'revolution' but with the  
idea of liberty. He was not really able to comment  
to any great extent on the French Revolution, but  
he was an admirer of it nonetheless. Burns was,  
however, a captive of his job as an Excise Officer in  
Dumfries.  

There is evidence to suggest, however, that  
Burns had not changed his views regarding both  
liberty and revolution, for in 1795 he wrote a piece  
about the Solemn League and Covenant:  

The Solemn League and Covenant cost  
Scotland blood - cost Scotland tears;  
But it sealed Freedom's sacred cause-  
If thou'r a slave, indulge thy sneers.  

Whether or not the reference to the Covenant  
was accurate seems of little consequence. Burns  
would have had a great deal of difficulty agreeing  
with the moral duplicity and confused thinking  
possessed by the majority of Covenanters. It is  
obvious from what he wrote, however, that Burns  
admired what he believed to be the thematic air  
around their struggle: the attainment of political  
and religious liberty.
The foregoing material has attempted to make several facts clear. Firstly, there seems little doubt that Burns was writing in an age of social revolution. Regardless of which heading the various forms of revolution mentioned earlier pretended to come under, they should all be seen as primarily social revolutions since the society at large would have been the factor most influenced. Secondly, Burns was very much a product of his environment since he wrote about the major aim of social revolution: the attainment of specific liberties. Whether or not the various forms of social revolution achieved their goals is not important; rather, the fact that they seemed to portend social improvement was of importance. Thirdly, Burns saw the world as being a chaotic mixture of inequality and imbalance, and wrote the way he did in order that all would become aware of that fact and attempt to alleviate the ills of a society held captive by an antiquated social and political structure. In other words, Burns believed that the world did not have to be such a cold and unforgiving place, and would not be so, if only all people realised that we are all in this together.

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