2001
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THE ROBERT BURNS WORLD FEDERATION
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HONORARY PRESIDENTS

OFFICIALS
Chief Executive: SHIRLEY BELL, “Inveresk,” Kelton, Dumfries. DG1 4UA. Tel/Fax: 01387 770283.
President: JAMES GIBSON, Craigowan Cottage, 28 Brewlands Road, Symington, Ayrshire. Tel: 01563 830312.
Senior Vice-President: JIM ROBERTSON, 4 Hunter's Close, Dunnington, York. YO1 5QH. Tel: 01904 489201.
Junior Vice-President: H. WILSON LOGAN, 64 Ballyhampton Road, Larne, N. Ireland. BT40 2SP.
Clerical Secretary: Mrs. MARGARET CRAIG, Dick Institute, Elmbank Avenue, Kilmarnock. KA1 3BU.
Editor: PETER J. WESTWOOD, 1 Cairnsmore Road, Castle Douglas. DG7 1BN. Tel/Fax: 01556 504448.
Honorary Legal Advisor: DAVID STEVENSON.
Auditors: SMITH & WALLACE & CO.

CONVENERS
200 Club: MOIRA RENNIE DUNSMORE, 59 Beechwood Court, Dunstable, Beds. LU6 1YA. Tel: 01582 705671.
Schools Competitions: ANNE GAW, 7 Highfield Place, Girdle Toll, Irvine. KA11 1BW. Tel: 01294 217481.
Scottish Literature: JOHN G. PATERSON, Newlands, 35 Shorncliffe Road, Folkestone, Kent. CT20 2NQ.
Memorials Committee: JOE KENNEDY, 49 Sutherland Drive, Kilmarnock. KA3 7JW. Tel: 01563 531688.
Marketing/Advertising: MURDO MORRISON, 110 Campbell Street, Wishaw. ML2 8HU. Tel: 01698 372638.
Conference Committee: MOIRA RENNIE DUNSMORE, 59 Beechwood Court, Dunstable, Beds. LU6 1YA. Tel: 01582 705671.

PAST PRESIDENTS

THE VISION by ROBERT BURNS
A SHORT EXTRACT TO COMPLEMENT THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE OIL PAINTING ON THE COVER OF THIS ISSUE BY THE ARTIST JAMES ELDER CHRISTIE.

‘Then never murmur nor repine;
Stirve in thy humble sphere to shine;
And trust me, not Potosi’s mine,
Nor king’s regard,
Can give a bliss o’ermatching thine,
A rustic Bard.

‘To give my counsels all in one,
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan;
Preserve the dignity of Man,
With soul erect:
And trust the Universal Plan
Will all protect.

And wear thou ‘–She solemn said,
And bound the holly round my head:
The polish’d leaves and berries red
Did rustling play;
And, like a passing thought, she fled
In light away.

IRVINE CLUB’S STAINED GLASS WINDOW
The window pictured overleaf is a montage of items directly related to Burns and his contemporaries. At the top of the window is the scroll and art work taken from David Sillar’s Burgess Ticket together with the Seals of the Royal Burgh or Irvine. Immediately under this is an extract from a Burns letter to his Irvine friend Captain Richard Brown dated Edinburgh 30 December, 1787, in which he credits Brown with encouraging him “to endeavour at the character of a Poet”. On the left middle is the front page of Burns Kilmarnock Edition and in the centre is the Beugo head taken from the Poet’s Edinburgh Edition. Centre right is the Founding Minute of Irvine Burns Club dated Irvine 2 June, 1826, with the signatures of the twelve founding members. Bottom left is an extract from Burns autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore dated Mauchline 2 August, 1787, in which he writes of Irvine “My twenty third year was an important era to me…” On the right of this is the front page of David Sillar’s book of poems printed by John Wilson, Kilmarnock, in 1789. Below this is an extract from Surgeon Fleeming’s Day Book showing the treatment and drugs prescribed for Burns during his illness in Irvine in November, 1781. Extreme bottom centre is one of Burns letters to David Sillar dated Ellisland 22 January, 1790, in which he enclosed the sum of £2- 4/- (£2.20 in today’s currency, i.e. the book would cost 5p in today’s money). To the right of this are two verses written by the Poet in Irvine where he contemplated becoming a soldier beginning “Oh why the duece should I repine…” Below this is a heckling comb with flax fibres. Bottom left is a map of Irvine as it was in Burns time. The glass of the montage is multi-coloured and the whole is attractively adorned with the bright blue flower of the flax.
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Margaret and John Skilling
REMINISCENCES OF THE IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

It was a great honour to serve as President of the Robert Burns World Federation. You would expect me to say that! But it was. And a great pleasure too, for both my wife and I. By great good fortune Margaret is a Burnsian too and she is seen opposite wearing the chain of President of the Ayrshire Association of Burns Clubs* when our terms of office overlapped.

We got invited to parties, functions and competitions which we really enjoyed, met old friends and made new ones. We were invited because I had the chain but were warmly received because we were with Burnsians.

The Federation is in good heart. Our finances are in the black, mainly due to Shirley Bell’s sterling efforts, and our membership is growing, at Association, Club, family and individual levels. Our Committees are focussed and our Conveners are not just holding their positions; they are developing their remits. Progress is being made in all fronts.

Yes, it has been a marvellous term in office with the successful Conference in Atlanta being the icing on the cake thanks to Mac Irvin and his merry band. We even got two MSPs (Alan Wilson, Deputy Minister for Sport, Culture and the Arts and David Mundell) and the Chief Executive of Ayrshire and Arran Tourist Board, Janet Rueben, to come along. They showed real interest and joined as individual members of the Federation. There’s commitment for you.

It is also very satisfying to hand over office to such a young active and knowledgeable Burnsian as Jimmy Gibson, our new President, who will put his own inimitable stamp on the Federation. To our Senior Vice President, Jim Roberts, and our new Junior Vice, Wilson Logan I can only suggest they fulfil their obvious potential. We are now led by a Scotsman, an Englishman (residing in anyway) and an Irishman!

The great triumvirate! Now that reminds me of a story…

‘These be thy guardian and reward
So prays thy faithful friend…’

John H. Skilling

* It is not the first time that we have had a President of the Federation whose wife was, at the same time President of the Ayrshire Association of Burns Clubs. In 1973-74 Thomas Anderson was President while his wife Jean was Ayrshire President from 1971-73. Once again too the lady was a teacher brought up in the Ayrshire countryside.
President James Gibson
I am a native of Kilmarnock and honoured to be a Past President of Kilmarnock Burns Club but in July I received the most wonderful honour of all in the Presidency of the Robert Burns World Federation.

I am most conscious of the fine history and traditions of the Federation and of the many fine Presidents who in their own terms of office worked to promote our great organisation.

It was a wonderful experience to be in Atlanta and to meet the many eminent scholars, politicians and Burns enthusiasts from a’ the airts who were in attendance. The enthusiasm and commitment displayed by all during the weekend was most reassuring and a great positive indication of the power, the popularity and the worldwide appeal and respect for the poet.

I, like many others, am deeply passionate about Burns and his works, and will most certainly do all in my power to celebrate the poet, to uphold the traditions and to promote the aims and ideals of the Federation.

Every year is a new challenge but the expertise and commitment within the Federation will ensure that we go forward in a positive and united manner. We will adapt our thinking and strategy to suit the demands of these modern times and ensure that we are in the vanguard of the Burns movement.

I look forward to my year, and most of all, to meet friends who I am proud to call fellow Burnsians.

But ye whom social pleasure charms,
Whose heart the tide of kindness warms,
Who hold your being on the terms,
Each aid the others,
Come to my bowl, come to my arms,
My friends, my brothers!

JAMES GIBSON
PRESIDENT ROBERT BURNS WORLD FEDERATION
FROM THE EDITOR
1 CAIRNSMORE ROAD, CASTLE DOUGLAS, DG7 1BN, SCOTLAND

It will be seen from the number of articles in this edition of the Chronicle that my appeal for editorial support by the way of contributions has for the time being been most successful, and I take this opportunity of thanking all contributors to this the 109th issue. The Chronicle has been published every year since its inception in 1892, which must be a record for this type of publication. Contributions are still required for future issues.

On the 21st July Greenock Burns Club celebrated their 200th Anniversary having met for the first time on 21st July, 1801. Your attention is drawn to the article on page 103 Rev. Hamilton Paul (1773-1854). During my researches on manuscripts of Robert Burns, his family and associates I had the good fortune of studying the original minutes of the Alloway Club in the hand of the Rev. Hamilton Paul whose members first met in the Poet’s Cottage in the summer of 1801. While this first meeting and the names of those attending have been well recorded, other interesting details have not. The minutes cover the period from 1801 until 1810 when the annual meeting of the Club (Burns Supper) was held in the Kings Arms Inn, Ayr. Most of these early meetings were held on the 29th January as the minute of 1801 states “… the next meeting should take place on 29th January the supposed birthday of the Poet”. The Alloway Club will be featured in the next issue of the Chronicle.

In the September issue of the Burnsian News I appealed for members to collect used foreign stamps and send them to me at the above address. When sufficient have been collected these will be sold with the proceeds going towards one of the Federation’s projects. A number of Burnsians informed me that Robert Burns had composed an appropriate verse applicable to the horrors of the 11th September. New York member of the Federation Thomas Keith suggested the lines from “Man was made to mourn” see below.

Peter J. Westwood

SEPTMBER 11th 2001

“Many and sharp the num’rous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves,
Regret, Remorse and Shame!
And Man, whose heav’n-erected face,
The smiles of love adorn,
Man’s inhumanity to Man
Makes countless thousands mourn!”

Robert Burns
A tangible expression of sympathy for those touched by the horrendous events on September 11, is being planned by the Federation in conjunction with East Ayrshire Council.

This will take the form of a Memorial Garden, within the magnificent setting of Dean Castle Country Park, Headquarters of the Robert Burns World Federation. The Garden will be planted with Robert Burns and Jean Armour Roses, and plaques erected with appropriate quotes from the works of Robert Burns.

The Heritage Committee will take responsibility for the Garden project, with support from the Castle groundstaff of East Ayrshire Council.

Contributors to the Garden project will be included in a special “Book of Remembrance”, prepared by Editor, Peter Westwood.

“Man’s inhumanity to Man” has made “countless thousands mourn”. Our world-wide desire is for the Poet’s dream of the “Brotherhood of Mankind”.

Shirley Bell
The Robert Burns and Jean Armour Roses

2001 sees the introduction of two new rose varieties to commemorate the lives of Robert Burns and Jean Armour.

The Robert Burns Rose

This deep red fragrant hybrid tea grows to a height of 75cm and has flowers which are carried in profusion throughout the season.

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Whisky in colour, this strongly scented upright plant has a profusion of flowers all summer. The mid green foliage clothes the plant from the base, ensuring an excellent variety.

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Honorary President of the Federation
And Dumbarton Burns Club

In appreciation of his outstanding academic literary contributions
On the subject of Robert Burns and his Associates in the

BURNS CHRONICLE

During the past 27 years.

——— 0 ———

Jim’s latest contribution appears overleaf as a result
of his visit to Australia earlier this year.

——— 0 ———

Here’s freedom to them that wad read,
Here’s freedom to them that would write!
There’s nane ever fear’d that the truth should be heard,
But they whom the truth would indite!
DISCOVERIES DOWN UNDER
By James L. Hempstead

In February my wife and I flew to Sydney, Australia, to visit our younger son, and his wife and family. During our stay, my daughter-in-law introduced me to the works of an Australian poet called “Banjo” Paterson. I had to confess, much to my shame, that I had never heard of him. To put matters right, however, I bought a copy of his works in a Sydney bookshop. What a discovery that was! To many “Banjo” Paterson is regarded as Australia’s national poet, having written the song, forever associated with Australia, “Waltzing Matilda”. His first published poem, “Clancy of the Overflow”, appeared in a Sydney magazine, *The Bulletin* in 1889. The poem was written under the pseudonym of “The Banjo” a name that was to stick to him throughout the rest of his life. A critic described it as “the best bush ballad”, and it obviously made a lasting impression on its readers as many an expatriate Australian is able to quote the first two verses –

I had written him a letter which I had, for want of better
Knowledge, sent to where I met him down the Lachlan years ago;
He was shearing when I knew him, so I sent the letter to him,
Just on spec, addressed as follows, “Clancy, of The Overflow”.

And an answer came directed in a writing unexpected
(And I think the same was written with a thumb-nail dipped in tar);
‘Twas his shearing mate who wrote it, and verbatim I will quote it:
‘Clancy’s gone to Queensland droving, and we don’t know where he are.’

Paterson continued to submit similar verses to *The Bulletin* and in 1895 his first collection, *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*, was published and the identity of “The Banjo” was revealed.

Somehow it came as no great surprise to learn that William Barton Paterson (1864-1941) was born of Scottish ancestry at Narambla, near Orange in New South Wales. For the first ten years of his life he lived on the family station at Illalong in the Yass District. It was there he acquired his love of the outback and a knowledge of its lore and folklore.

In 1874 “Banjo” was sent to Sydney Grammar School, staying with his maternal grandmother, Emily Mary Barton at Rockend Cottage, overlooking Looking Glass Bay on the Parramatta River. He spent his school holidays back at Illalong on the farm with his father. The bush had a profound effect on his poetic work, his bush ballads in particular, while his life at Rockend influenced his poetical thinking and his life philosophies. He trained as a solicitor, and although he contributed regularly to the press, the law remained his chief livelihood until 1899, when he sailed to South Africa to report the Boer War for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. After his return to Sydney he undertook a lecture tour describing his experiences in South Africa.

He married in 1903, and became, successively, editor of the *Sydney Evening News* and the *Town and Country Journal*. During the first World War he served as an ambulance
driver in France and on his return to Australia he settled in Sydney and became a freelance writer. He was made a CBE in 1939. Between 1895 and 1917 three volumes of his poetry were published and in 1921 they were combined in one volume as *The Collected Verse of A B Paterson*.

His poetry has a very popular appeal, telling of the rought life and values of the outback, and the apparent simplicity of the ballad form, which “Banjo” embraced so wholeheartedly, tell of a frontier society, in which song and campfire recitation were the only entertainment to tired stockmen and drovers.

One of his verses seems to epitomise all his poetic endeavours.

\[
\text{I have gathered these stories afar} \\
\text{In the wind and the rain,} \\
\text{In the land where the cattle-camps are,} \\
\text{On the edge of the plain.} \\
\text{On the overland routes of the west,} \\
\text{When the watches were long,} \\
\text{I have fashioned in earnest and jest} \\
\text{These fragments of song.}
\]

Rockend cottage has now became Banjo Paterson Cottage Restaurant, and has a room devoted entirely to photographs and press cuttings of the poet and his life. The area is now owned by the State Government and is permanently reserved as Harbour-side Parkland. Rockend Cottage is classified by the National Trust of Australia and protected by the Heritage Council of New South Wales. The Restaurant is a first class establishment and it was there one day that the Hempsteads and the Russells (in-laws) enjoyed an excellent lunch.
My second discovery happened when I was reading a book called *The Birth of Sydney*, edited and introduced by Tim Flannery. I came across the name of Major Francis Grose and I immediately thought of Captain Francis Grose, the antiquarian, who inspired Robert Burns to write “Tam O’ Shanter”. A little research confirmed that Major Grose was the son of the antiquarian and he is described in the book as “an unassertive, affable and easy going man”, qualities which he no doubt inherited from his father. Grose, who was commander of the New South Wales Corps, arrived in Sydney in 1792 and took over as acting governor following the departure of the first governor, Arthur Phillip. He does not seem to have cut a very impressive figure. It is recorded that under his governorship the colony underwent a form of moral collapse. Grose wanted a quiet life above everything and gave his officers virtually anything they wanted, one item being the entire cargo of rum (7,500 gallons) that an American vessel had brought to Sydney in 1793. They then proceeded to sell the rum at a huge profit to themselves. He is credited with being one of the first cheery and contented immigrants to Australia.

It is interesting to note that when two of the Scottish Martyrs, Thomas Muir (1765-99) and William Skirving (c 1754-96) landed in Sydney in October 1794, both were humanely treated by Grose on the instructions of the British Government. In 1793 Muir was convicted at the High Court in Edinburgh on a trumped up charge of sedition, and received the harsh sentence of 14 years transportation. Robert Burns’s Edinburgh publisher, William Creech was a member of the jury. During his 16 months stay in the colony, (he escaped aboard an American vessel in 1796) he bought a farm which he named Hunters Hill after his home near Glasgow. It is now the name of a suburb of Sydney and is believed to have been called after Muir’s farm. A counter claim has been advanced that the suburb was named after John Hunter, who was captain of H.M.S. *Sirius*, Phillip’s flagship. He became Governor of the colony in 1795. Australian antiquarians are disagreed on the source, but I would like to think that the name originated in Scotland and was transplanted to Australia by Muir.

The third discovery was made as my daughter-in-law was driving us to Mrs McQuarrie’s point. Proceeding along Art Gallery Road in the Domain, we came across, quite unexpectedly, the statue of Robert Burns. I immediately recognised it as a replica of the Paisley statue unveiled in 1896. The sculptor was Frederick William Pomeroy and his work is considered one of the most original of all the Burns statues ever produced. The Sydney statue was unveiled in 1905. It stands in a garden named after the poet, and is a traditional meeting place for Scots in the city.

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**ROBERT BURNS WORLD FEDERATION**

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Erskine Bridge Hotel

13-15th September, 2002
Robert Burns was Scotland’s Bard and one of the world’s greatest songwriters. In his brief lifetime, Burns created about 270 poems and more than 300 songs with indications for the specific tunes that he had selected for them. It is really impossible, however, to determine precisely how many songs Burns actually composed because of the different approaches he used in his effort to save Scotland’s musical heritage. In the Preface to Volume I of *The Robert Burns Song Book*, Serge Hovey (1998) explained:

Burns did not always write completely new, original lyrics; on the contrary, he was more often interested in perpetuating an old song by remodeling it, by adding his creative energies to it, while preserving as much as possible of the traditional form and words. This remodeling process resulted, as one examines one song after another, in the most varied proportions of old and new, of traditional words and Burns words. In a number of songs, he retained only the chorus of the original model, or a traditional line or key-phrase, creating new lyrics to fill out the rest of the song-form. Often enough he left an old song basically intact, at most adding a touch here and there. It is only in a minority of the songs that he composed completely new lyrics. For some tunes, several sets of lyrics were written (polite and bawdy versions).¹

The question of Burns’s authorship is further complicated by the fact that many of his songs were published without the melodies that the songwriter had in mind or without any music at all. James C. Dick, author of the ground-breaking work *The Songs of Robert Burns* published in 1903, reported that he could not “trace the tune *I am a man unmarried*” for which Burns composed his first song “Handsome Nell” in 1774.² Fortunately, Robert D. Thornton found the melody that “Thanks to Professor [Thomas] Crawford” had been transcribed by George St J. Bremner from his grandfather’s singing.³ In August 1783 Burns included the song “Handsome Nell” in his *Commonplace Book* with these remarks:

For my own part I never had the least thought or inclination of turning Poet till I got once heartily in Love, and then Rhyme & Song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart. The following composition was the first of my performances, and done at an early period of life, when my heart glowed with honest warm simpliciy; unacquainted, and uncorrupted with the ways of a wicked world.⁴
Robert Burns met James Johnson during his first trip to Edinburgh in the winter of 1786. The young poet and the struggling music engraver apparently formed an immediate bond due to their common love of old Scottish songs and determination to preserve them. By the following year Johnson had completed the first volume of *The Scots Musical Museum* and was grateful for Burns’s enthusiastic suggestions and additions. From that time onward, Burns became the virtual editor of this museum without walls. He was responsible for about two hundred of the six hundred songs that were published in this collection between 1787 and 1803. This was truly a labor of love. While attempting to support his expanding family with farming ventures that invariably failed or as a petty tax-collector riding horseback up to forty miles daily, the poet worked on his beloved songs without accepting any fees or even credit as author. Some of his songs were marked with the letter S, R, X or Z after the last bar, but as Burns explained to his friend Mrs. Dunlop on November 13, 1788:

> Those marked, Z, I have given to the world as old verses to their respective tunes; but in fact, of a good many of them, little more than the Chorus is ancient; tho’ there is no reason for telling every body this piece of intelligence.5

It was only a month before his death that Burns wrote to Johnson:

> Your work is a great one; & though, now that it is near finished, I see if we were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended, yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your Publication will be the text book & standard of Scottish Song & Music (*Letters*, II, 381-2).

So great was Burns’s dedication to his nation’s music that, in 1792, he accepted an offer to work on yet another collection of Scottish songs while continuing his collaboration with James Johnson. George Thomson, a government clerk and amateur musician, looked down upon the *Museum* and aimed to produce a more prestigious publication. He edited and published five volumes of *A Select Collection of Original Scotish Airs for the Voice* between 1793 and 1818. They contain more than one hundred Burns songs with piano, violin, and cello accompaniments by distinguished composers such as Haydn, Weber, and Beethoven. In his earliest correspondence with this editor (September 16, 1792), Burns naively expressed these thoughts:

> As to any remuneration, you may think my Songs either above, or below price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. – In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c. would be downright Sodomy of Soul! –A proof of each of the Songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favor (*Letters*, II, 149-150).
That Thomson did not share his songwriter’s idealism is evidenced by the manner in which he secured the sole copyright to all of Burns’s compositions that appeared in his *Scotish Airs*. He accomplished this feat by waiting until Burns had died to publish a revised version of an agreement that the poet had originally signed in 1793. Burns and Thomson disagreed on many aspects of the song materials, especially in regard to the poet’s use of Scottish vernacular. Burns wrote to Thomson on January 26, 1793:

> There is a naiveté, a pastoral simplicity, in a slight intermixture of Scots words … phraseology, which is more in unison (at least to my taste, … I will add, to every genuine Caledonian taste,) with the simple pathos, or rustic sprightliness, of our native music, than any English verses whatever.—For instance, in my Auld Rob Morris, you propose instead of the word, “describing,” to substitute the phrase, “all telling,” which would spoil the rusticity, the pastoral, of the Stanza (*Letters*, II, 181). And again on October 19, 1794, he wrote to Thomson:

> These English songs gravel me to death.—I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue.—In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch.—I have been at “Duncan Gray,” to dress it in English, but all I can do is deplorably stupid. (*Letters*, II, 318).

Thomson not only preferred English verses, but went so far as to alter some of Burns’s lyrics and match them to tunes of his own choice instead of those intended by the songwriter. The most famous example of this editorial meddling is the international hit song known as “Auld Lang Syne.” Burns sent his first draft to Mrs. Dunlop on December 7, 1788 with these comments:

> Apropos, is not the Scots phrase, “Auld lang syne.” Exceedingly expressive.—There is an old song … tune which has often thrilled thro’ my soul.—You know I am an enthusiast in old Scots songs… Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired Poet who composed this glorious Fragment! There is more of the fire of native genius in it, than in half a dozen of modern English Bacchanalians (*Letters*, I, 342, 345).

Dick (pp. 435-6) found that the idea of the lyrics had been expressed in an anonymous sixteenth-century ballad “Auld Kyndnes foryett” and in a song beginning “Should old acquaintance be forgot,/ And never thought upon,” printed in James Watson’s *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems both Ancient and Modern* (Part III, 1711). The melody for which Burns penned his lyrics is also traditional and had appeared in Playford’s *Original Scotch Tunes* (1700), Sinkler’s MS. (1710), *Orpheus Caledonius* (1725), *The Caledonian Pocket Companion* (1751), and in the first volume of *The Scots Musical Museum* in 1787 with words by Ramsay. Burns sent his revised second draft to Johnson who printed it in the fifth volume of the *Museum* in 1796 with the tune as designated by the songwriter. The signature Z at the bottom of the manuscript indicates
Burns’s reshaping of this “old song” with his corrections and additions. Three years after Burns’s death, Thomson included “Auld Lang Syne” in the second volume of his *Scottish Airs* (1798) with a different melody that he selected, previously known as “The Miller’s Wedding” which was the air for a strathspey (a Scots country dance). Dick stated, “No tune was better known or more popular in Scotland during the last half of the eighteenth century, and it was published in numerous collections under many titles” (p. 439). And that is what was heard around the world to welcome in the new millennium!

It was Dick’s contention that Thomson obtained the music for “The Miller’s Wedding” from Vol. IV of the *Museum* where it had appeared in 1792 with Burns’s polite version of a bawdy song entitled “O can ye labour lea.” Burns used a variant of this tune for still another song, “Comin thro’ the rye.” Which was printed in the same volume of *The Scots Musical Museum* as his song “Auld lang syne.” Jean Redpath sings Burns’s original version on the first CD recording in this series *The Songs of Robert Burns* as researched by Serge Hovey.

Interviews with songwriters always include the question: Which comes first, the words or the music? We can’t interview Robert Burns, but we already have some of his responses in a letter written in early September 1793 to George Thomson. This communication contains Burns’s reactions to a list of seventy-four song titles that the editor had sent him:

No. 37. Laddie lie near me-must lie by me, for some time. –I do not know the air; … until I am compleat master of a tune, in my own singing, (such as it is) I never can compose for it. –My way is: I consider the poetic Sentiment, correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then chuse my theme; begin one Stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now … then, look out for objects in Nature around me that are in unison or harmony with the cogitations of my fancy … workings of my bosom; humming every now … then the air with the verses I have framed: when I feel my Muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, … there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals, on the hind-legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures, as my pen goes on. Seriously, this, at home, is almost invariably my way. –What damn’d Egotism! (Letters, II, 242).

In more than seven hundred letters, his *Commonplace Book*, and his interleaved copy of the first four volumes of *The Scots Musical Museum*, Burns left an informative and colourful paper trail indicating his sources, tune preferences, and observations concerning the songs of Scotland. Burns’s interleaved notes in Volume III of the *Museum* (1790) contain this comment for the song “A waukrife Minnie”: “I pickt up this old song and tune from a country girl in Nithsdale. I never met with it elsewhere in Scotland” (p. 51).

“The Mill, Mill O’” is one of the bawdy songs found in Burns’s special collection known as *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (1799). With reference to the air for this song, Burns noted in his *Commonplace Book*:
There is a degree of wild irregularity in many of the compositions … Fragments which are daily sung to them by my compeers, the common people—a certain happy arrangement of old Scotch syllables, … yet, very frequently, nothing, not even *like* rhyme, or sameness of jingle at the ends of the lines. (p. 38).

The ancient Scottish melody, “The Mill, Mill O,” was published in William Thomson’s *Orpheus Caledonius* in 1733 (No. 20) with lyrics by Allan Ramsay. We can hear a late twentieth-century rendition of Burns’s song on the third CD album as arranged by Serge Hovey and sung by Jean Redpath with Keith Jarrett at the piano.

In 1786, in a state of economic and emotional turmoil, Burns was planning to emigrate to Jamaica, but the successful publication of his first volume of poems in Kilmarnock and the birth of his twins to Jean Armour gave him ample reason to cancel his trip. Burns’s songs, however, arrived in the New World on the lips and fiddles of the early Scottish immigrants. Serge Hovey (1998) commented:

> The Burns and Scottish tunes worked their way into the bloodstream of American music and had become an integral part of the very roots of our American musical heritage. Traditional Scottish ballads had settled and evolved new variants in the Appalachians. Burns’s “Soldier’s Joy” became a fiddle tune. “Lord Ronald” became “Lord Randall” and “Billy Boy”. The ancestry of “Sweet Betsy from Pike” can be traced back to the English “Villikens and his Dinah” and from there right back to the ancient “Lord Ronald” again (p. 12).

In his definitive work supplying the traditional tunes and variants (both British and American) for three hundred English and Scottish ballads collected by Francis J. Child at the end of the nineteenth century, Bertrand Bronson printed 103 variants of “Lord Randal” and an additional 29 of “Billie Boy”. He stated, “The oldest copy with the ballad text is that recovered by Burns in Ayrshire, and sent to Johnson’s Museum. Melodically, it is one of the comeliest, and closely allied to ‘Lochaber… no More.’”6 The song appeared as “Lord Ronald, my Son” in the fourth volume of *The Scots Musical Museum* in 1792.

In a symbiotic fashion, Burns songs were transformed as they adapted to their new cultural environment and, in turn, became a basic component of the emerging American sound of music. To Hamish Henderson, poet, folklorist, and an outstanding leader of the current Scottish folksong revival movement, Hovey wrote (September 14, 1972):

> When I hear a fine, slow lyric American melody by Charles Ives, or… Aaron Copland, I *think* they are echoing old Gaelic airs. Many hymns and Negro spirituals have this haunting association, to my ear. There’s no question of the strong Scottish musical heritage in the Appalachians (misnamed “English” by the otherwise capable Cecil Sharp). Whatever the exact musicology of it, I am sure of one thing, the Scottish melodies are organically, deeply related to the American musical scenery.
Serge Hovey was a classically-educated composer, born in 1920 in New York City. He studied piano with Edward Steuermann and composition with Hanns Eisler and Arnold Schoenberg. He had achieved some recognition and success in the concert, film, and theatre worlds when he turned his attention to the question of the cultural roots of American music. Thus began a musicological journey that led to intensive studies of the rhythms and melodic patterns of various ethnic groups in our multicultural nation. Hovey described his early involvement with the songs of Robert Burns in the aforementioned letter to Henderson:

My interest in Burns’s songs, from the musical angle, started about twenty years ago. At the time, I was living in New York, very much involved with Jewish music and off-Broadway theatre. I knew next to nothing about Scots songs. Then a friend, a Burns enthusiast, kept after me on a point of curiosity, i.e., what in the world were all these little tune indications under the titles of Burns’s songs? He showed me, opening up the Barke edition to page 584: “The Tailor” and asked, what did that mean: Tune: “The Drummer?” Or page 600: “O, That I Had Ne’er Been Married,” Tune: “Crowdie?” Did these notations refer to tunes that still existed? Or tunes that had disappeared? Were they folk tunes? Or What?… Sheer curiosity led me to The Scots Musical Museum and Thomson’s Scotish Airs but once I realized that the tunes were still extant, that they were mostly Scots folk songs and, above all, that they sounded marvelous in conjunction with Burns’s lyrics, then I was hooked.

Hovey meticulously examined Burns’s own sources, letters, and manuscripts. He carefully perused the works of important musicologists and Burns scholars in an effort to determine the origin of every tune and all the verses. This American composer attempted to fulfill Burns’s intentions with regard to the match of his lyrics to specific tune variants to the extent that this was possible to do nearly two hundred years after the poet’s death. In the course of this fascinating work, Hovey made some startling discoveries. The history of the song “A Red, Red Rose” is one example. Burns sent a letter to his close friend Alexander Cunningham in November, 1793 describing his composition as

…a simple old Scots song which I had pickt up in this country… I would, to tell the fact, most gladly have seen it in our Friend’s publication [Thomson’s Scotish Airs]; but, though I am charmed with it, it is a kind of Song on which I know we would think very differently. –It is the only species of Song about which our ideas disagree. –What to me, appears the simple … the wild, to him, … I suspect to you likewise, will be looked on as the ludicrous … the absurd (Letters, II, p. 258-9).

Burns sent “A Red, Red Rose” to Johnson for publication in the fifth volume of the Museum (1796) with this note: “The tune of this song is in Niel Gow’s first Collection, and is there called Major Graham.” While conducting further research in the National
Library of Scotland in 1972, Serge Hovey was able to examine the fiddle tune “Major Graham of Inchbrakie” in Niel Gow’s first Collection of Strathspey Reels, published in Edinburgh in 1784. He subsequently observed that Stephen Clarke, Johnson’s sole music assistant for the Museum, in attempting to follow Burns’s instructions for the tune, had simply omitted the repeat sign, i.e., two dots before the broad double bar lines, after the first strain in the song. As a result, Burns’s second stanza was matched to the melody intended for the chorus instead of being sung to the same strain as the first stanza. On Hovey’s first CD album Jean Redpath sings “A Red, Red Rose” as it was arranged by Hovey with the lyrics matched to the tune in the sequence it was intended by the songwriter.

Hovey’s eclectic approach to his arrangements are indicative of another sort of American connection to the Burns songs. They represent a crossover of folk, pop, and classical musical styles. His Preface to The Robert Burns Song Book concludes with these thoughts:

There is ample room for a multiplicity of interpretations of the Burns songs. In fact, a diverse approach, rather than a narrow, dogmatic one, is the key to opening the door to the creation of fresh, contemporary settings. As long as Burns’s intentions are well understood, alternative treatments may be equally valid… The challenge of Burns accompaniment is to apply the highest possible levels of taste and musicianship to the songs that the poet created, thoroughly respecting the organic integrity of the melodies and the national values from which they spring, but not being afraid to experiment. Haydn brought the wondrous charm of old Vienna to Burns, creating hybrids of imperishable value; we can bring to Burns any musical idea we choose so long as it is of genuine interest and thoughtfully integrated with Scots tradition (p. 14).

Although all 324 songs that Hovey identified were arranged for voice and piano or small instrumental ensembles, there are a few a capella songs such as “Auld Lang Syne” and a composition requiring a full symphony orchestra and chorus. In 1958, Hovey composed a Robert Burns Rhapsody subtitled A Scottish-American Fantasy. It was performed the following year by the Berlin Radio Orchestra and Grand Chorus in honour of the bicentenary of Burns’s birth. The Rhapsody ends with a hymn-like arrangement of the song “Is There for Honest Poverty.” The tune “For a’ that” was a popular one and was associated with Jacobite lyrics from about 1750 onward. In January, 1795, Burns sent his song to Thomson remarking: “A great critic, Aikin on songs, says, that love … wine are the exclusive themes for song-writing. The following is on neither subject, … consequently is no Song; but will be allowed, I think, to be two or three pretty good prose thoughts, inverted into rhyme” (Letters, II, 336). J. De LANCEY Ferguson, a renowned Burns scholar, stated:

… it it well known that “A Man’s a Man” is “two or three pretty good prose thoughts inverted into rhyme” from the writing of a former Excise officer named Thomas Paine.7
The Burns songs that Serve Hovey wove into his *Rhapsody* were translated into German for the Berlin concert. The composer and his wife were surprised and thrilled to receive a professional tape recording of that performance. The work of Serge Hovey goes forward. Two volumes of *The Robert Burns Songs Book* have been published; the two concluding ones are being edited and should appear before long. My son Daniel and I think that Serge would have been proud of them.

*Pacific Palisades, CA*

NOTES

SEE UNDER BOOK REVIEWS ON PAGE 210.


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*A sketch of the Robert Burns Cottage, Atlanta, Georgia, USA by club member James Montgomery. (See reference on page 77).*

20
Introduction

The Deil, Auld Hornie, Auld Nick, Clootie, Auld Hangie, Auld Cloots, Foul Thief, Auld Mahoun, the Ill-Thief, Lucifer, Mammon – as you would anticipate, Burns’ names for the Devil are rich and varied. According to Edwin Morgan, “The Devil is everywhere in Burns, God makes a poor showing, churches even worse, while the Holy Ghost is nowhere.” Given the many references to the Devil in Burns’ poetry and the fact that he considered the Devil important enough to justify not only numerous mentions, but also an ‘address’, it is surprising that more has not been made of this relationship since it seems that the Devil was a key component of his poetic imagination. The Devil, or lines which include him, are to be found throughout Burns’ poetry, sometimes affectionately, sometimes fearfully, sometimes with conviviality.

Before examining the role of the Devil in Burns poetry, I thought it worth considering the significance of superstition, and consequently the importance of the Devil amongst the rural population of 18th Century Scotland. One of the all pervading influences on the lives of country people during Burns’ time was superstition and power of evil spirits. Trust in omens, charms or incantations invoking powers of good and evil were an integral part of daily life in which death, baptisms, even the churning of the milk, the condition of the butter were associated with some strange ritual or unearthly forces frequently assuming human form as witches. Although the educated classes had given up the persecution of witches by the middle of the 18th Century, the country people retained their profound belief in witchcraft and its connotations of “trafficking with Satan”, who was regarded as a superhuman monster who dominated the minds of the people inducing mankind to sin.

It was not uncommon for families to watch constantly over a new born child, forming a circle with a Bible in their hands lest the Devil carry it away and leave a changeling in its stead. Similarly, few country people would omit to place the branch of a Rowan or Elder tree at the door of the byre as a positive act of sustenance for the agents of Satan, thus protecting the cattle from disease or unnatural influences.

Those ideas, rooted in the mindset of the country people, were hidden from the eye of the Kirk and its Elders. In Burns’ Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire, old pagan beliefs lay side-by-side with Calvinist doctrine long after witchcraft as a crime was abolished. To be female, ugly and old, to be morose and withered, to live aloof from others were sufficient to raise suspicions of trafficking with Satan. Every problem was her fault – if the hens laid fewer eggs, if the cows gave less milk, if the children were unwell, she might be locked up in jail and only escape burning by becoming banished. Often terrorised by zealous Ministers and vindictive Elders, she might be driven to fabricate a confession. Half demented and wholly panic-stricken, every accusation would elicit a confession,
even to giving descriptions of the Devil’s personal appearance, drawn from fanciful notions of legends and myths on the Devil’s grand attire.

It was the practice in Scotland to burn convicted witches, a practice that continued for nearly a hundred years, gradually tapering off until the last trial in 1727, some 32 years before Burns was born. However, in 1808, writing about the backwardness and superstition of country people, the Countess of Sutherland referred to the fact that belief in witches still persisted amongst the people of rural Scotland, based on the myth that witches worshipped the Devil.

Taking account of the frequency of the references to the Devil and the importance of superstition in Burns’ time, let us now explore some of the ways in which Burns’ relationship with the Devil is revealed in his poetry, Like the multi-faceted person he was, Burns had no single view of the Devil, whose role and significance are portrayed in various ways in his poetry. I propose to consider three interpretations:

❖ as a rebel: a symbol of revolt
❖ as a superhuman monster to be feared
❖ as a member of the community

The Devil as a rebel: a symbol of revolt

In a letter to Willie Nichol, he wrote:

“I have bought a pocket Milton which I carry perpetually about with me in order to study the sentiments, the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid unyielding indulgence, the desperate daring and noble defiance in that great personage, Satan”.

‘That great personage’ – was he not describing here a figure to be admired and to join with in a rebellion against the forces he is against?

A week earlier in another letter, he said:

“Give me the spirit and the unyielding presence of my great hero, Milton’s Satan”.

In those comments, Burns gives us some insight into his rebellion against cultural authority in all its forms and in particular his quarrel with the Scottish Kirk and the divisions in Scottish society. Like so many people of his social status – small farmers or tradesmen – he was part of the social group in which religious questions looked large and resentment at the pious intrusion of the Kirk in so many areas of everyday life burned deep. It would seem that the Devil’s attractiveness to Burns is similar to that which has appealed to readers of Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ for centuries. The Satan of Milton’s great epic is a complex character already fallen from Heaven, cast out for rebellion in the process of degeneration, but still hopeful of victory. His immediate aim is to rebel against God and become established as a supreme power amongst the spirits expelled from Heaven. He teaches the doctrine that God has won the war in Heaven, not because he is right, but
because he is powerful. His message is that God regards his children not with the pure love of a perfect Father, but with contempt for their weaknesses.

The Devil himself is a purely Christian invention, there being no mention of him before the New Testament. The idea of dividing a supreme power into two – good and evil – was the product of an advancing civilisation and particularly suited to Scottish Calvinism as it struggled to contain the contradictions of the people. The idea of an all good, all loving deity necessitated an antagonist, based on the notion that you can only have the colour white if there is an opposite colour, black, for the purposes of comparison. As Hugh MacDiarmid observed, Presbyterians are able to come to rest “whaur extremes meet” and on that knife edge, be at ease with contradictions coalesced in harmonious resolution.

From the 15th Century onwards, from the onset of Calvinism, the Church in Scotland was harsh on its people, with social consequences which have been documented extensively by many historians. The severity of Godly discipline and the single mindedness of many Elders in their pursuit of Sabbath breakers, drunkards, fornicators and other delinquents, has been well recorded. It is not surprising, therefore, that this led to a rebellion – albeit a clandestine one. The people, Christians, becoming more aware that their lot was not bettered by praying to the God of love, sought consolation in his opposite instead. Burns, in rebelling against Calvinism, was inclined to adopt the tones of the harangues of the Auld Licht Ministers and in so doing project Calvinistic pre-occupation with human depravity into the very person of Satan himself. There is an abundance of Auld Licht venom coupled with rhetorical brilliance fired by his satire on the gentry’s oppression of the poor in the ‘Address of Bellzebub’ when he writes:

“Get out a horsewhip or a jowler,
The langest thong, the fiercest growler
An’ gar the tatter’d gypsies pack
Wi’ a’ their bastards on their back.”

If God would not help those who were appressed by authority, perhaps the Devil would and so Satanism, witchcraft and the power of evil spirits – a revolt against the harshness of the Church – came into being as a mockery of Christianity. As it turned out, the Devil did not help the poor peasants either, but at least he was showing his disdain for the authorities.

Burns was sympathetic to the Jacobite cause and although his own feelings about the exiled House of Stuart were not always consistent, he had moments when he was strongly supportive of the Jacobites, especially when in Jacobite company. But as David Daiches has observed “His heart ran before his head in this matter”. In his later years, he was influenced by the ideas underpinning the French Revolution, giving further strength to his passion for egalitarianism. Some of his lines reveal him as sharing with the Devil the desire to rebel against authoritarian forces. The Devil is perceivable in Burns as a potent symbol of revolt. This symbol of rebellion can be linked to Burns’ own feelings of isolation and alienation and explains his identification with the Devil as a rebel. His references to the Highlands and the Devil, “Their unhappy Culloden in Heaven”, leads Andrew Noble to conclude that for Burns, the Devil was conceived of as a failed political revolutionary.
In this sense, Burns and Auld Nick are rebels together, united in protest against unjust authoritarian forces. But Burns’ affinity with the Devil was more than a statement of his approach to cultural and religious authoritarianism. It seems to stimulate him to write with a liberating enthusiasm, enabling him to demonstrate quite extensively his rhetorical brilliance. Again, in the ‘Address of Beelzebub’, he adapts the very voice of Satan himself in speaking to the Earl of Breadalbane in commenting on the controversy over whether Highlanders should be encouraged to remain at home or emigrate. The Devil advises the landowners to break the spirit of those who wish to leave:

“But smash them! Crush them a’ to spails
And rot the dyvors i’ the jails!
The young dogs swinge them to the labour
Let wark and hunger mak’ them sober
The hizzies if their aughtlins fawsont
Let them in Drury Lane be lesson’d.

(Drury Lane was then a depraved area of London).

Similarly, in the ‘Holy Fair’, the Devil is depicted as someone who opposes the Rev. Alexander Moodie, an Auld Licht Minister who preaches hell fire and damnation. However, it is clear that in Moodie, he has met a worthy adversary because the sight of Moodie’s face is enough to send the Devil back to his own home:

“Should Hornie as in ancient days
Man sons o’ God present him,
The vera sicht o’ Moodie’s face
To’s ain het hame had sent him”.

Thus, the Devil is an oppressed figure, rebelling against God’s authoritarian system. The Devil’s conflicts with the Almighty have a parallel in Burns’ own conflicts with the Established religious morality and social divisions of his day. In the same way as the Devil sees angels and Church goers created to please God, so Burns sees religion as “Churches built to please the priest”.

The Devil as a superhuman monster

Burns’ vision of the Devil shifts at times from a rebel to the Devil as a person of enormous power, able to instil terror throughout a simple rural population. Much of the fear of the Devil as a superhuman monster was at the instigation of the Auld Licht preachers who, Sunday by Sunday, would lambast the congregations with fierce and eloquent sermons. Invariably, these would be richly dramatised with ominous warnings and fearful descriptions of hellfire and the awesome power of the Devil. It is not surprising that some Church goers came to believe that they were damned beyond redemption, to the point of being the Devil’s own servants.
Burns highlighted this notion of Hell as a fearsome place where the Devil reigned supreme and where Auld Licht preachers sent sinners. In the ‘Holy Fair’, Hell is described as:

“A vast unbottom’d boundless pit
Fill’d fu’ o’ lowin brunstane”.

This is where Calvinism, with its cruelly selective God, sends pre-ordained sinners to face the fires and the wrath of the Devil. The common people are naturally not attracted to this vision and turn instead, in the poem, to the consolations of drink and sex. Similarly, Hell is depicted in ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’ as a place:

“Whare damned Devils roar and yell
Chain’d to their stakes”.

Thus, Burns presents us again with the Devil as a fearsome presence – a powerful force for evil. Here Burns is probing, like many great poets from other ages and several nations, the notion of evil and the personality of the Devil. As a writer he cherished human creativity, loved poetry and no doubt remembered the terrible vision of Alexander Pope in which he saw the seeming triumph of evil in the Kingdom of Dulness. “If the Devil through his power were to triumph” wrote Pope, “it would be through the death of art and human creativity”. As has previously been alluded to, Burns was also familiar with John Milton’s awesome portrayal of the self-destructive nature of the power of evil. In the poem ‘Scotch Drink,’ he suggests that the Devil has the power to seize the “cursed, horse leeches o’ the Excise” and:

“Bake them up in brunstane pies”.

The power of the Devil to deal with unpopular matters is acknowledged in ‘The Deils awa wi’ the Exciseman’, when Burns, in light hearted vein, described how he (the Devil) lures the Excisemen away from their duties whilst the women of the town cheer and give thanks to the “meikle black Deil,” for giving them freedom to brew their drink in peace.

Although in ‘Tam O’ Shanter’ the Devil takes part in the jollification, providing the music for the hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys and reels, he is, elsewhere in the poem, depicted as a figure to be feared and so Tam requires sufficient whisky in order to face him.

The Devil as a member of the community

There are several instances in which Burns reduces the Devil “the Chief of many throne’d powers” to earthly human dimensions, becoming an almost familiar member of the local community – a neighbourhood nuisance. In the ‘Address to the Deil’, Satan is the Devil of popular superstition and folklore, reminding us of Puck in ‘A Midsummer Nights Dream’. The ‘Address to the Deil’ begins with an invocation stating the various names which have been coined for the Devil with Burns wagging an amused, but admonitory finger at him, treating him as a cheeky rascal – almost a crony, sort of 18th
Century Oor Wullie.

“Oh Thou whatever titles suit thee,  
Auld Hornie, Satan, Nick or Cloutie,  
Wha in yon cavern grim and sootie,  
Clos’d under hatches,  
Spairges aboot the brunstane coutie  
To scaud poor wretches.

Hear me, Auld Hangie for a wee,  
And let poor damned bodies be,  
I’m sure small pleasure it can gie,  
Even to a Diel,  
To skelp and scaud poor dogs like me,  
And hear us squeel”.

The tone of the ‘Address to the Deil’ is comic, with the Devil splashing about in the ‘brunstane coutie’, playing verbal games with some of the 18th Century moral conventions. Here, the Devil is no longer an awesome figure, but is reduced by irreverent familiarity to an impish pest, a naughty boy having his fun wandering about the countryside in ‘lanely glens’ and ‘ruined castles’, a mischief making source of irritation to ordinary folk:

“I’ve heard my rev’rend graunie say  
In lanely glens ye like to stray  
Or where auld ruin’d castle grey  
Nod to the moon.  
Ye fright the nichtly wand’rer’s way  
Wi eldritch croon”.

Later in the poem, some biblical references are handled with a distinct lack of reverence as in his account of Satan’s part in the temptation of Job:

“D’ye mind that day when a bizz  
Wi reekit dudds an’ reestit gizz  
Ye did present your smoutie phiz  
Amang better folk  
An’ sklented on the man of Uzz  
Your spitefu’ joke”.

Similarly, in an attempt to interpret the Bible as a series of narratives which are relevant to contemporary society, he presents Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as ordinary lovers without any theological aura:

“Lang syne in Eden’s bonie yard  
When youthfu lovers first were paired
An’ a’ the solar love they shar’d
The raptur’d hour
Sweet on the fragrant flow’ry swaird
In shady bower”.

It is the dramatic contrast between the Devil’s reputation as an awesome and terrifying figure, contrasted with his mischievous local activities that gives the poem its comic dimensions. Burns grants the Devil his due of fame, but places him locally “ayont the loch”. There is no suggestion that Ayrshire is a Hell on earth because of the Devil’s presence, instead he is responsible for minor misdemeanours such as ruining the butter and punishing drunks.

Burns leaves us with the final suggestion that even the Devil might repent and escape from ‘yon den’. This is a satiric thrust at the Calvinist view disguised with the lightness of touch that characterises the poem as a whole.

The Devil’s presence as a loveable scamp in the 18th Century society is highlighted further in ‘Tam O’ Shanter’, probably one of literatures best known versions of man’s experience of the supernatural. Here we can observe Burns, in a single poem, treating the Devil in different ways – as an ominous threat, as a provider of entertainment and as a party-going crony. Burns named ‘Tam O’ Shanter’ one of his own favourites, an assessment endorsed by numerous critics, one describing it as having “A power of imagination that Shakespeare himself could not have exceeded.” A hint of what Tam is to encounter is suggested by an ominous build-up leading to the first mention of the Devil in the description of the storm outside.

“That night a child might understand,
The Deil had business on his hand”.

A further ominous note arises when Tam, heading for home in the wind and rain, singing to himself an old song:

“Whilst glowing round wi’ prudent cares
Less bogles catch him unawares”.

The “unco sicht” which Tam encounters includes the Devil, not only as the piper, playing the music for the witches to dance to, but also as the source of creative energy. Auld Nick as a frenzied Scottish piper in the form of a shaggy dog, is a biting satire on the wild Scottish folk music tradition. By locating the devilish dance in a Scottish Church yard, Burns is hitting out at religious complacency, and making an inebriated observer witness this is a real challenge to the unco guid. In making the Devil a dog (black, grim and large), Burns makes him a frightening presence, but he is also a ‘towsie tyke’ which makes him one of us. Although the Devil is in the form of a dog, he has the responses of a human being when he shares with Tam admiration for the dancing of the young witch Nannie in the Cutty Sark:
“Even Satan glowr’d and fidg’d fu fain
And hotch’d and blew wi’ micht an’ main”.

A psychologist would find much of interest in Tam O’ Shanter. The Devil is a key figure in Kirk Alloway, the Church in which Burns’ father was buried and where he himself had a claim to “lay down his banes”. Is it possible that Burns is creating in the Devil a representation of himself – source of creative energy, rebuking the Church, ridiculing the worship of religious relics by putting horrific objects, “un-Chistened bairns, a thief cut from the rope”, on a ‘haly table’? By comparing the Devil with himself (both sources of creative energy), is he suggesting that they share a creator – an alternative creator to God?

Conclusions

My analysis of the way that Burns treats the Devil leads me to the conclusion that one or more of the three interpretations I have outlined can be observed sometimes in one poem. I have already referred to ‘Tam O’ Shanter’ where in the same poem the Devil is an ominous threat and jolly party-goer. Similarly, in the ‘Address to the Deil’, he shifts from matey familiarity at the beginning, to a description of the Devil’s activities at the end with a mischievous suggestion that accidents sometimes attributed to the Devil have purely natural causes.

The diversity of Burns’ writing in this respect, together with the skills with which he balanced the forces of good with the forces of evil to enrich his imagination, may be traced in part to the cultural and literary influences of his upbringing. In childhood he would listen to tales of the supernatural and old Scots songs from his mother, and from Betty Davidson, a relative, who lived with the family. In writing about her, he said:

“She had I suppose the largest collection of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, deadlights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery”.

Burns was essentially a chameleon, capable of adopting a myriad of stances from biting satirist to tender romantic. As such, he was highly skilled in the creation of distinctive voices, establishing in many of his poems a specific persona. His reliance on the Devil as a voice on different occasions, allows him to use the Devil to speak or express feelings on his behalf. For example, in the ‘Address of Beelzebub’, he creates a character for political purposes as the Devil rebukes Glengarry for his leniency whilst representing the oppression of the poor.

Could it be that he is using a Devil in a search for his own identity. Indeed, in a letter to Mrs. MacLehose, he expressed a romantic vision of the Devil by saying he was “a favourite hero” of his:

“My favourite feature in Milton’s Satan is his manly fortitude in supporting what cannot be remedied – in short, the wild broken fragments of a noble exalted mind in ruins”.

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There is a suggestion here of Burns identifying his own chameleon nature with the mental fragmentation of the Devil. If Burns is uncertain about himself, then we may conclude that he is ambivalent about the Devil. In his writing, he moves from the parochial to the universal, revealing his ability to use the Devil to explore the immensity of good and evil, fate and belief, life and death, and relate these, sometimes seriously, at other times in a light hearted and whimsical way, to the everyday lives of the rural Scotland in which he lived.

References

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Burns and Independence

By Kenneth Simpson

“My two favorite topics [are] Love and Liberty.”¹ wrote Burns to Maria Riddell in a letter containing two of his compositions. One, to Clarinda [Mrs. M’Lehose], begins:

In vain would Prudence, with decorous sneer,
Point out a cens’ring world, and bid me fear;
Above that world on wings of love I rise:
I know its worst and can that worst despise.²

The other is “Bannockburn – A Song-Robert Bruce’s Address to his Army” (second version) with the rousing conclusion:

Lay the proud Usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
LIBERTY’S in every blow!
Let us DO-OR DIE!!! (Poems, II, 708)

These are quintessential Burns sentiments: romantic love liberates; patriotism should lead to freedom.

My topic – “Burns and Independence” – has implications for Burns as Scot, as individual, as writer, and as member of the human family. Habitually these interact. “Scotland an’ me’ s in great affliction” (Poems, I, 185) protests the speaker in “The Author’s Earnest Cry and Prayer, to... the Scotch Representatives in the House of Commons.” Taking his cue from the rigorous enforcement of excise laws, the speaker ranges through a list of Scotland’s ills, rallying-cries to the Scots nation, and the warning that “Auld Scotland has a raucle tongue,” before ending with the defiant “FREEDOM and WHISKY gang thegither” (Poems, I, 191). Thomas Crawford has noted the “humorous blending of two of the values which play so large a part in the poems written up to 1786.”³ Whisky is emphatically Scottish. It stirs the blood; equally, it stimulates the imagination – the needs of Scotland the nation and Burns its poet are simultaneously met. “LIBERTY’S a glorious feast” (Poems, I, 209) sing the Jolly Beggars in their final chorus. Food and drink are basics that are the fundamental right of all; likewise liberty for Burns.

It is particularly apposite that the subject of liberty should be addressed here. Burns was seventeen when the Declaration of Independence avowed, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Burns saw clearly the significance of American independence, and his writing on the subject of freedom was to impact on American writers. Burns wrote:

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¹ Quoted in Kenneth Simpson, “Burns and Independence.”
² Quoted in Kenneth Simpson, “Burns and Independence.”
³ Quoted in Kenneth Simpson, “Burns and Independence.”
I dare say, the American Congress, in 1766, will be allowed to have been as able and as enlightened, and, a whole empire will say, as honest, as the English Convention in 1688; and that the fourth of July will be as sacred to their posterity as the fifth of November is to us (Letters, I, 334-5).

Addressing the Boston Burns Club on 25 January 1859, Ralph Waldo Emerson said of Burns, “His organic sentiment was absolute independence… He is an exceptional genius. The people who care nothing for literature and poetry care for Burns.” Recently, the American scholar, Roger Fechner, designated Burns “the world’s foremost poet of democratic aspirations.”

The “Ode for General Washington’s Birthday” offers one of Burns’s most vehement proclamations of libertarian principles. By this point (June 1794), as Fechner has shown, Burns had come to identify America with liberty:

But come, yet sons of Liberty,
Columbia’s offspring, brave as free,
In danger’s hour still flaming in the van:
Ye know, and dare maintain, The Royalty of Man (Poems, II, 733).

Once that crucial concept is established – “The Royalty of Man” – the speaker turns to England, which “in thunder calls, ‘The Tyrant’s cause is mine!’” and Caledonia, which is invoked, “Where is that soul of Freedom fled?”

Is this a rallying-cry for Scottish independence? In our efforts at an answer we encounter one of the central problems in Burns studies. To take all his utterances literally and look for absolute consistency is futile. As a human being, and a complex one at that, he is likely to contradict himself; as an imaginative writer, he has no obligations to truth. In poems and letters Burns proves a master of voice and persona; and like many Scots, both of his time and since, he exemplifies double or even multiple vision. Thus, Burns’s poems and letters provide a rich hunting-ground, and he is capable of rendering substance to the views that he is, respectively, Jacobite, Unionist, Nationalist, and Socialist. Certainly, he seems to exemplify the dichotomous characteristics of a number of Scottish writers in the century after the Union.

Tobias Smollett, whose “Ode to Independence” Burns termed “glorious verses” (Letters, II, 45), edited The Briton in support of the Bute ministry and in Humphry Clinker introduced Scotland to her southern partner. Walter Scott, too, in his fiction and poetry tries to reconcile his conflicting allegiances – to the romance of Scotland’s past and the reality of its present.

Burns’s patriotism is epitomized in the song, “Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation” (Poems, II, 643), the speaker is a patriot who has lived through the Union of 1707 and, now in old age, still resents the loss of independence and rages at those responsible. Scotland, now “England’s province,” has been “sold for English gold” by “rogues,” the thirty-one Scottish Commissioners, collectively parcelled – a most telling metaphor suggestive of both their herd-like mentality and their being bundled up together for protection. Here Burns characteristically draws upon the Scottish past as exemplary of heroic virtues:
“ancient glory,” “martial story” have been surrendered for “hireling traitors’ wages.”

There is a sense in which Burns appoints himself custodian of the culture, history, and reputation of Scotland – “The appellation of, a Scotch Bard, is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it is my most exalted ambition. Scottish scenes, and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing” (Letters, 1, 101) – this to Mrs. Frances Anna Wallace Dunlop, to whose distinguished ancestor Burns regularly alludes. The terms in which he enthuses about his earliest reading are revealing:

Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest (Letters, I, 136).

This correlation of martial prowess and cultural independence was to recur.

Similarly, the wistful poignancy of much Jacobite song struck a chord with Burns’s nostalgia for a lost Scotland. The self-image which he was to project increasingly, that of the outsider – as “Heaven-taught ploughman” in fashionable Edinburgh society, as celebrity when back in Ayrshire, as exciseman in Dumfries – found a parallel in the situation of the Young Pretender; witness this “Stanza from Epistle to Mr. Tytler of Woodhouselee, Author of the Defence of Mary Queen of Scots”:

Tho’ something like moisture conglobes in my eye,
Let no man misdeem me disloyal;
A poor, friendless wand’rer may well claim a sigh,
Still more if that Wand’rer were royal (Poems, I, 332).

In Scottish history Burns finds figures whose very name will trigger the finer feelings – pity for the innocent victim; admiration for the patriot. Foremost exemplar of the former is Mary, Queen of Scots. “Scots Prologue, For Mrs. Sutherland’s Benefit Night” invokes the poet to present Scottish material: “There’s themes enow in Caledonian story, / Was shew the Tragic Muse in a’ her glory” (Poems, II, 543). After homage is paid to Wallace and Bruce, the speaker turns to “the lovely hapless Scottish Queen”:

She fell-but fell with spirit truly Roman,
To glut that direst foe, – a vengeful woman;
A woman – tho’ the phrase may seem uncivil,
As able – and as wicked as the devil! (Poems, II, 544)

Archetypal Scottish heroes and heroines evoke the reawakening of traditional Scottish values. The most stirring of Burns’s patriotic songs in “Scots Wha Hae” “Robert Bruce’s March to Bannockburn” (Poems, II, 707), in which slavery and freedom are vividly contrasted. In the postscript to the letter accompanying the text to George Thomson,
Burns wrote, “I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the Subject, till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for Freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles of the same nature, not quite so ancient, roused my rhyming Mania” (Letters, II, 236). America or revolutionary France may be in his mind here, but scholars have noted that the letter coincides with the start of the trial of Thomas Muir of Huntershill, advocate of parliamentary reform and Scottish independence, charged with sedition and subsequently sentenced to transporation.\footnote{Does the habitual inculcation of heroic values mean that Burns desired independence? – In his heart, yes. Did he expect it? Possibly, but independence was for him not necessarily synonymous with the restoration of the Stewarts. Paul Scott, a prominent Nationalist, is realistic in acknowledging Burns’s realism: “In supporting Jacobitism, Burns knew exactly what he was doing. He did not imagine that a Stewart could be restored to the throne. It was an expression of his detestation of the Union and of the arrogance and corruption of wealth” (Scott, p. 269). For Burns, one may suggest, Jacobitism was an inspirational source, rather than an active cause. Burns sent to Alexander Cunningham a copy of the song. “There’ll never be peace till Jamie comes hame,” in which a Jacobite is heard lamenting,

The Church is in ruins, the State is in jars,
Delusions, appressions, and murderous wars:
We dare na weel say’t, but ken wha’s to blame,
There’ll never be peace till Jamie comes hame (Poems, II, 572).

Revealingly, he comments, “When Political combustion, ceases to be the object of Princes & Patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of Historians and Poets” (Letters, II, 82).

Burns’s heroic service to Scotland was to take its own distinct form. As a cultural nationalist, he felt it his duty to preserve the corpus of Scottish song, as his correspondence with George Thomson makes plain. Relations between the collaborators were often uneasy. Burns refers to Scots airs he has picked up from the singing of country lasses: “They please me vastly; but your learned lugs would perhaps be displeased with the very feature for which I like them. I call them Simple; you would pronounce them Silly” (Letters, II, 198). His cultural nationalism finds expression in such comments as “These English Songs gravel me to death” (Letters, II, 315), and, above all, in the following:

But let our National Music preserve its native features. They are, I own, frequently wild, … unreducible to the more modern rules; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect (Letters, II, 211).

One of Burns’s most significant contributions to Scottish independence is in terms of the preservation of language and song-culture. Another important function of his patriotism is to serve as catalyst to his political radicalism. Injustices – national and individual – in Scotland past and present inspire pleas for a new, fairer social order in which the rights of all human beings are recognized. Such pleas have universal relevance; with justification,
Thomas Crawford entitled the final chapter of his still-unsurpassed study, “Burns as World Poet.” As the evidence of the letters indicates, the song which was to become the anthem of universal brotherhood, “A Man’s a Man for a’ that,” encapsulates sentiments which Burns had long held. To Thomson, who was to delay for ten years the song’s inclusion in his *Select Collection*, Burns wrote that it “contained two or three pretty good prose thoughts, inverted into rhyme” (*Letters*, II, 336). Like “Love and Liberty,” the song proclaims that poverty is nothing to be ashamed of. As early as 22 March 1787 Burns had written from the midst of Edinburgh society, “I shall never blush for my own poverty, nor the poverty of my country” (*Letters*, I, 102), the conjunction of personal and national once again significant. The radical energy aimed at the destruction of artificial social hierarchies is evident in a letter of 16 August 1788 where he contrasts the situations of “the selected few” and “the neglected many,” sentiments echoed in:

Ye see yon birkie ca’d a lord,
Wha struts, and stares, and a’ that,
Though hundreds worship at his word,
He’s but a coof for a’ that (*Poems*, II, 763).

On 10 September 1792 Burns had written:

I remember, in my Plough-boy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble Lord could be a Fool, or that a godly Man could be a Knave.
How ignorant are Plough-boys! (*Letters*, II, 147).

Pride, pretence, illusion, are set against true natural worth; honesty is set against deceit. In the natural, just order of things, “The honest man, though e’er sae poor, /Is king o’ men for a’ that.” Burns offers honesty as counter to the corruption which he sees in the body politic, a direct legacy of the Union. To Mrs. Dunlop he wrote,

…what are all the boasted advantages which my Country reaps from a certain Union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her Independence, and even her very name?

and, noting how politicians can manipulate “The Rabble,” he comments:

When they talk of Right & Wrong, they only mean Proper & Improper;
& their measure of conduct is, not what they OUGHT, but what they DARE, (*Letters*, II, 23-4).

Natural morality has been superseded by pragmatism and self interest. A better, fairer society can only be achieved by the man of independent mind, who will see through pretence and challenge corruption, and the honest man, respectively Sense and Worth:
Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a’ that,
That Sense and Worth, o’er a’ the earth
Shall bear the gree, and a’ that.
For a’ that, and a’ that,
Its comin yet for a’ that,
That Man to Man the warld o’er,
Shall brothers be for a’ that (Poems, II, 763).

If this song offers the most overt statement of Burns’s radical politics, there are poems in which the communication of values, albeit more oblique, is subtly effective. Writing of his adolescence, Burns commented that young people are relatively free of class consciousness (Letters, I, 136). In “The Twa Dogs” he contrasts the natural fellowship of Caesar and Luath, aristocrat’s gun-dog and farmer’s collie, with the rank-based society of their owners. Caesar takes the lead in the discussion of the class-divisions in the world of their masters, pitying the peasantry their life of hardship. Luath, though admitting their difficulties, cites compensations.

But how it comes, I never kent yet,
They’re maistly wonderfu’ contented;
An’ buirdly chiels, an’ clever hizzies,
Are bred in sic a way as this is (Poems, I, 140).

Startled by the response, Caesar tries to goad Luath into agreement by redoubling his attack:

Lord man, our gentry care as little
For delvers, ditchers, an’ sic cattle;
They gang as saucy by poor folk,
As I wad by a stinkan brock.

This serves only to elicit from Luath a fuller justification of the life-style of the peasantry, though he concedes that tenant farmers are being evicted so that landowners may further their political ambitions. This point serves to unleash from Caesar a tirade on the corruption, neurosis, and pretension of the landed gentry, which he contrasts with the life-style of the peasantry. Burns would later extol in a letter the character of “an independent-minded Country Gentleman” (Letters, II, 344). Here the viewpoint which Burns would endorse has been offered not by the aristocrat but his dog, but what is most revealing is that it is the farm-dog that has succeeded, by subtle manipulation, in eliciting these views from him.

Burns wrote, “Whatever shall be my failings, for failings are part of Human-nature, may they ever be those of a generous heart and an independent mind” (Letters, II, 32). The man of independent mind is empirical in his approach (and here Burns shows the influence of Lockean liberalism and the empiricism of Hutcheson and Smith): authority,
be it political, religious, or intellectual, is not accepted as a given but is subject to scrutiny or established out of experience. Evidence of the questioning intellect is present in the school-boy debates with William Niven and Thomas Orr. By early manhood, as he acknowledged to Moore, he was prone to “puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me which has not ceased to this hour” (Letters, I, 136). It was the “unyielding independence” (Letters, I, 123), the attempt to shape his own destiny, that drew him to the figure of Milton’s Satan.\(^8\) In an earlier letter he had written to James Dalrymple of the devil’s “success… in making you a poet” (Letters, I, 93). Courtesy of the creative imagination, the poet liberates himself into the unconstrained realms of an alternative world.

Burns realized that one of the most effective ways of justifying the independent mind was to allow the closed mind to reveal itself. The outcome is one of the foremost texts of the Scottish Enlightenment, “Holy Willie’s Prayer.” Prompted by the dismissal of William Fisher’s charges against Gavin Hamilton, the poem is an outstanding example of Burns’s capacity to develop a universal truth out of a specific incident. Nowhere in world literature is there clearer identification of the closed mind in its absurd limitations and very real dangers. Certain that he is one of the Elect, Holy Willie can risk confessing his sexual indiscretions and speculate as to why he is allowed such license:

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Maybe thou lets this fleshly thorn  
Buffet thy servant e’en and morn,  
Lest he o’er proud and high should turn,  
    That he’s sae gifted;  
If sae, thy hand maun e’en be borne  
Untill thou lift it (Poems, I, 76).
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If we are startled by the candor – an elder boasting to his God of his sexual prowess – and amused by the devious logic – it’s an awful job this “houghmagandie,”’’ but someone has to do it – our response turns to pity when we see the reactions of the Auld Licht faction to the challenge of liberal, enlightened thought and behaviour: “a burning and a shining light… pillar o’ thy temple… guide, ruler, and example” can only respond in a pathetically physical way to the challenge:

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O Lord my God, that glib-tongu’d Aiken!  
My very heart and flesh are quaking  
To think how I sat, sweating, shaking  
And piss’d wi’ dread,  
While Auld wi’ hingin lip gaed sneaking  
And hid his head (Poems, I, 75; 77)
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Yet the vehemence of the ensuing demands for vengeance gives awesome insight into the reaction of the closed mind when threatenend. Burns has needed to say nothing in his own right. Holy Willie, and the creed he represents, stand condemned from his own mouth, down to the last detail of the deal struck: he gets “gear and grace” – worldly and
eternal gifts – and his God gets the credit.

What of “the generous heart” referred to? In both poems and letters, Burns tends to deal in terms of binaries: reason v. instinct; prudence v. open-heartedness; learning v. superstition; philosophical investigation v. religious faith. Without compromising the rigor of his rational investigation, Burns habitually comes to rest on the side of the heart, the source of benevolent emotions, and in this his natural inclination found confirmation in Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which popularized the notion that the capacity for feeling is an index to virtue. Burns acknowledged, “My idle reasonings sometimes make me a little sceptical, but the Necessities of my heart always give the cold philosophisings the lie” (*Letters*, I, 307). There is no necessary contradiction in his thinking: his cherished values of independent mind and honesty combine to create the just society founded on benevolent tolerance; and sympathetic identification is thus a key social virtue. For instance, in “Death and Dr. Hornbook” Burns’s benign and convivial peasant lends a sympathetic ear to Death, reduced to a figure of ridicule by the local amateur apothecary, whose incompetence has made Death redundant. Here the convention of the bargain with Death is given an ironic twist: Death needs sympathy from the listener and the downfall of his human competitor in order to resume his rightful status. Burns has reduced Death to the human level and elevated Hornbook to such an extent that he is now the local legend on whose malpractice malevolents can rely to achieve their own ends. Death is not the enemy, Burns says, it is human corruption.

The legacy of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy even informs such a poem as “Address to the Deil.” Familiarized within the community (rather in the matter of Satan in Burns’s oft-quoted Book of Job), the Devil is anything but the awesome figure of the Miltonic epigraph – “O Prince, O chief of many throned pow’rs, / That led th’ embattl’d Seraphim to war” – he is the local nuisance, directly addressed by a range of nicknames – “Auld Hornie, Nick, Clootie, Auld Hangie.” Demystified, the Devil is treated as a crony and becomes latterly the target of the speaker’s sympathetic concern:

But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben!
O wad ye tak a thought an’ men’!
Ye aiblins might – I dinna ken-
Still hae a stake-
I’m wae to think upo’ yon den,
Ev’n for your sake (*Poems*, I, 172).

Even the Devil does not deserve to be consigned to eternal torment, and if he were to reform it would benefit not just himself but humankind. Here is direct challenge to the fixed certainties of orthodox Calvinism. Here social leveling is such as to allow for the accommodation of the Devil within the human community – a Christian egalitarianism of a remarkable kind. If the Devil here presented is somewhat different to the Miltonic “noble personage” of several of Burns’s letters, the explanation may be that these diverse characterizations of the Devil reflect Burns’s attempt to reconcile within one figure his fragmented, multiple self.

The egalitarian society of some of the poems is, of course, not that of the world
Burns inhabited. He fell victim to, and also at times exemplified, the values of a less just society. Acknowledging that he has “no romantic notions of independancy of spirit,” he write to Mrs. Dunlop:

> From the manner in which God has divided the good things of this life, it is evident that He meant one part of Mankind to be the Benefactors & the other to be the Benefacted; and as he has thrown me among this latter Class, I would wish to acquiesce with cheerfulness (*Letters*, I, 421).

Freedom is circumscribed by social constraints of class, familial obligations, and the competitive ethos, whereby self-interest rules. Echoing Rousseau, Burns exclaims in a letter to Peter Hill:

> I am out of all patience with this vile world for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures… but we are placed here amid so much Nakedness, & Hunger, & Poverty, & want, that we are under a damning necessity of studying Selfishness in order that we may Exist! (*Letters*, II, 21).

Dependency sits awkwardly on a man of such pride. He writes feelingly to Mrs. Dunlop of the alternatives facing the poor man offered financial help by a friend: to accept is to run the “danger of falling into an abjectness of soul equally incompatible with the independence of Man and the dignity of Friendship”; to decline is to be guilty of “exceptious pride” (*Letters*, I, 451). Claiming to be “ill-skilled in beating the coverts of imagination for metaphors of gratitude” (*Letters*, I, 107), he alternates between deference and defiance. Some letters work on two levels: fustian patronage from the Earl of Buchan draws the response, “I must return to my rustic station, and, in my wonted way, woo my rustic Muse at the ploughtail” (*Letters*, I, 92). This functions in two ways: patrons can savor the miracle of the “Heaven-taught ploughman,” while Burns can relish his mimicry of bombast. Nonetheless, he seems unaware of the element of contradiction in this claim:

> To secure myself from ever descending to any thing unworthy of the independent spirit of Man, or the honest pride of Genius, I have adopted Lord Glencairn as my titular Protector (*Letters*, I, 357-8).

How easily do the generous heart and the independent mind coexist in the realms of Burns’s familial and personal relationships? Can responsibility and freedom be reconciled, or are social constraints and individual energies at odds?

It is undeniable that Burns felt keenly his family responsibilities, especially in times of crisis, as, for instance, after his father’s death or as his own health declined. While it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Burns felt at liberty to love where he chose, it has to be acknowledged that, as an intensely passionate man, he expressed the needs of the generous heart in sexual relationships as well as in print. “A Poet’s Welcome to his love-begotten Daughter” conveys the mixed emotions prompted by the birth of his
daughter to Bess Paton, with loving pride giving way to defiance:

Tho’ now they ca’ me, Fornicator,
   And tease my name in kintra clatter,
The mair they talk, I’m kend the better;
   E’en let them clash!
An auld wife’s tongue’s a feckless matter
   To gie an fash (Poems, I, 99).

There is a sense in which he seems to savour the added celebrity her appearance in the world gives him; his reputation as social rebel will be consolidated. Even our politically correct times cannot object, surely, to the warm-bloodedness, but the chauvinism of his celebrations of sexual conquests is perhaps offensive to some. An early letter contains this endorsement of matrimony: “And then to have a woman to lye with when one pleases, without running any risk of the cursed expense of bastards and all the other concomitants of that species of Smuggling” (Letters, I, 24). These may be the braggart confidences of early manhood, but when he records his own sexual experiences the motif of sex as transaction is prominent: of Jean’s bearing him twins: “poor Armour has repaid my amorous mortgage double” (Letters, I, 51); to Ainslie, “I have the pleasure to tell you that I have been extremely fortunate in all my buyings and bargainings hitherto; Mrs. Burns not excepted, which title I now avow to the world” (Letters, I, 281); he boasts that he wants Jean to deliver twins annually for twelve years (Letters, I, 274); and to Mrs. Dunlop he exclaims, “I wish I had lived [in the days] of Joktan, in whose days, says Moses, the earth was divided. Then a patriarchal [sic] fellow like me might have been the father of a nation” (Letters, I, 398). Transactions, deals, boasting of sexual prowess – where have we encountered this before? Wasn’t it with Holy Willie, from whom Burns was ironically distanced?

Arguably, no woman would have satisfied the needs of Burns’s multiple personality. Mary Campbell, Jean Armour, Frances Dunlop, Nancy M’Lehose, Maria Riddell - each had an important role in Burns’s life (cf. Tam o’ Shanter whose fate is largely determined by females – Kate, Kirkton Jean, Cutty Sark, Maggie). Jean Armour, shamelessly demeaned by Burns in a letter to Clarinda, is reported to have observed that her husband should have had two wives. Burns was beset by the problem of reconciling his background and his talents: to Mrs. Dunlop he admitted, “Circumstanced as I am, I could never have got a female Partner for life who could have entered into my favourite studies” (Letters, I, 294). Thus Jean would provide the stability of family. In Edinburgh, Burns fathered a child by the servant-girl, Jenny Clow, (who “had the misfortune to make me a father” (Letters, II, 122), while, true to the vogue of Sensibility, participating in the Platonic love-affair of letters with her mistress, Nancy M’Lehose. Out of rural Ayrshire and now surrounded by the affectations of fashionable society, “Sylvander” (“Backwoodsman” – was he aware of the ironic appropriateness?) assures his “Clarinda”: “I like the idea of Arcadian names in a commerce of this kind” (Letters, I, 189) (the word, “commerce,” again revealing). Posturing like mad, he claims “I scorn dissimulation” (Letters, I, 205). They collaborate on a poem in what becomes almost a bizarre, alternative consummation
of the relationship (cf. Donne, “The Flea”), and Burns ends the letter, “I can’t dissemble were it to shun perdition” (Letter, I, 197). Yet from this play-acting (on his part, largely) sprung “Ae Fond Kiss,” its fourth stanza for Scott “the essence of a thousand love tales”:

Had we never lov’d sae kindly,
Had we never lov’d sae blindly!
Never met-or never parted,
We had ne’er been broken-hearted (Poems, II, 592).

Here, certainly, the feeling is of the most genuine.

A striking feature of Burns’s work is the frequent correlation of procreation and creation, sexual license and poetic license. In the letters, references to children and poems are often conjunct. Sending “Castle Gordon” to James Hoy, Burns writes, “The inclosed is one which, like some other misbegotten brats, ‘too tedious to mention,’ claims a parental pang from my Bardship” (Letters, I, 164). Even more revealing is this admission to Thomson:

Making a poem is like begetting a son: you cannot know whether you have a wise man or a fool, until you produce him to the world & try him. For that reason I send you the offspring of my brain, abortions & all; and as such, pray look over them, and forgive them, & burn them (Letters, II, 305).

Poet is maker: he fathers forth offspring in parallel worlds/in life and in print. The equation culminates in his assertion to Mrs. Dunlop.

I look on your little Namesake [Francis Wallace Burns] to be my chef d’oeuvre in that species of manufacture, as I look on “Tam o’ Shanter” to be my standard performance in the Poetical Line (Letters, II, 83).

To conclude: the issue of literary independence. How original can a writer be, especially one such as Burns, devouring literature, blessed with formidable powers of memory, and, by is own admission, one who like “to have quotations ready for every occasion. They give one’s ideas so pat, and save one of the trouble of finding expression adequate to one’s feelings” (Letters, I, 207)? Did we hear aright? Is Burns merely a collector of stolen gems? Is there, by the late-eighteenth century, nothing new to be said? Apologetically, he writes of the mode of elegy, “any new ideas… is not to be expected: ‘tis well if we can place an old idea in a new light” (Letters, II, 70). In fact he proves himself to be master of conventional elegy in “Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson” (Poems I, 438), and of mock elegy in “Tam Samson’s Elegy” (Poems, I, 273).

No poem better demonstrates the innovative, esemplastic power of the imagination than “Tam o’ Shanter.” No poem could substantiate more emphatically Carol McGuirk’s contention that “True poets are inspired, not legislated, by classical models.”9 The circumstances of its genesis are well known – Francis Grose’s request for local witch
All of these were influences, but “Tam o’ Shanter” is emphatically Burns’s own. In The Rape of the Lock Pope offers a tour de force of style. Burns uses mock-heroic to celebrate ordinary human experience and affirm common humanity. Arguably, it is the most radical of Burns’s poems. I have argued elsewhere that here the process of democratization of literature, to which Scottish vernacular poets contribute so much, reaches, the zenith of its expression. The trappings of classical epic are used to celebrate Tam’s experiences and responses. The common man is now center stage, a worthy focus of attention; the traditional correlation between social hierarchies and literary hierarchies no longer obtains. Enter the ordinary man, “heroic Tam.” Leaving human conviviality, he survives nature as its most hostile, passes by relics of human corruption and misfortune (that splendid mock-epic catalogue), only to become a fascinated spectator at the second party of the night:

As Tammie glowr’d, amaz’d, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:
The piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew;
They reel’d, they set, they cross’d, they cleekit,
Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sack! (Poems, II, 561-2)

The rhythmical enactment of the sense is superb, and the poem is transfused with Burns’s humanity: even the witches need to let their hair down, and they have invaded the kirk (in which Burns’s father lay buried) for their ceilidh. Tam is safe as voyeur until his instinctive and ever-mounting sexual excitement at the sight of the sensual Cutty Sark overcomes him:

Even Satan glowr’d, and fidg’d fu’ fain,
And hotch’d and blew wi’ might and main;
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason a’ thegither,
And roars out, ‘Weel done, Cutty-sark!’
And in an instant all was dark:
And scarcely had the Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied (Poems, II, 563)

It is ironic that the energies which made Cutty Sark so seductive are the same energies that lead the threat to his survival. Earlier we alluded to the opposition between Reason and Instinct. Here it is made plain that there are limits to the extent of Reason’s constraining power: natural instinct will ultimately win out (but we should be mindful of the consequences!).

Inspired by range of sources, Burns has crafted the ultimate celebration of universal human instincts and responses; in so doing he gives unrivalled demonstration of artistic independence. By the miraculous power of the imagination the local is made universal.

Glasgow
University of Strathclyde

NOTES

hey know not Burns who only know his poetry.”¹ That remark was made by John Muir, the very first editor of The Burns Chronicle back in 1891, actually aware that only one in a thousand who could recite the poems or sing the songs had ever read a line of Burns’s letters. Apart from the Chronicle itself, which over the ensuing century helped to publicise existing letters as well as record new finds of the poet’s correspondence, the various Centenary editions of the life and works of Burns in 1896 gradually brought the prose writings of Burns before a wider audience.

A major breakthrough was the publication of the edition of the letters by DeLancey Ferguson in 1931, brought up-to-date in Ross Roy’s two-volume edition of 1985, the latter being by far the best and most accurate text and unlikely ever to be surpassed, unless it becomes possible to publish all 700-odd letters in a facsimile edition.

My own single-volume edition, published by the Burns Federation in 1988 is, shall we say, a down-market version aimed at the general rather than the academic reader. Some attempt was made to provide biographical notes concerning each of the poet’s correspondents and background details on their correspondence, with a few highlights of the more important letters picked out in the head-note which preceded each section. The letters themselves were grouped together according to the recipient, a system which had its disadvantages. On the plus side, it enabled the readers to see at a glance how the correspondence with each person developed, how it waxed and waned or, in the case of Mrs. Dunlop, ebbed and flowed before coming to an abrupt halt.

The chief disadvantage of this thematic approach was that it was very difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to put the poet’s letter-writing into the context of his everyday life. It was also very difficult to relate what he wrote to one person with what he was writing to other people around the same time, which was one of the strong points about Ross Roy’s strictly chronological approach.

The supreme drawback about the Oxford and Burns Federation editions of the poet’s letters, however, is that they are both so one-sided. In neither case do we get so much as a glimpse at the reaction of the addressee, or in many cases, what was written to Burns in the first place to provoke a response from him.

To be sure, there have been studies of the letters that passed between Burns and a single correspondent, notably the volume published by William Wallace in 1898 giving both sides of the correspondence between Burns and Mrs. Dunlop, and the various editions of the Sylvander-Carinda correspondence, which, to judge by their numbers, wielded an extraordinary fascination for the Victorians. Indeed, this exchange of overheated prose has continued to pose the question: “did he or did he not?” to this day, as the latest edition, published last year, indicates. Even as I write these notes, there is feverish
talk of a Hollywood movie devoted to this torrid affair. I understand that it is being put together by the people who made *Braveheart* so we may conjecture that it will bear little relation to the truth.

Even now, remarkably little is known regarding the correspondence which Burns received. We get a tantalizing glimpse of this from the list compiled by Dr. James Currie when he gathered together all the papers that were in the poet’s possession at the time of his death; but the only manuscript of that list suffered grievously from damp and it was in a fragmentary condition when it was first published seventy years ago, often furnishing little more than the names of the poet’s correspondents and the dates on which they wrote to him. The occasional word or phrase does provide a clue as to the nature of the letter, and quite often it is possible to gauge its tone or glean its contents from the comments or remarks in Burns’s answer.

Ross Roy and Ken Simpson have, I believe, been working for several years on a compilation of the letters to Burns, and it is to be hoped that such monumental and invaluable research will eventually become available to other Burns scholars.

In his review of my biography of Burns the late Alan Bold made the valid point that it was far from the last word on the subject. He himself was engaged on a biography of Burns at the time but as it was apparently never completed before his untimely death we may never know what new facts he had unearthed. I would be the first to admit that, although it represented the furthest extent of my own researches, over a period of sixteen years, I was acutely aware that there were questions as yet unanswered, not to mention the questions that were not even asked!

Despite the shortness of the life and the heftiness of that volume, I, more than most, realize its superficialities. It would have required a series of volumes to do full justice to the subject. A long-standing ambition of John Cairney is to compile a book dealing with Burns day by day, from birth to death. It is an admirable thought, but how far would it be practicable? It is said that of the 32 years in the life of Jesus Christ we actually have details of no more than fifty days. Although the life of Robert Burns is infinitely better docketed and documented than that, there are still enormous gaps, and not just in his early years either, as I am now beginning to discover.

About two years ago I was approached by Ian Macdonald and Ian McMaster of Irvine in the course of setting up a Burns website with a “concept” – a very challenging proposition as it turned out. With the seemingly limitless capacity of the present generation of personal computers, would it be feasible to produce a new edition of the letters of Burns? They outlined what they had in mind. The letters themselves, from those first self-conscious schoolboy exercises to William Niven in 1780 to that last poignant letter to his father-in-law, written only three days before his death, would be merely the skeleton. The flesh would be the extensive commentaries on each letter.

Who was Burns writing to and what were the circumstances in which he wrote? What was he doing that very day? What was the context in which the letter was written? What response, if any, did it elicit? Answering these questions has proved to be difficult enough, but when it comes to analysing the letters, one by one, and providing not only a textual criticism but also an explanation of the events and personalities alluded to therein, I very soon realized that I was moving into uncharted waters. Hitherto, if I could not answer
these questions it was all too easy merely to ignore them, but this time there was to be no getting away from them.

Getting to the bottom of the thousand and one problems of identifying the men and women referred to by Burns in passing has strained my detective skills to the limit. This has involved endless hours and days of research in the Mitchell Library and the library of Glasgow University, the archival collections of Glasgow and Ayrshire and, farther afield, the Scottish Records Office, the National Library of Scotland and the library of Edinburgh University, poring over parish registers and records of wills and testaments, ancient street directories and the genealogies of the landed gentry.

To keep this mass of material within manageable proportions I ought to log it all on to the computer. Call me old-fashioned, but I have preferred to gloss my well-worn copy of Maurice Lindsay’s *Burns Encyclopedia* with new entries in miniscule handwriting, barely legible to myself let alone anybody else, and it would be no exaggeration to state that these additions would easily swell this book to a volume twice its size.

I sometimes wonder whether there is a point to all this pursuit of trifles. Is it really necessary to discover to whom Janet Nievison, Burns’s neighbor at Ellisland, got married in 1790, or where, or when? Do we really need to know the identity of Maunderson of Dumfries who was owing money to John Tennant Junior in 1791, and why precisely he had incurred this debt? But it niggles me when I read a letter of Burns and wonder who is referred to. I take the view that if so-and-so was important enough to merit mention in a letter then he or she should be identified and put into proper context.

Messrs Macdonald and McMaster stressed at the outset that it was important also to put Burns himself in the context of his times. To be sure, this has been done at a fairly superficial level in every biography of Burns from Currie onwards, but it is only when we look at Burns day by day, through the medium of his letters (and to a lesser extent his poems, especially those written on specific occasions), that this sort of back-ground detail comes into perspective.

This has entailed reading all the newspapers of the period, to find out what was going on in the wider world, beyond the limits of Mauchline or Dumfries. I have always been intrigued that the stirring events from July 1789 onwards that marked the progress of the French Revolution had little or no impact on Burns in its early stages. Indeed, if we are to judge from his letters in the period, it made no impression at all, until December 1792 when we get his first casual comment about the “Ça Ira” incident at the Theatre Royal in Dumfries, swiftly followed by his grovelling letter to Graham of Fintry when he was denounced to the Excise Board as being “a person disaffected” (*Letters*, II, 168). As Burns’s views on the French Revolution must have been formed from July 1789 onwards, and he hints as much in his letter to Graham – “As to France, I was her enthusiastic votary in the beginning” (*Letters*, II, 174) – this merely shows that he was heeding his own “Epistle to a Young Friend” and keeping something to himself which he would “scarcely tell to ony”.

It is well-known that Burns often used his letters as a means of striking a pose, especially when writing to those whom he regarded as his social or intellectual superiors, and that he was also conscious of the fact that he would be judged by posterity according to what he wrote, not only in verse but in prose. He preserved drafts of the letters he
considered significant or important and, as we all know, even went to the extraordinary length of making a collection of them for his friend Robert Riddell. To what extent does the real Robert Burns show through? The answer is, quite a lot, especially in the more ephemeral pieces. Sometimes it is in the more casual, spur of the moment letters that we get a glimpse of Burns as he really was. Often it is the most trivial of notes that provide the best clues to what he was actually doing at that precise moment, and I have found that it is these letters which give me the most headaches in trying to unravel the casual allusions.

Because they do not materially affect our perception of Burns as a man or as a poet, however, these short letters and notes, terse and positively telegraphic in their laconic character, have perhaps not had the attention that they deserve. We form a very vivid picture of electioneering in the 1790s from Burns’s graphic and witty descriptions of the antics of the candidates and their supporters, and this reinforces what we know of these blatantly corrupt practices from other contemporary sources.

But there are other aspects of Burns’s letters which have not previously excited comment, and yet shed light on some of the peculiar practices of that period. To give only one example of this I will examine the workings of the postal system as reflected in the letters of Burns which are studded with references to the high postal charges. A single-sheet letter travelling no more than eighty miles cost fourpence which, in real terms (in the length of time taken to earn that sum), would be the equivalent of £4 or $6.50 in modern money. If a letter strayed over on to a second sheet, this automatically doubled the postage.

It was the duty of the postmaster at the nearest post town (i.e. Dumfries, when Burns resided at Ellisland and afterwards moved into that town) to tax the letters before forwarding them. As an envelope would have counted as an extra sheet and doubled the postage it is hardly surprising that they were never used. Letters were folded carefully and sealed so that the address was written on the outer part of the sheet.

What may not be generally realized, however, is that in Burns’s day the vast majority of letters were sent unpaid, it being considered extremely bad form to prepay the postage on letters, other than to lawyers and tradesmen. Thus it was the recipient, and not the sender, who was stuck with the postage.

As letters were charged by sheet and not by weight, it was vital to get hold of the largest sheet you could find. Writing to Mrs. Dunlop on 5 February 1789 Burns says: “I have rummaged every Stationer’s shop in Dumfries, for a long and broad, ample and capacious, sized sheet of writing paper, just to keep by me for epistles to you; and you see, dear Madam, by this honest-looking page, that I have succeeded to a miracle” (Letters, I, 369). Towards the end of a letter to the same lady, dated 6 December 1792, he confesses: “I see you are in for double Postage, so I shall e’en scribble on t’other sheet” (Letters, II, 166). Other letters bearing the endorsement “Single Sheet” on their outer cover contained, in fact, two leaves, thereby deliberately attempting (with some success) to evade the double postage.

Burns occasionally rails against the excessive postal charges of his day. In a letter to the Birmingham gunsmith David Blair (23 January 1789) he writes: “If I could think of any other channel of communication with you than the villainous expensive one of the Post, I could send you a parcel of my Rhymes” (Letters, I, 360). To the same correspondent
(27 August 1789) he rails against “that cursed tax of Postage” (Letters, I, 436).

At the end of a very long letter to Peter Hill, the Edinburgh bookseller, in March 1791 he writes: “I have just this moment an opportunity of a private hand to Edinr., as perhaps you would not digest double Postage – so God bless you” (Letters, II, 79-80). On other occasions he apologises to his correspondents for the length of his letters, knowing that if they run over to a second sheet the charge will be doubled.

Writing to Alexander Cunningham on 3 March 1794 he notes: “As I cannot in conscience tax you with the postage of a packet, I must keep this bizarre [sic] melange of an epistle until I find the chance of a private conveyance” (Letters, II, 285). Sending letters by the hand of a friend, or even a perfect stranger who just happened to be travelling in that direction, was one way of getting around the embarrassing dilemma of landing one’s correspondents with a charge for the privilege of reading one’s letters. There are numerous references in Burns’s letters to entrusting them to travellers, even casual acquaintances whom he had only just met for the first time.

The excessively high rates of postage, of which Burns justifiably complained, encouraged the illegal carriage of letters. The freight traffic of the country was in the hands of numerous carters and carriers. So long as they confined their business to parcels they did not break the law, but many of them conveyed letters. Such smuggling was regarded as a serious offence, punishable by a fine of £5 a time, but this did not deter the traffic. It was illegal to enclose a letter in a parcel, but it was perfectly permissible to send a letter separately by carrier, so long as it accompanied a parcel. Such letters had to be endorsed in the lower left-hand corner to that effect.

This regulation was intended to cover bills of lading and other freight documents, but inevitably the point was often stretched. Thus we find a letter from Burns to Peter Hill
on 29 January 1796 endorsed on the cover “wt a kipper salmon.” The letter itself reads: “By the chaise, the driver of which brings you this, I send your annual Kipper” (Letters, II, 373). At an earlier date Burns mentions to Hill, “I sent you a Maukin [hare] by last week’s Fly” (Letters, II, 134), but does not mention if he included a letter in the parcel. Elsewhere in Burns’s correspondence there are references to letters sent with a pound of Lundiefoot snuff (to John M’Murdo in 1788), with seven samples of local limestone (to William Nicol in 1790) and “a hare, by last Saturday’s Fly, carriage-free.”

From Burns’s letters we also learn much about the various carriers. James Johnson, for example, is informed that the Mauchline carrier is Connel who “puts up at Campbell’s Grass market” (Letters, I, 339), while John Smith, the Glasgow bookseller is asked to send books “by John Glover, Carrier to Dumfries” (Letters, I, 355). To James Johnson (19 June 1789) he adds a postscript: “If you send a parcel, direct to the care of Walter Auld, Saddler, Dumfries, & write me at the same time by post to let me know what Carrier you have employ’d as they are careless rascals” (Letters, I, 417).

The commonest method of saving your correspondents the burden of postage, however was to abuse the franking privilege which had been enjoyed by peers of the realm and members of parliament since 1654. Originally it was sufficient for the MP merely to endorse the lower left-hand corner of the wrapper with his signature, but there were so many cases of MP’d signing blank sheets in bulk to oblige their voters that the regulations were tightened up in 1764, requiring the member to write the name and address of the recipient, and later on they were even obliged to add the date of posting as well, writing it out in words as a further deterrent.

Burns makes several references to “obtaining a frank” from the local MP, Sir Robert Laurie, a cousin of Robert Riddell. Alexander Cunningham who, as a Writer to the signet in Edinburgh, was no stranger to the subtleties of the franking system, seems to have made frequent use of it in sending his letters free of postage. Writing to Cunningham on 11 March 1791 Burns apologizes for the length of the letter: “I foresee that it will cost you another groat [fourpence] of postage” and then goes on “By the way, you once mentioned to me a method of franking letters to you, but I have forgot the direction” (Letters II, 81). One wonders whether this referred to another method of evading postage, namely the direction of letters to people who enjoyed the franking privilege.

One of those officers of state who did have a franking privilege was William Kerr, Secretary of the Post Office. That the highest-ranking postal official in Scotland was quite ready to abuse the system was borne out of by some of the correspondence between Burns and Mrs. Dunlop. She was obviously on intimate terms with Kerr, for several letters from Burns were addressed to her, care of William Kerr, Post Office, Edinburgh and subsequently forwarded to Mrs. Dunlop at Dunlop House or Moreham Mains at no charge. In a letter of 7 December 1788 Burns writes: “I shall give you the verses on the other sheet, as I suppose Mr. Kerr will save you the postage” (Letters, I, 342). When Kerr had to spend some time in London on official business this cosy arrangement was temporarily suspended, causing both Burns and Mrs. Dunlop no end of annoyance, as their letters reveal.

That point about the MP having to date the wrapper of a franked letter could be most inconvenient. On 27 September 1791 Burns wrote to Riddell at Friars’ Carse: “dare I
trouble you, if you meet with the Member, to get me a Frank, ‘October the second’ 1791/ Colonel Fullarton of Fullarton / Fullarton-house / Irvine’ – I am to send the Colonel some things, beside the Whistle; & do not wish to put him to expense” (Letters, II, 110). The frank was duly forthcoming, for Burns wrote to Fullarton on 3 October (the actual date endorsed on it by the MP): “I have just this minute got the frank; & next minute must send it to Post, else I purposed to have sent you two or three other bagatelles, than might have amused a vacant hour” (Letters, II, 114).

Having obtained a frank, therefore, Burns had to dash off a letter before the due date had expired, and he used this circumstance to explain the haste or shortness of his letters. To Lady Henrietta Don he wrote on 23 October 1791: “The Post is just going, else I would have taken the opportunity of the frank, & sent your Ladyship some of my late pieces” (Letters, II, 119). And to George Thomson on 26 October 1792 he made a similar excuse: “I intended to have given you, & will soon give you, a great many more remarks on this business; but I have just now an opportunity of conveying you this scrawl, postage-free, an expense that it is ill able to pay” (Letters, II, 154).

On 25 August 1793 he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop: “I have got a Frank for you, my dear Madam, but I have unfortunately miscalculated the time. The Post goes in ten minutes, so, to fill up my paper to the decent length of a letter, in such a moment of time, I shall write you a song which I composed the other day” (Letters, II, 232).

This is only one aspect of late-eighteenth century life, trivial enough, but from these sample references it can be seen how one can build up quite a detailed picture of how people sent and received their letters at the time. There are many other aspects, such as the intriguing references to some form of vaccination – years before Edward Jenner made his findings public – which would repay a closer examination.

Glasgow

NOTES
1. John Muir, in a broadside which he circulated in 1891, asking for contributions to the forthcoming Burns Chronicle which was published the following year.
On 23rd October 1786 Robert Burns was invited to dinner by Professor Dugald Stewart of Catrine, near Mauchline. Stewart held the Chair of Mathematics at Edinburgh University before switching to the Chair of Moral Philosophy. He had received a copy of the Kilmarnock Edition in August 1786 from Dr Mackenzie of Mauchline, another of the invited guests, and was greatly impressed by the poets’ genius. A third dinner guest of Stewart’s that night was Basil William Douglas-Hamilton, Lord Daer, the second son of the Earl of Selkirk. A member of the nobility, Lord Daer was liberal-minded. He had friends in France who were involved in the Revolution and he himself was in favour of Parliamentary reform in Britain.

Lord Daer was the first taste of nobility encountered by the socially-emerging Robert Burns. Having never met a member of the aristocracy Burns was pleasantly surprised at the views of Lord Daer, so much so that he composed a poem:

“On Meeting with Lord Daer” (2) where he states –

Then from his Lordship I shall learn
Henceforth to meet with unconcern
One rank as weel’s another;
Nae honest, worthy man need care
To meet with noble, youthfu’ Daer
For he but meets a brother.

This meeting was perhaps Burns’ first example of discovering that “the rank is but the guinea’s stamp, the man’s the gowd for a’ that”.

Lord Daer’s father was Dunbar Douglas, the 4th Earl of Selkirk. He was Lord Lieutenant of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright and his seat was St. Mary’s Isle. He had supported the Government during the ’45 and he was described by Burns as “that Lord was not an aristocrat, at least in his sense of the word” (3) although his politics were more to Burns liking by 1793.

On 27th July 1793 Burns set out on a tour of Galloway with his friend John Syme – ‘Stamp Office Johnnie’ – or Sinecure of Collector of Stamps for the District of Dumfries and Galloway, to give him his correct title (4). Syme had an office on the ground floor of the Wee Vennel when Burns moved there from Ellisland and the two became firm friends. Syme was instrumental in organising the Bard’s funeral and raised money to help the poets’ widow and children after his death.

Syme had managed to get a loan of a grey Highland shelty for Burns, the poet having
with them. Burns stated that he

“would not dine but where he could eat like a Turk, drink like a fish and swear like
the Devil”(8)

They set out for St Mary’s Isle in the evening, Syme remarking that Burns
“had not absolutely regained the milkiness of good temper”

It was in such a mood that Burns entered the dining room of the Earl of Selkirk and his
15 or 16 guests. There they found the company about to take tea and coffee, which would
be followed, in the custom of the upper classes of the time, by dessert. As Syme put it
“we had really a treat of mental and sensual delights, the latter consisting in abundance
and variety of delicious fruits etc and the former you may conceive from our society”(9)

As Burns was well-known for his extempore poetic graces as he was for his epigrams, it
is highly probable that this entertaining young poet would be asked to favour the company
with a grace before they all partook of the variety of delicious fruits.

It is not my intention to go into the provenance of where the Selkirk Grace was actually
given, that has already been covered in the excellent article by that eminent Burnsian
Dr J. A. Mackay (see Burns Chronicle 1989 p24). Nor is it my intention to differentiate
between the English version or the vernacular, by calling it the Covenanters Grace, Grace
at Kirkcudbright or whatever. Again, that has been covered by Dr Mackay in the same
article and everyone has their own opinion on those two points. My point is merely to
examine the words, the meaning behind them and why Burns chose them at that time.
Whether or not Burns wrote none, all, or some of it (as he did when he salvaged and
resurrected certain old Scots songs and ballads) is not the issue here. The Selkirk Grace has
become so identified with the Bard and is used so often at Burns Suppers and gatherings
that it is now his by default, by popular demand almost. For this paper we will assume
that it was said at St Mary’s Isle.

So, what does it mean?

Let us look at the first line – some have meat – Immediately, with that first word,
Burns exposes his social conscience and issues a reminder to the assembled company
that not everyone is sitting down to such a dinner as is able to be given by the Earl of
Selkirk… only some have meat!

…and cannot eat. Why are the fortunate some not able to eat? Could it be that “a’
their weel-swall’d kytes belyve are bent like drums” by the preceding courses of the
dinner? Could it be that their riches offer scant protection against illness or disease which
leaves them unable to take any sustenance? Is it a veiled message that worldly goods are
worthless should the owner not be able to enjoy them? Who knows?

In studying poetry, and all great poems, the reader should never feel that they
understand it fully. On-reading a poem one should always come away from it having
discovered something new, something though-provoking, something the reader didn’t
realise before. A single word can have multiple connotations, each connotation having
the possibility of throwing a different light or meaning on each succeeding or preceding
word, giving multiple subtle variations of each phrase, iambic pentameter, line, couplet
or whatever. In that way the poetry remains fresh, stimulating and capable of being
re-read for further enjoyment. Once the readers feels that they know the poem inside
out the poem is dead for that person. It is imperative that a poem be challenged and be
given up his horse when he was transferred to the Dumfries Port Division of the Excise because of the expense of the upkeep. They stopped at Kenmure Castle that night, in the company of John Gordon, a grandson of the 6th Viscount Kenmure (who died in the rebellion of 1715, his title having been stripped from the family because of it) Burns and Syme spent three days at Kenmure and one can only imagine the topics of conversation with his fellow Jacobite, Gordon. A Mr Carson who was also at Kenmure Castle, with the parish minister Mr Gillespie, gives a detailed account of the day of their departure –

“on the evening preceding their departure, the bard having expressed his intention of climbing to the top of the ‘highest hill that rises o’er the source of Dee’, there to see the arbour of Lowe, the author of the celebrated song ‘Mary’s Dream’, Mr Gordon proposed that they should all sail down the loch in his barge Glenkens, to the Airds Hill below Lowe’s seat. Seeing that his proposal was intended in compliment by the worthy host to the bard and to Mr Gillespie, who had been the patron of Lowe, the gentlemen all concurred; and the weather proving propitious next morning the vessel soon dropped down to the foot of Loch Ken with all the party on board. Meanwhile, Mr. Gordon’s groom led the travellers horses round the Boat-o’-Rhone, saddled and bridled, that each rider might mount on descending from the poet’s seat; but the barge unfortunately grounded before reaching the proposed landing place – an obstruction not anticipated by any of the party. Mr Gordon, with the assistance of an oar, vaulted the prow of the little vessel to the beach and was soon followed in like manner by Mr Syme and myself; thus leaving only the venerable pastor of Kells and the bard on board. The former, being too feeble to jump as we had done, to land, expressed a desire to remain in the vessel till Mr Gordon and I returned; upon hearing which, the generous bard instantly slipped into the water, which was however, so deep as to wet him to the knees. After a short entreaty, he succeeded in getting the clergyman on his shoulders; on observing which, Mr Syme raised his hands, laughed immoderately and exclaimed “Well Burns, of all the men on earth, you are the last that I could have expected to see priest-ridden!” We laughed also, but Burns did not seem to enjoy the joke. He made no reply but carried his load silently through the reeds to land” (5)

Burns new knee-high boots, known as jemmy boots, which cost him the equivalent of a weeks wages, were dripping wet. Leaving Kenmure after the boat incident, they next travelled to Gatehouse, being caught in a torrential downpour for 3 hours and were absolutely drookit by the time they reached the Murray Arms. That night Burns insisted on getting unco fu’ “to revenge ourselves”. The next morning his boots having dried out and shrunk somewhat overnight, Burns tore them whilst angrily trying to get them on “the brawny poet tried force and tore them to shreds” (6)

Combined with a hangover this put him in a foul mood. As Syme described it

“we were going to St Mary’s Isle, the seat of the Earl of Selkirk, and the forlorn Burns was discomfited at the thought of his ruined boots. A sick stomach and a headache lent their aid and the man of verse was quite accable. I attempted reason with him. Mercy on us, how he did fume and rage. Nothing could reinstate him in temper” (7)

They reached Kirkcudbright about 1 o’clock and were meant to dine at John Dalzell’s house at Barncroch. Dalzell was a friend of Gordon of Kenmure. Burns, however, was in such a temper that Dalzell came to their hotel, the Heid Inn in the High Street to dine
As a master of the social scene such a tribute to the host would have produced rapturous applause from the company and elevate Burns further in their eyes.

Here was the celebrated Burns, just in the door, and with one verse he would have had the company eating out of his hand. As Syme reports –

“We had a most happy evening at Lord Selkirk’s. The poet was delighted with his company and acquitted himself with admiration. The lion that had raged so violently in the morning was now as mild and gentle as a lamb” (17)

Having investigated some of the nuances of the verse and the questions they raise, the question ‘why did Burns choose this Grace to say at the table?’ must be asked. It was not beyond his immeasurable genius to come up with a Grace which would have suited the company. Was it that he was still in the last remnants of his bad mood? Did the grandeur of the table affect his sense of decency? Did the amount of money spent on this one night’s entertainment rile his sense of inequality?

To better understand why, a look at his circumstances at the time is essential. Elisabeth Riddell Burns was born in November 1792 giving Robert another mouth to feed and clothe. He had just moved in to the new house in Millbrae Vennel in May, with all the extra expense such a move entails. His transfer to the Dumfries Port Division didn’t come with a salary increase but with the expectation of perquisites in seizures. However, the war with France was hitting hard and Foreign imports were almost nil, which affected his Excise emoluments. Burns was soon in arrears with his rent on his new home albeit that he was being charged 25-50% less than the going rate for such accommodation. He had just ruined a new pair of boots which had cost him a weeks wages.

Could all this financial pressure have been at the back of his mind, as well as his mood, when he looked at the table and was asked to give a Grace for the company? Perhaps he chose this Grace to highlight the inequality and social injustice he felt? Perhaps as he was reciting it, in the company of the ladies and gentlemen looking at him, the cathartic effect of the first three lines softened his mood somewhat and he used the last line to his advantage? We will never know.

Some readers may not agree with one or all of the questions raised here. Some may not even agree that the Grace was even said at this dinner at all. So be it. Discussion is healthy. The fact is that the verse is now commonly known as the Selkirk Grace in the public’s eye and it is on this premise that I have based my observations.

My point in advancing this interpretation is to open previously unkown, or unthought of, doors in Burnsians minds and stimulate a bit of debate about this oftquoted but little-studied verse.

A greater understanding of the meaning of the words of Robert Burns should always be the aim of any Burnsian, not the blind repetition of his poems. I’ve had people tell me that they can recite 10 or 20 or 30 of Burns poems in their entirety. They wear this claim as a badge of pride then in the same breath they speak of their fellow man with loathing or jealousy or bigotry! A parrot could learn the poems of Burns!

It is not the learning of the words that is the difficulty but rather the understanding of them. The true student of Burns seeks to know the meaning of the poetry as fully as they can, learn from the words and apply such learning to their own life, rather than just recite the poems, beautiful though they are. A Burnsian worthy of the name actually attempts
challenging in return.

In the second line *some cannot eat that want it*, Burns reinforces the sentiments of the first line. He exposes the injustices of an ill-divided world, something he felt keenly himself. Some cannot eat because they cannot afford it, they will never be able to afford it. They must get by on the most meagre of diets. Hunger, deprivation, want are all encapsulated in that second line. As he said in his autobiographical letter to Dr John Moore of August 1787 –

“we lived very poorly… this kind of life, the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing moil of a galley slave brought me to my 16th year”\(^{(10)}\)

Burns knew from bitter experience what it was like to be one of the “*some*” who cannot eat but want it. The vareity of delicious fruits on the table would be a far cry from the meagre table of the young Burns.

“*But we have meat and we can eat*” is representative of one aspect of Burns’ philosophy. Burns was aware of the blessings he had, a gift which is sadly lacking in the vast majority of modern day people. Instead of always wanting more, or bigger, or newer, why not appreciate what you have?

“All you who follow wealth and power with unremitting ardour
the more in this you look for bliss, you leave your view the farther”\(^{(11)}\)

Of course, it might be nice to have your hearts’ desire but stop and smell the flowers sometimes. Life is a journey, enjoy the variations and richness of the ride along the way instead of forever wanting to arrive. Be aware of what you already have –

“I’ll count my health my greatest wealth…
to weans and wife
that’s the pathos and sublime
of human life”\(^{(12)}\)

The fourth line, always said in the vernacular, *sae let the Lord be thankit* seems straightforward enough. A simple thank you to the Almighty for the bountiful foods the earth gives up for mankind. Almost all of Burns other Graces give thanks to the Creator—

“*O Thou who kindly dost provide
For ever creatures needs*”\(^{(13)}\)

“*Lord, we thank, and Thee alone
For temporal gifts we little merit*”\(^{(14)}\)

However, knowing Burns’ skill for extempore verses and matching the words to suit a certain person or occasion –

“*let Meg now take away the flesh
and Jock bring in the spirit*”\(^{(15)}\)

“*let William Hislop bring the spirit*”\(^{(16)}\)

is it possible that the Lord to be thankit was Lord Lieutenant of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, Lord Selkirk himself? Did Burns recite the first three lines in sombre English then revert to the vernacular to finish the Grace in a light-hearted manner, at the same time paying tribute to the host? Did Burns in some way accentuate the world ‘Lord’ for comic effect? Did he point or indicate with a sweeping hand in Lord Selkirk’s direction as he spoke the word ‘Lord’?
to live the philosophy of the Bard.

As William Howlitt said –

“A national permeated with the philosophy of Burns would be the noblest nation that the sun has ever yet shone upon”(18)

Therein lies the difficulty.

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A MASTER AND HIS FAMILY
AT WORK
REPAIRING A STATUETTE OF BURNS

During the month of May this year, Glasgow born artist of many talents, Colin Hunter McQueen was contacted by Dunfermline Museum in order to find out if he was in a position to sculpt a small statuette of Robert Burns. This had become necessary owing to an unfortunate accident which had completely destroyed a 4 foot high statuette of the Poet, which was an important part of the Murison Burns Collection in the Dunfermline Public Library.

Colin and his wife Alison visited the Library and were shown three large boxes which contained the remnants of the statuette (see photograph above).

Owing to other commitments Colin at that time was not in a position to meet their request but informed them that he was prepared to consider re-building the statuette from the salvaged pieces. This was agreed and Colin commenced the work ably assisted by his wife Alison and son Douglas.

It will come as no surprise to those who know Colin, a talented artist, painted, sculptor and model maker that he would successfully complete the task. The photographs on the following pages illustrate the progress and repair work involved in restoring the statuette to its original condition, which had been thought by some as an impossible task.

The result of Colin’s work being that the statue now appears as it was prior to the accident but now in pristine condition. The statuette of the Poet is now back where it belongs in the Dunfermline Public Library as part of the Murison Burns Collection.

Little is known about the history of the statuette – a piece of a newspaper dated 1898 was found amongst the fragments and this may be a guide as to the age. The sculptor is not known and the original may have been one of a number, any information would be much appreciated. (see also page 65)
Below: repairs - progress from the base.

Below: internal strength was achieved with the use of scrim and plastic rods to minimize expansion, contraction and rusting.

Above: Some of the plaster cast was so exceedingly thin in places, strengthening and thickening was required.

A certain amount of modelling was required especially to the back of the jacket which was almost entirely missing.
Alison giving the repairs a coat of size.

Colin filling in any flaws.
Douglas applying the final rub down with smooth sandpaper.

The sculpture painted with matt black, by Colin’s wife Alison.
The 4 foot high statue restored at home in the Murison Burns Collection in Dunfermline Library.

Master artist Colin applying the bronze finishing.
In the history of Russian letters, translations of foreign authors have always been used as a substitute for overt declarations of cherished, but unachievable, social ideals. Not infrequently, these ideals had little to do with the original. The poetry of Robert Burns is a vivid example of this kind of misrepresentation. The glory of Burns in Russia stems from two deeply rooted, almost traumatic, inhibitions for which Russians are notorious. The first is caused by a sense of social guilt, the other by an acute sense of social propriety. The two are, of course, interconnected, and both found expression in the creation of a Russian Robert Burns.

The sense of guilt which members of the Russian intelligentsia always felt towards the lower classes, caused by the gulf in social status between the chosen few and the vulgar herd, created an atmosphere in which the search for a people’s poet became almost a holy quest. This happened throughout the centuries, from Radischev to Solzhenitsyn. The vacancy was filled from time to time by one native writer or another; but there always remained a craving for something permanent, immune to the changes wrought by the spiritual and ideological disputes at home. Such unassailable things are usually imported into Russia from abroad – and Burns was one such, brought in to satisfy the lovers of the masses.

Burns’s reputation in Russia actually preceded his poetry. Although some interest in all his work can be found in Pushkin’s papers, as well as in Turgenev’s, his most enthusiastic translators before the Bolshevik revolution were second-rate writers from the populist camp, propagandists for the enlightenment of the so-called masses. The first translations were published during the early nineteenth century, not long after Burns’s death; but even in the later, professional renderings, it is extremely hard to find support for the legend of the poet’s life which accompanied his poetry in Russia. The myth was that of a jolly lad of robust temperament, with a corpulent physique and ruddy cheeks, a pub-crawler holding a tankard of ale in one hand and a quill in the other, hymning the simple virtues of working folk, attacking the hypocrisy and privilege of the ruling class. In short, Burns came on to the Russian scene as a Robin Hood among poets, a defender of the oppressed.

During the Soviet period, this reputation was only enhanced. Burns’s rise to official stardom – to judge by the amount of his verse published and translated – came in the late 1930s, coinciding with the Stalinist onslaught on bourgeois tendencies in Soviet literature, and the encouragement of popular forms everywhere in the arts. It was at this time that the bulk of the most famous Russian translations of Burns, by Samuil Marshak, was produced. Since then, the image of Burns was forever identified with the artificiality of the Soviet literary process, and with propagandist notions of the people’s culture. Some of his poems, set to music by Shostakovich, became an indelible part of the classic Soviet vocalist’s repertoire. The two-hundredth anniversary of his birth, in 1959, was celebrated with the pomp and circumstance usually reserved for the
founders of Marxism and Leninism. The calendar distributed among the Soviet population, containing all the important Soviet Festivals and important dates of political history, had a page – January 25 – allocated exclusively to Burns. The Post Office issued two stamps with Burns’s portrait. One of Moscow’s leading secondary schools set up a “Friends of Pushkin and Burns Club”. In the 1950s, Burns’s popular fame had almost overshadowed that of Pushkin, with Byron and even Shakespeare moving back into the winds. He became a Soviet invention – part of a fictitious Western culture whose progressive representatives were supposed to herald the first proletarian state. “Your bare-footed muse / To which we all got used / Will walk on and on / Across the Soviet Union”, wrote Marshak in his rhymed couplets, besotted with his own Soviet version of the Scottish Bard.

However, the obverse of this image is that, while Burns was genuinely loved by many, it was not necessarily for his poetry. The ideal of the people’s poet corresponded even less to reality because of the very vague awareness among Russians of the cultural differences between the Scottish and English peoples. If there was any understanding of the role of Scottish dialect in Burns’s poetry, there was no trace of it in the translations. The beginning of “To a Haggis”, for example – “Fair fa’ your honest, sonsie face, / Great Chieftan o’ the Puddin-race” – in Marshak’s rendering comes out, when retranslated, as “I praise you as a Commander / Of all hot puddings in the world.” The edge of Burns’s wit, his strong rhythms and rhymes, gave way in Russian to artificial poetical embellishment and enforced gaiety. Any trace of Burns’s reckless personality – the darker side of his muse – has gone, too.

The Russian language, of course, is not lacking the appropriate linguistic arsenal for translating the idiosyncrasy and complexity of Burns. Russian is well fitted for this task, with elaborate ways, for example, of describing different states of drunkenness. Nor is there any shortage of obscenities in Russian folklore (barely represented in official publications) or in the bawdy underground songs from prisons and labour camps (in the Tsarist as well as the Soviet period). There are also many local dialects which could serve as parallels for Scots vernacular.

But at the time when the Russian cult of Burns was created, the gap between colloquial and literary ways of expression was enormous. A strict sense of propriety, not dissimilar to that of the Victorians, in public and on the printed page, ruled supreme. The coy hints of the translator to sexual escapades that Burns’s characters might have been involved in were enough to inflame the imagination of the Russian reader. As a result of such censorship, Burns’s sallies on sexual manners read in Marshak’s translation like a dirty old man’s attempts at erotic titillation.

Nowadays, with such literary and moral restrictions removed, there might be a chance to reveal Burns’s real face. However, as socialist dogma no longer rules over Russian society, public craving for a Western variety of the true defender of the people’s virtue has correspondingly diminished. Should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind?

C

olin Hunter McQueen’s description of his paintasking restoration of a small Burns figure in Dunfermline’s Carnegie library may evoke a quizzical response from some readers. *A Burns collection? In Dunfermline?* Despite being one of the richest sources of rare and sometimes unique material in Scotland Dunfermline’s library seems to have dropped over the horizon for many Burns scholars and enthusiasts.

The core collection, of about 1500 books, was built up by the Glasgow-born salesman, Burns enthusiast, and friends of the much better-known Craibe Angus, John Murison. It has good specimens of all the early editions of Burns including those rather scarce “pirate” volumes produced by provincial booksellers and printers throughout the British Isles. From further afield there is a nice little set of early North American editions each volume decorated with an appropriate “fore-edge painting”. Not content with editions in English Murison gathered together many foreign language versions including – exotically – Flemish, Cape Dutch, and Swiss-German dialect. In recent years, the late Toshio Namba, past president of the Burns Federation, has presented his Japanese texts.

But Murison collected more than books. He was an avid cutter of newspaper and magazine articles and hoarder of concert programs. Medals and Mauchlin ware, prints, engravings, snuffboxes and bookends. If Murison were alive today I have no doubt that his house would be bulging with printed tea towels and glass paper weights. Although Murison had omnivorous rather than discerning tastes he did acquire some very fine pieces. Sets of Ridgway jugs, porcelain busts, and some very attractive Staffordshire figures, including a splendid one of Highland Mary, found their way into his collection. As a book-collector he showed little interest in fine bindings. However, when the collection of his friend Craibe Angus came on the market, Murison obtained a small number of rare and beautifully bound volumes. Best of these is the 1801 Glasgow edition of the Poems. Bound in red morocco with gilt decorative patterns of birds and thistles. The painted fore-edge by Katherine Cameron is a motif of mountain daisies.

So, why Dunfermline? On the face of it there is nothing that significantly connects the town to the poet. Burns visited Dunfermline on only one occasion which has been recorded. On a day in October 1787, with his friend, James Adair, he visited Dunfermline abbey where, according to his companion, he climbed to the pulpit and proceeded to address a mock rebuke to the penitent below. On the same occasion the poet knelt and kissed reverently the stone which he had – mistakenly – been informed marked the resting place of Robert the Bruce. Although this connection of town and poet is rather slight there has always been an enthusiastic appreciation of Burns locally. The Dunfermline United Burns Club’s oldest records begin in 1812 making it one of the oldest Burns Clubs in Scotland. No doubt the radical politics of the town’s weaving population was significant here.
But the reason why an important Burns Collection is situated in Dunfermline has nothing to do with these. It originates from the British Government’s desire to counter the growing naval threat from Germany in the early years of this century! The construction of Rosyth naval dockyard was undertaken by the firm Easton, Gibb & Son whose chairman, Sir Alexander Gibb, had enjoyed hospitality and friendship during their connection with the Dunfermline area. When John Murison’s collection went under the hammer soon after his death in 1921 it was immediately purchased by Gibb in its entirety and promptly presented to the town in commemoration of this friendship.

Originally housed in its own separate room in the Carnegie Library it is now available in our Special Collections Room. In 1953 a printed catalogue to the Collection was sponsored by the local Public House society. The Collection has been well-used by students and lovers of Burns in the past. I believe it is a resource which has much to offer the Burns community of today.

Chris Neale
Information Services Librarian
Dunfermline Carnegie Library
On the 2nd June, 2001, Irvine Burns Club celebrated 175 years of continuous existence. The Club was formed by twelve local men who met in Milne’s Inn, High Street, Irvine, and signed the original minute which reads: IRVINE, 2nd JUNE, 1826. We subscribers agree hereby to form, and so now form ourselves into a Committee for the purpose of establishing a Club, or Society, for commemorating the birth of Robert Burns the Ayrshire Poet – and we agree to meet on an early day to get the preliminaries of the Club properly arranged.

John Mackenzie
David Sillar
William Gillies
John Peebles
James Johnston
Robert Wyllie

John Orr
James Allan
Maxwell Dick
William Shields, Snr.
William Fletcher
Patrick Blair

The handwriting of this treasured document indicates that it was drawn up by Doctor Mackenzie who became the first President of the Club. He was a close friend of the Poet and first met him when he attended the Poet’s dying father William Burnes who died at Lochie Farm, Tarbolton, on 13 February, 1784. It was through Mackenzie that Burns met Professor Dugald Stewart at his country home at Catrine a few miles from Mauchline on 23 October, 1786. Also present that day was William Hamilton Douglas, Viscount Daer, son of the 4th Earl of Selkirk. This occasioned the poem On Dining with Lord Daer. Mackenzie left for posterity a memorable account of his first meeting with the Poet whom he later got to know well after the Burns family moved to Mossgiel Farm, Mauchline. Burns and Mackenzie were both members of St. James Masonic Lodge, Tarbolton. Mackenzie married Helen Miller one of the ‘Mauchline Belles’. She is buried in Irvine Parish Kirkyard. Dr. Mackenzie came to Irvine to be physician to Colonel Hugh (Sodger Hugh) Montgomerie of Coilsfield (referred to in the poem The Vision) later 12th Earl of Eglinton, Eglinton Castle, Irvine. Dr. McKenzie died in Edinburgh.

The second signature is that of David Sillar a close friend of the Poet and a member of the Tarbolton Bachelors’ Club. Sillar’s father farmed Spittalside Farm on the outskirts of the village of Tarbolton. He was the recipient of two verse Epistles the first dated January, 1785, and the second July, 1786. He had a book of verse published in 1789 by John Wilson, the printer of Burns Kilmarnock Edition. It did not meet with success. Burns, then living at Ellisland got him eleven subscribers for his book. Sillar came to Irvine in 1783 and after a somewhat chequered career he founded a school of navigation. In 1811 he came into considerable wealth on the death of a brother. From 1819 to 1830 he served on Irvine Town Council as a Councillor and Baillie. He died in 1830 and is buried in Irvine Parish Churchyard.

A number of the other signatories knew the Poet.
Of the many artifacts in possession of the Club possibly the most valuable and significant are six of the original manuscripts sent to John Wilson, Printer, Kilmarnock, for the Poet’s famous Kilmarnock Edition. They bear the printer’s marks, i.e. where he wishes capitals, centring, italics, punctuation, etc. The manuscripts are the first five poems in the book viz. *The Twa Dogs; The Holy Fair; The Author’s Earnest Cry and Prayer; Address to the Deil; Scotch Drink*; the sixth is the thirteenth poem *The Cotter’s Saturday Night*. These manuscripts were originally in the possession of Burns lawyer friend Gavin Hamilton who was also his confidant and landlord of Mossgiel Farm, Mauchline. They subsequently came into the possession of one of Hamilton’s clerks by name of Hamilton Robinson who came to Irvine and set himself up as a Writer (Lawyer) in the Town. When he died his widow married Mr. Campbell the Burgher Minister of the District. The manuscripts were given by Mr. Campbell to Patrick Blair, Lawyer, one of the founder members of the Club in order that they might be handed over absolutely to the Club. This was done in 1837 since which time these priceless documents have been carefully treasured. They are housed in a safe within a strongroom together with a Kilmarnock Edition (1786) and an Edinburgh Edition (1787) and all the Minutes of the Club back to the 2 June, 1826, and other treasures and relics.

The Club also possess two letters written by Burns from Ellisland farm to David Sillar in Irvine. They are dated respectively 5th August, 1789, and 22nd January, 1790, and relate to Burns obtaining 11 subscribers for Sillar’s book of poems. The letters were purchased from the Rev. David Sillar, Weatherby, Yorkshire, a direct descendent. David Sillar did not become President of the Club as he became ill and died in 1830. He is buried in Irvine Parish Kirkyard. His son Dr. Zachariah Sillar was President that year. The Club have a large and very fine pencil drawing of Dr. Sillar.

Two original well-known paintings adorn the Directors Room, viz. Burns in Edinburgh by Charles Martin Hardie (1858-) and The Vision by James Elder Christie (1847-1925) (see front cover of this issue). Also in the same room is a Grandfather clock made by John Brown, Clockmaker, Machline (note spelling). Brown was one of those satirised by Burns in his poem the *Libel Summons* as ‘Clockie’ Brown and is strongly thought to be the character referred to in the *Epitaph for a Wag in Mauchline*, beginning “Lament him Mauchline husbands a’”.

The Club possess a library of some 2,000 quality books’ viz. Burns biographies and volumes of his works; Burns criticism and volumes relating to all aspects of his life; General Poetry but mainly Scottish; Scottish History; Ayrshire History; all the Works of John Galt (Novelist and Pioneer) the Works of James Montgomerie (The Christian Poet) and finally the works of Edgar Allan Poe who spent some at school at Irvine.

Within the Burns Room there are beautiful executed murals depicting the life of Burns in Irvine from June, 1781 to February/March, 1782, incorporating sequence lighting and a 12 minute voice-over. The text is based on extracts from the Poet’s letters and knowledge of those locals who were acquainted with him. The murals, and indeed all the decor of the Club was done in 1965 by a husband and wife team Elizabeth and Ted Odling tutors at the Glasgow School of Art.

On the first-floor there is a Music Room which was three large rooms converted into one which can seat 100 persons. Pride of place here is a magnificent Bechstein (made in
Berlin 1913) over-sized grand piano whose owner was the late Dr. Ian Whyte who for many years was the leader of the B.B.C. Scottish Orchestra. It was gifted to the Club by his son the late Don Whyte, Author and Journalist.

The Club have a unique collection of holograph letters from some of the most famous men and women over the past 175 years who have accepted Honorary membership of the Club. The founding fathers, in their wisdom, decided that Honorary Membership would be offered each year by the Club President to one or more persons who was (a) a poet or a person of letters; (b) a person of eminence of (c) a benefactor of the Club. The first two persons to be offered and accept Honorary Membership were John Galt, Novelist and Pioneer, and James Montgomery, the Christian Poet. Both were Irvine men. A few of the other holograph letters include Charles Dickens; George Bernard Shaw; Henry Longfellow; Arthur Conan Doyle; Thomas Hardy; Lord Kelvin; Samuel Marshak; Guisepi Garibaldi; Albert Schweitzer; Theodore Roosevelt; Woodrow Wilson; Field Marschal Foch; Douglas Bader; Chris Barnard; Sheik Ahmad Yamani; Alfred Lord Tennyson, Toshio Namba, etc. (Example of signatures below).

Since its formation Irvine Burns Club has been blessed with numerous benefactors, men of vision and others who gave unstintingly of their time and talents. In 1962 Miss Margaret McCulloch Hogg a sister of James Hogg a former Secretary of the Club bequeathed her property at 21-23 Bank Street, Irvine, to the Club as a Museum. Simultaneously, the Club received the munificent gift of ‘Wellwood’, 28 Eglinton Street, Irvine, from Mr. Robert and Mr. J. Graham Paterson, two bachelor brothers, in memory of their father John Paterson, a former Councillor and Provost of Irvine in the late 19th century. The property in Bank Street was sold. ‘Wellwood’ is a large imposing two-storey building of Ballochmyle sandstone, c. 1903. Alterations and improvements were made
to ‘Wellwood’ and a large walk-in safe built to house the Club treasures.

To mark the 175th anniversary of the Club a large stained glass window was commissioned and unveiled in the Music Room on the 2nd June, 2001, by the Club’s two oldest Past Presidents John M. Ramsay (1961) and Harry A. Gaw (1962) (see pages 3 and 4 of the cover of this issue). The window is a montage of Burns autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore, his letters to David Sillar and his Irvine friend Captain Richard Brown, etc. Burns gives Brown credit for giving him the stimulus to have his poems printed. In a letter dated 30 December, 1789, to Brown he states: “on repeating some verses to you, that you wondered I could resist the temptation of sending verses of such merit to a magazine: ‘Twas actually this that gave me an idea of my own pieces which encouraged me to endeavour at the character of a Poet.”

To mark the Bicentenary of the Poet’s death Irvine Burns Club commissioned a large stained glass window for Irvine Parish Church which Burns attended during his sojourn in Irvine. The window was unveiled at a special service on 2nd June, 1966. It depicts the River of Life and the Tree of Life of Rev. 22 (1, 2, 14 and 17); it “bare twelve manner of fruits”; Burns paraphrase of the first psalm and Rev. 7 V.s 15, 16 and 17 are quoted in full.

The Club possess many other interesting documents and items connected to the Poet not least of which is Surgeon Fleeming’s (Fleming) Day-Book discovered in the loft at 49 Kirkgate, Irvine, by the late Mr. Charles Balcombe, a local Pharmaceutical Chemist and fortuitously a Club member. The book covers a long period from 1757 to 1798 and shows that Surgeon Fleeming attended Robert Burns, Lint Dresser, no less than 5 times in the space of 8 days in November, 1781 it was long known that Burns had been seriously ill during that period while in Irvine but here for the first time was documentary proof.

Irvine boasts one of the finest statues erected to Burns. It was gifted to the town of Irvine by Mr. John Spiers, a native of Irvine and it was sculpt by Pittendreight Macgillivray an Honorary Member of the Club. The statue was unveiled before a crowd of 10/12,000 people on 21st July, 1896, by the then Poet Laureate Alfred Austin.

The Club actively supports the four Senior Secondary Schools and six Primary Schools in the town with book prizes for their annual Burns Competitions. During the local Marymass Festival in August all the children, not necessarily winners, are invited along to perform their party piece in song and verse – not compulsory Burns – in the presence of their parents, relatives, Club members and local dignitaries.

Irvine Lasses Burns Club have unrestricted use of the Club for meetings and functions.

In its long and proud history three members of the Club have been Presidents of the Robert Burns World Federation Ltd; Alexander McMillan (1959); Samuel K. Gaw (1979) and John Inglis (1984).

The Club is open during the summer months 1 April to 30 September from 1430 to 1630hrs. on Mondays, Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays. From 1 October to 31 March it is open on Saturdays only, from 1430 to 1630 hrs. It may be opened at other times for clubs and organisations by appointment via Eric Park, Esq., Club Secretary, Irvine Burns Club, 28 Eglinton Street, Irvine. KA12 8AS. Admission is free but donations to help with the upkeep of the fabric are most welcome.
BURNS STATUES IN NORTH AMERICA, A SURVEY

By Thomas Keith

In his Dedicatory Address for the unveiling of the Burns statue in Detroit, Michigan on July 23, 1921, William Allan Neilson wrote:

A hundred and sixty years ago, the spot where we now stand lay in the midst of a wilderness through which roamed bands of savages. No European had ever seen it, save an occasional wandering Frenchman. At that date there was born in a small cottage in the southwest of Scotland a boy who never traveled as far as two hundred miles from his birthplace, and who died in middle life a petty officer in the excise. Today, in the heart of a great cosmopolitan city, standing where once was that wilderness, a group of that obscure Scot’s countrymen have met to dedicate a monument raised in his likeness. What is the meaning of this extraordinary event? Why, after so long a stretch of time, four thousand miles away, should we be standing beside this statue cast in immortal bronze, in honor of that peasant?1

The Scottish diaspora in North America found the need to display an author as the permanent symbol of their ethnic identity, as have immigrants from countries such as England, Italy, Germany, Norway and Ireland. According to records in the Smithsonian Institution, in the United States there are six public statues of Shakespeare, eight of Dante, seven of Goethe, three of Ibsen, two of Thomas Moore and three of Walt Whitman.2 In contrast, there are 14 public statues of Robert Burns in the U.S. Statue here refers to life-size and heroic outdoor statues, or outdoor busts of larger than life-size or heroic proportions only. Any indoor sculpture, bas-relief, abstractions, terra cotta adornments, architectural components, plaques (which ornament most of the Burns statues) or cairns are excluded. The number of public Burns statues worldwide (under the strict definition used here) totals 50, which breaks down to fifteen in Scotland, fourteen in the United States, eight in Canada, seven in Australia, four in New Zealand and two in England.3 That there are more public statues of Burns in North America (22) than there are in Scotland (15) is a peculiar fact indeed, and yet Burns’s status as the most celebrated literary figure in North American public statuary has essentially been ignored.

There is one book on the subject of Burns statues – The World’s Memorials of Robert Burns by Edward Goodwillie – published in Detroit, Michigan in 1911, by which time about half of the North American Burns sculptures had been unveiled.4 The most recent sources to thoroughly cover the subject are the third chapter in James Mackay’s Burnsiana from 1986 and a follow-up article by him in the 1989 Burns Chronicle, both of which give useful details about Burns statues worldwide.5
Which statue can fairly be called the first statue of Burns erected in North America has yet to be definitively established due to unanswered questions surrounding the prolific Scottish stone mason, James Thom. Born in Ayrshire in 1802, Thom became famous in the early 1820s for his larger than life renditions of Tam O’ Shanter and Souter Johnny, the popularity of which eventually led Thom to the United States in 1836 to collect money from an unscrupulous agent. Thom recovered most of his profits and decided to settle near Newark, New Jersey where he continued sculpting. He made several stone sets of Tam, the Souter, the Landlord and Landlady from “Tam O’Shanter,” and executed a variety of sandstone sculptures based on the works of Burns and Scott as well as various busts and statues of the two Scottish authors.6

The Ayrshire foursome was replicated at least eight times and those sets were sent out on various tours of Great Britian, the United States and Canada from 1828 through 1840. A notice about yet another tour of Thom’s statues in the New York City Morning Courier of November 13, 1835, mentions that Thom also has a fine model of Burns, in plaster, of life size, and is now making another of Sir Walter Scott, both of which he intends to execute hereafter in stone.7

Thom’s obituary from the New York Evening Post, May 4, 1850, includes the following information, “An imposing statue of Burns – whom we infer from such pictures as we have seen, he [Burns] greatly resembled in face and form, as he did in certain points of character – was executed about the same period, [the mid-1830s] but we have lost all trace of its whereabouts” (Evening Post, May 4, 1850). Most later reference material on James Thom translates the latter statement as something like: “Thom sculpted and had erected in Newark, New Jersey, an imposing statue of Robert Burns.”8

This is not surprising if one considers the fate of most of Thom’s American sculpture. One set of the four “Tam O’Shanter” figures arrived in Philadelphia in the 1830s, survived the 1876 Centennial Exhibit and endured another 85 years outdoors in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park only to be demolished in 1961 when a car careened off the road crushing all four figures. A pair consisting of Tam and the Souter were on tour when the ship carrying them sank, depositing both at the bottom of Chesapeake Bay. Another set of the characters was being transported to Charleston, south Carolina, when the Landlord and Landlady slipped overboard. One set of Tam and the Souter spent nearly 75 years on the steps of the Colt family mansion in Patterson, New Jersey, and was then donated to the Patterson Public Library which promptly burned to the ground, destroying the sculptures in the process. A group entitled “Auld Land Syne” simply disappeared from New York City’s Central Park once the building in front of which it stood, known as The Casino, was torn down in 1924. The only examples of Thom’s work in America which remain intact are a group based on Sir Walter Scott’s characters titled “Old Mortality and His Pony” which sits in Laurel Park Cemetery in Philadelphia, and some of the more intricate stone work on Old Trinity Church in lower Manhattan.9

There is little doubt that Thom completed a life-size Burns statue in America but, his medium being generally less durable than bronze or marble, it is not hard to believe that it deteriorated long ago. If it was erected on public property in the town of Newark, it would carry the honor of being the first outdoor sculpture of Burns anywhere, including Scotland. While the likelihood of that statue ever being found is very slim, Thom was
Central Park, New York 1880.

St. Louis Exposition, 1904.

Toronto, Ontario, 1902.

Portland, Oregon, Lewis & Clark Exposition 1905.

Robert Aiken’s full size plaster model of St. Louis Burns statue.
credited with sculpting a good deal of material labeled “garden ornamentation” and so Thom’s Burns may still be gracing someone’s private property, somewhere, in the quiet neighborhoods of rural areas of New Jersey.

Not to be eclipsed by the members of the Walter Scott Monument Committee who completed their mission in 1872, the New York Caledonian Club commissioned the same artist of the Scott statue, Sir John Steell, RSA, to design a statue of Burns which was unveiled in Central Park on October 2, 1880, with all the crowds, fanfares, dignitaries, speeches, poems, songs and bagpipes which, in one form or another, accompanied all by Wallace Bruce entitled “Walter Scott’s Greeting to Robert Burns” was read by the author at the unveiling.10 This was considered the first statue of Burns in North America and therefore a source of great pride and celebration for the organizers. One of many statues to be copied and erected in other major world cities, the Steell statue was and is roundly criticized on a number of fronts. Nearly all statues of Burns are based in part on the Alexander Nasmyth portrait and a cast of Burns’s skull (taken at his second interment in 1819) was used as a basis for the head.11 An unsatisfying as the Nasmyth portrait is in light of the first hand descriptions of Burns’s appearance, it is understandable that sculptors would turn to it as it has been the most popular, most reproduced and enduring image of Burns in the public consciousness. It is worth noting, however, that Steell, along with all prior and subsequent sculptors, made some attempt to masculinize the overly effeminate qualities in the Nasmyth portrait.

Burns is rendered by Steell as sitting on a tree stump wearing top coat, waistcoat, breeches, stockings, buckled shoes, and a gigantic and unwieldy plaid. He is so deep in thought that his pen-holding right hand is raised, but shows no signs of landing on paper anytime soon, while his left hand hangs slackly over part of the tree stump, his ankles are crossed and the poet’s head is thrown back at what looks to be an uncomfortable angle as he searches the skies for inspiration to finish the poem “To Mary In Heaven,” the first stanzas of which are written on a scroll that has fallen to his feet. In spite of the colossal size of this Burns, he does not appear terribly strong; on the contrary, his body is so carelessly relaxed as to be nearing sleep, or perhaps even ecstasy.

Although there were some early admirers, typical feelings about this statue can be found in a review from the 1895 Burns Chronicle by someone identified only as “An Art Student.” The disappointed student laments Steell’s old age and diminished artistic powers at the time of his interpretation of Burns and goes on to remark, “A glance at the figure is enough to show the merest tyro in anatomy that the proportions are far from correct. It is no exaggeration to say that the length of limb from the hip to the knee is about a fourth too short, while the neck could profitably be shortened by a third.”12 He or she was not wrong in this or other technical criticisms, but failed to observe, certainly due to a lack of perspective, how perfectly this statue embodies the Victorian ideal of an anguished romantic poet; were it not for a plough tucked indiscreetly by the stump and under the plaid, a passerby approaching from a distance might well expect to see the name “Lord Byron” engraved on the marble base. Sir John’s design was not considered so flawed that it failed to grab the attention of other cities looking for a Burns statue; copies were cast for Dundee where the head was straightened out a bit; the Thames Embankment in London, where the head was straightened out even more and Burns was given much
San Francisco, California, 1908.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1909.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1914.

Boston, Massachusetts, 1920.

San Francisco, California, 1908.
fuller, one might say “puffed-up”, hair; and Dunedin, New Zealand, where the statue is an exact copy of the original New York version (Goodwillie, p. 74).

The work of American sculptor Charles Calverly, the next North American Burns statue was unveiled in Albany, New York, on August 30, 1888. The Albany statue was the first of three American Burns statues to be financed by a single patron, in this case a Miss Mary MacPherson. She and her brother John were the children of Lachlan MacPherson who emigrated from Dundee to Albany in 1819 and quickly became the janitor of the New York State House. After his father’s death in 1841, John replaced him in the same job. Mary and John MacPherson, lifelong spinster and bachelor, were shrewd and canny savers and amassed a considerable sum of between thirty and forty thousand dollars, which Mary inherited on the death of her brother in 1881. Described by friends as “economical even to penuriousness,” Miss MacPherson strangely enough had no concern for the disbursal of her estate after her death until some friends gave her the idea of erecting a statue of Burns in Albany. Having no potential survivors, she was concerned not only that her Trust, as stated in her will, “get a monument worthy of the man, an ornament to the park, and an honor to the land of my birth,” but that her family name would be perpetuated. She directed the executors that the successful completion of any Burns monument using her bequest would be officially called the “McPherson Legacy to the City of Albany.” It was only two years after her death in 1886 that the monument was unveiled with full pomp and ceremony.

Charles Calverly chose to portray his bronze Burns seated, wearing a ploughman’s dress clothes with a plaid, a tam and a book. Perhaps in opposition to the Central Park statue which Calverly is said to have studied prior to his own attempt, his Burns is anything but contemplative or moody. In Albany, Burns’s feet are spread at a wide stance, his right hand rests on his right thigh holding a book, his left elbow is slightly bent, his left hand clutches his tam, and the figure is noticeably leaning forward from the waist, either having just been seated, about to stand, or perhaps attentive to some lassie or the viewers of the statue. Drawn rather distantly from the Nasmyth portrait, Calverly took pains to portray a handsome Burns of solid bearing, belied by the fact that he is seated; there is something athletic and energized about Calverly’s Burns. It is worth noting that after seeing the Albany statue, Andrew Carnegie commissioned Calverly to sculpt an heroic bust of Burns which was then reproduced and placed prominently inside every library Carnegie funded throughout the United States (Burnsiana, p. 47).

The author of the 1895 Burns Chronicle review put his cards on the table when he wrote, “Unfortunately, in most of the statues of Burns the art has not equaled the enthusiasm. In America and Australia art is only in its infancy, and it is not too much to say that in most cases the statues had better never been erected. But even at home the majority are of that mediocrity which can only be ‘damned with faint praise’” (Art Student, p. 121) Apparently unaware of Charles Calverly’s work in Albany, neither did the critical Art Student have the benefit of viewing the works of later Burns statue sculptors J. Massey Rhind, Henry H. Kitson, Robert Aiken or H. S. Gamley.

J. Massey Rhind, a United States citizen originally from Edinburgh, has the distinction of designing two different statues of Burns for the United States which have survived. The first commission came from Scots and their descents who populated the area in and
around granite-rich Barre, Vermont. A collection for the statue was taken up all over the state, most of the contributions coming from the Burns Club in Barre, and the statue was unveiled on July 21, 1899. Rhind’s design was cut out of a solid piece of grey Vermont granite by local craftsman Sam Novelli and was at the time the only granite statue of Burns in the world. The Barre statue is also unique in that it is easily the most youthful interpretation of all the North American Burns statues. Dictated perhaps by the hard medium of granite, the features don’t resemble any other known likeness of Burns and even with a fairly high degree of details give the impression of an “Everyman” instead of the popular figure it is meant to represent. The figure appears as a young farmer, coat thrown over one arm, eyes cast downward, walking home after a day of labor. There is a gentle strength about this Burns; it is the first to give the feeling of a new world pioneer as much as a Scottish cotter.

Canada’s first heroic statue of Burns is probably her most elegant; a bronze statue designed by D W. Stevenson for the Scottish city of Leith in 1898 was recast and unveiled in the Allan Gardens in downtown Toronto in 1902 (Goodwillie, pp. 112-116). It is classical in the manner of Flaxman’s 1825 marble statue originally intended for Edinburgh’s Calton Hill Monument to Burns. With a regal bearing, right hand clenched over his heart and a plaid thrown over his left shoulder, Burns is depicted here, if not in fact as a nobleman, then as the noblest of peasants.

Although they do not fit the category of statuary, mention must be made of the two American replicas of the Burns cottage. The first was organized by members of the St. Louis Burns Club and became a popular display at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904. That cottage was disassembled and removed to Portland, Oregon, where it became a display at the Lewis & Clark Centennial Exposition of 1905. It is assumed to have been destroyed after the second exposition.

Beginning in 1907, the Burns Club of Atlanta made plans for their own permanent replica of Burns’s Cottage (see page 20) when they engaged the services of architect and club member Thomas H. Morgan who worked from exact drawings made of the original cottage in Scotland (from the interior dimensions to the curve in the road). Situated on 14 acres of land purchased by the club, the Atlanta Cottage was dedicated on January 25, 1911. Shortly afterward, electricity was added and in addition to being the headquarters and meeting place for the Atlanta Burns Club since that time, the Atlanta Burns Cottage remains one of the most unique and impressive tributes to Robert Burns in the world.

The Burns Monument Fund of Denver, Colorado, in collaboration with the local Caledonian Club, decided to commission William Grant Stevenson, RSA, Edinburgh (and incidentally the younger brother of D. W. Stevenson who designed the statue erected in Leith and Toronto) to design their bronze tribute to Burns. In fact, Stevenson had already designed this statue for a group in Chicago (unveiled in 1906), who were rather slow in paying the commission and hence let Denver be the first to unveil the W. G. Stevenson-designed Burns statue on July 4, 1904. Other copies were cast for Fredericton, New Brunswick (1906) and Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1909). Based on Nasmyth and dressed up in Burns’s Edinburgh clothes, Burns stands with his left leg stepping forward, his left hand holding a book and resting on his left thigh, and his right hand grasping high on the lapel of his outer coat. It is a classical, if somewhat stiff, rendition of Burns and portrays...
Quincy, Massachusetts, 1923.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1936.

Cheyenne, Wyoming, 1928.

Windsor, Ontario, 1939.
him more as a great thinker than as a rustic or a man of the common folk. The Stevenson brothers both seem to have imagined Burns as he might have stood reciting a poem for some of the Edinburgh gentry during one of his famous trips. The face on the younger Stevenson’s Burns bears a trace of mild astonishment—perhaps a result of finding himself in the Rocky Mountains, among other exotic locations.

The Burns statue erected in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park in 1908 got off to a false start due to the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and subsequent fire which destroyed the original model before it could be cast. M. Earl Cummings, the grandson of Scots, was already a famous sculptor in the American West when he was hired by a group of San Franciscans brought together by one John D. McGilvray for the sole purpose of raising funds for a Burns statue (Goodwillie, pp. 131-133). Cummings’ second effort (there is no existing illustration of his first effort) shows Burns wearing an open-collared shirt and vest, top coat and breeches, his left elbow bent and his left hand holding a book. Standing upright in a stiff posture as if waiting in line or standing at attention, Burns’s heels are together and his right arm is held tightly by his side. The face on this Burns is different from most, resembling the Reid miniature more than the Nasmyth portrait, and bears a rather neutral expression. While technically in proportion, the Cummings statue appears, especially in photographs, to have the dimensions of a much shorter person than Burns himself.

The most popular statue of Burns in Scotland is generally considered to be the heroic bronze sculpted by George A. Lawson and erected in Ayr’s town square on July 8, 1891. The Lawson statue has proved just as popular outside of Scotland, where copies were ordered and cast for public spaces in Melbourne, Victoria (1904), Halifax, Nova Scotia (1914), Detroit (1921), Vancouver (1928), Montreal (1930) and Winnipeg (1936). Clearly not orchestrated intentionally, four of Canada’s eight Burns statues are copies of the Lawson statue from Ayr. Lawson’s Burns stands in good, but not fancy, clothes, his right knee slightly bent, his arms crossed over his torso and chest, and his eyes looking outward in a state of intense contemplation. A good deal of the success of this statue may be due to the way Lawson adapted the Nasmyth features into a broader, more masculine and personable, though quite serious, face.

Pittsburgh is where the second statue of Burns designed by J. Massey Rhind was unveiled on October 14, 1914. A stark contrast to his effort in Barre, the bronze statue in Pittsburgh is more traditional in several respects: Burns is depicted walking in rather fancy work clothes, wearing a tam, focused on the famous daisy he has just ploughed under, and his features are another variation on the Nasmyth face. In a letter dated March 25, 1915 to a librarian at the Newark (New Jersey) Public Library, which purchased a miniature bronze of the Pittsburgh statue, J. Massey Rhind wrote:

In modeling the figure I was anxious to represent the poet as the young, handsome debonair farmer who had manly beauty to an uncommon degree, so uncommon that strangers looked at him in wonderment and women idolized him, not only the country lassies among whom he lived… Doubtless his eloquent tongue and eyes of fire softened the hearts of the high-born ladies he met when Edinburgh was the intellectual center of
the world.

At the age of 27 is when I have shown him and when I believe he did his best work, selecting “To a Mountain Daisy” as my theme. I have endeavored in my completed status to suggest his imaginative soul full of pity and contemplation, as he looks at the little daisy which he has just turned up with the plow, a prophetic vision of his own life; and trust that while I have caught him in a sentimental mood I have also succeeded in embodying the democratic spirit capable of writing “A Man’s A Man for A’ That.”

Although it can be problematic to get close enough to the face on the Pittsburgh Burns statue to observe the subtleties he describes, Rhind was generally successful in his mission.

Like the organizers in San Francisco, the Burns Memorial Association of Boston got off to a false start, though in the latter case this was due to disputes and delays among the half dozen local Scottish associations involved, not by an act of God. After twelve years of fund raising the Association in Boston accepted a design submitted by Yorkshire immigrant and sculptor Henry A. Kitson, which Goodwillie illustrates in his 1911 book and prematurely predicts will meet with great success. Kitson’s original design had his Burns statue standing on an enormous rectangular pylon with a classical solid arch behind the poet and the whole monument decorated with a variety of details and embellishments. However, Kirtson’s original design was never executed due to further delays and America’s involvement in World War I. Later, the statue was lost en route from Brooklyn, finally found and on January 1, 1920, unveiled by Governor Calvin Coolidge at its first location in Back Fenway near the Boston Fire Department. Moved in 1975 to a more conspicuous spot on Winthrop Square in downtown Boston where it now stands, Kitson’s Burns statue is one of the most engaging. Burns in depicted bareheaded, hair askew in the wind, walking with his eyes downcast, in modest dress clothes, holding a book under his left arm, a walking stick in his right hand, a large and heavy plaid on his shoulders billowing out and his dog eagerly trotting by his side. Another stalwart take on Nasmyth, Kitson’s Burns is handsome and youthful, deep in a gentle, rather than pensive, contemplation. It looks as though Burns is walking against a fierce wind, which would explain the condition of the hair and plaid. Someone approaching this Burns statue from a short distance might readily expect it to be identified as a patriot from the American Revolution before finding out that is in fact a tribute to Scotland’s Bard. In spite of the dress clothes, the overall effect is of a dignified rustic, perhaps more closely approaching the “democratic Burns” beloved in New England and throughout the United States.

John Horrigan of Quincy, Massachusetts, designed two Burns statues for his hometown, the first one destroyed by a fire. Both were cut from white granite by his father, prominent Quincy sculptor Gerald T. Horrigan, and the second one, described as a modified design of the first, was unveiled in 1923. A rather peculiar rendition of Burns, Horrigan’s statue appears as stiff as the material he’s cut from and wears a coat that might have been worn some seventy years after Burns’s death. The poet is striding forward with an incompatible and anachronistic boater-hat in his right hand and, most curious and charming, he bears a subtle smile. The first base, also made of granite, was
placed upon a larger black marble base engraved with a lengthy excerpt from Burns’s “Ode to General Washington’s Birthday,” leaving no doubt about the presumed democratic leanings of this obdurate representative of Scotland in New England.

Wealthy St. Louis businessman William K. Bixby, instrumental in arranging the Burns Cottage exhibit at the 1904 World’s Fair, and the long-time president of the St. Louis Burns Club, was the primary benefactor responsible for the St. Louis Burns statue unveiled (not accidentally in front of Bixby Hall) on the campus of Washington University, June 2, 1928. Born in San Francisco in 1878, Robert Aitken was already an eminent sculptor by the time Mr. Bixby secured his services in the design of a statue of Burns for St. Louis. Standing bareheaded in front of a sheaf of wheat with his left hand on his hip, a scythe handle resting between his left forearm and biceps, his right leg stepping forward, his right hand holding a small book against his right thigh, wearing breeches, stockings, shoes and a work shirt with sleeves rolled up and the top buttons open, Aiken’s Burns is unquestionably sculpted in the American style. Burns looks distinctly as though he has actually finished a long day of hard labor. Weary, thoughtful, but still possessing a bearing of ease and sureness, the Robert Burns statue in St. Louis is a far cry from the “Edinburgh Burns” depicted in several of the earlier North American renderings. Aiken made another interesting choice when, instead of adapting the Nasmyth face into something fuller, he made the face more lean and intelligent. Add a tri-cornered hat and blur the scythe handle into a musket and one could easily see the St. Louis Burns as a minute-man from the American Revolution. As it is, the Aiken Burns statue would be recognized from the great plains of Alberta and Manitoba to the plains and western states of the United States as a working farmer; only upon closer inspection is it recognizable as the statue of a poet. In his dedicatory speech at the statue’s unveiling, George S. Johns remarked,

Robert Burns, although born in Scotland, belongs to the world. He is poet of freedom and the rights of man. He has expressed exquisitely the sentiments of love, home and country. He was a wonderful interpreter of nature and depicts its beauty with the charm of his own imagination and language. The appeal of his poetry is therefore universal wherever it is read. (Stevens, p. 4).

Mr. Johns, Mr. Bixby and the other officers of the Robert Burns Club of St. Louis must have felt they got their money’s worth in the work of Robert Aiken.

Ayrshire native Andrew Gilchrist and his wife Mary arrived in the territory of Wyoming in 1875 where Gilchrist soon became a successful cattlemen, the President of the Stock Growers National Bank and a member of the Territorial Legislature. His early death at the age of 53 left Mary as a cattle-baroness and one of Wyoming’s most important citizens. Before taking one last strip to Scotland at the age of 90, Mary Gilchrist arranged for a statue of Burns to be erected in what was by then the state capital, Cheyenne. She secured the services of Scottish sculptor Henry H. Gamley RSA who completed the plaster model in a Paris studio and then promptly, the very day he finished, passed away. The statue was cast in Scotland and there was some controversy as to whether or not it should be let out of the country; it was Gamley’s last, and by consensus, best work. The sole benefactor
of the Cheyenne statue, Mary Gilchrist had already paid for the design, marble base and casting in full, and wasn’t about to let the statue find its way elsewhere; it was unveiled on November 11, 1928. According to Dorothy I. Richardson, a resident of Cheyenne whose Scottish aunt and uncle were good friends of Mrs. Gilchrist, Gamley described this Burns statue as “having the face of a ploughman and the look of a gentleman,” which it does indeed, and which perfectly suits its western location; Wyoming has one of the largest land areas in the Union and the smallest population and has always evoked the spaciousness and freedom of the American west. Mr. Gamley may have been strongly influenced by his patron since his Burns resembles a land owner more than it does a farmer, yet it has a ruggedness about its features which does not suggest a member of the upper classes. Considering Burns’s posture and the prominence of the book he holds, the Cheyenne statue could be titled “Burns the Scholar.”

There are two busts counted among these North American Burns statues. The first was unveiled in Confederate Park, Jacksonville, Florida, on August 27, 1930. The local newspaper articles from the time give no information as to who designed the two foot granite bust and the thirteen foot high obelisk on which it rests. The unremarkable head and shoulders somewhat resemble Nasmyth except for an open shirt collar; there are relief thistles carved into the granite plinth, and below the thistles, almost as prominent as the bust on top, there is a bronze plaque listing nineteen past presidents of The Robert Burns Association of Jacksonville.

On June 28, 1939, a heroic bronze bust of Burns was erected by The Borders Cities Burns Clubs in a park named for Queen Elizabeth II, in Windsor, Ontario. It is an impressive head and shoulders of Burns designed by F. Vagra and resting on a base of pink marble. Upon close examination the face on the Windsor bust bears angular features and the bust is unadorned and symmetrical, but the overall effect of the entire monument is still formal.

The most recent addition to the Burns statues in North America, unveiled on January 25, 2000, is one of the most original in concept. The Burns Club of Edmonton, Alberta, commissioned Canadian sculptor John Weaver who based his likeness of Burns not on the Nasmyth portrait but rather on his interpretation of the various portraits and descriptions of Burns available. The hair is not unlike other Burns portraits, while the features of this “everyman Burns” are rough hewn; indeed the entire statue has a ruggedness and simplicity about it. Many illustrations of Burns, especially in the 19th century, erroneously portrayed the poet in formal attire while pausing from his work at the plough, usually in contemplation or at work on a poem. Mr. Weaver has also chosen the theme of Burns writing on the job, but has dressed his Burns in work clothes and logically posed his figure down on one knee, holding paper on the raised knee, his pen poised to write and his gaze looking out placidly over the fields. This is a humble bronze Burns, still fittingly robust and durable enough for the wide open spaces of western Canada.

Guided by Scots and those of Scots descent who had the means, the love of Burns, the loyalty to Scotland and the desire to assert their ethnic identities, Canadians and Americans created monuments to the immortal bard as their representative in the new world. It was only natural that a certain number of Burns Clubs and Burns Statue organizations would look for reproductions of Burns statues already erected in Scotland. However, the large
number of Burns statues on this continent and the wide scope of original thinking behind their design stand collectively as a permanent and tangible testimonial, not only to the genius of Robert Burns, but to the industriousness, creative spirit and devotion to Scotland of generations of Scottish immigrants, and as an uncommon inheritance for all admirers of Burns in Canada and the United States.

New York

NOTES

1. *Burns Day in Detroit* (Detroit, MI., 1921), p. 28.
2. Smithsonian Institution, Inventory of American Art, AmericanArt.si.edu.
11. *Full Account of the Proceedings of the Unveiling of Burns's Statue, Presented to the City of New York Saturday October 2d, 1880* (New York, 1880).
13. *Historical Sketch of the Burns Statue, the McPherson Legacy* to the City of Albany (Albany, 1889), pp. 3-7.
16. Burns Club of Atlanta brochure, nd.
18. Vertical file, Newark Public Library, Newark, NJ.
In 1756 William Burnes, the poet’s father, acquired from Alexander Campbell, physician in Ayr, 7½ acres of land with the intention of working the ground as a market garden, and aptly named the property New Gardens. Of this land, he later transferred about 2 acres at the foot of his feu to the Galbraith Brothers, local wheelwrights, which may account for the neighbouring place named ‘Wrightfield’.

James Baird (1802-76) was one of Scotland’s great Victorian entrepreneurs and the country’s foremost coal and iron master. In 1853 he bought Greenfield (formerly Crigweil, including Wrightfield) from Lord Nigel Kennedy for £22,000 and renamed it Cambusdoon. He built a very handsome mansion, now gone. He also built a row of service cottages for the estate on an existing road on the ground transferred by Wm Burnes. These are still occupied and known as Wrightfield Cottages.

If we follow the line of the drive in front of the cottages to the north-east, we immediately come to the boundary and drive leading straight past the Ivy House Hotel (formerly North Park House Hotel, formerly North Park farmhouse). It was built as a farmhouse shortly after the roup (auction) of the lands of Alloway, Corton and Carcluie by the Royal Burgh of Ayr in 1754. That farmhouse road would go down to the main road from Ayr to Maybole (now the B7024) via Alloway Village.

The high road would originally come over the old Slaphouse burn bridge shown in Pont’s map of 1654 and on all maps since, right up to the present day.

The smiddy in Alloway village also appears in early maps (Pont’s) and its updated (only 100 years old) buildings are on the original site just inside the northern end of Alloway village about 70m from Burns Cottage. We can draw a line from the old Slaphouse bridge to Alloway village and, following the extant road, it is apparent that when Wm Burnes first built his cottage (the byre and the kitchen) about 1756, he built it in line with the existing road through the village, with the doors to the front facing the road as they are now. (There were no doors facing the back apparently). The existing new Slaphouse bridge was built in 1756 by John Donald and the new road re-aligned. When he came to extend his building later by adding a byre and a barn, making the original cow byre a kitchen and the kitchen the spense, he again built in line with the road which was just there running a little nearer north, and in line with the other cottages in the village including the smiddy cottage.

Originally there would have been one door for people and one for the cow(s) – quite a modern idea in Wm Burnes’ day. When he extended his ‘cottage’ he added a door at the back facing down his ‘New Gardens’ which would give access to them and facilitate movement of produce to/from the barn.

It is almost inconceivable that William Burnes would, could, build his house on one side of the main highway, with no door facing it, and have his feu on the other side of the road.
The ‘Lost Road’ I would submit is the one which still runs, in part, from the Ayr-Alloway road past North Park and Wrightfield Cottages. It is a possibility at least that it then ran on until it met up with the original road winding up the river Doon from Alloway Mill to the Auld Brig passing ‘The Cairn’ in Cambusdoon on its way and, before stone was quarried to the riverside of Alloway’s Auld Kirk, passing the South side of Alloway Church.

As you will no doubt have guessed I have just described Tam’s route and if we allow that Meg took a right fork at North Park, instead of through the Village, the route would have been perfectly feasible. So there we are: The ‘Lost Road’ found; the bend in Burns Cottage explained and Tam’s route justified.

John H. Skilling

BURNS IN ULSTER
By Leslie A. Montgomery

‘Lynn Doyle’ was the pen name of the late Leslie A. Montgomery (1873-1961), a bank manager from Downpatrick who wrote his first story while working as a clerk in a provincial branch of the Northern Banking Company.

His pseudonym is typical of his sense of fun – early in his writing career, he happened to notice a can marked *Linseed Oil* in a grocer’s shop, and so ‘Lynn C. Doyle’ was born. Later he dropped the ‘C’. (he may have felt it was too ‘literary’) and settled on the name familiar to generations of Irish readers.

The country folk of Ulster are not much given to literature. Even in the towns we are content to subsist on scandalously short commons in the way of reading matter. It was but the other day I was reproached with the scarcity of book-shops in Belfast, and could only retort irrelevantly with the output of linen. True, we have taken no contemptible part in the Irish Literary Revival of recent years. Some of the sweetest singers among our latter-day poets are Ulster born and bred; and the accomplishment of the Ulster Literary Theatre alone would justify us in claiming our share in the restoration of Irish drama to truth and naturalness. But the field of culture is restricted. The bulk of the people, in town and country, remain as unliterary as ever. The Gaelic revival has not touched us, at least one section of us. That section will have no truck with Maeve and Grania, Cuchullin and Conchobar, the Fianna and the Children of Lir. It looks upon these fabled beings as having their origin not in Ireland, but somewhere among the Seven Hills; and is inclined to suspect them of a past not wholly untainted with the heresy of Home Rule. I do not think they will ever resume their sway in Ulster while the present population endures. They are too airy and unsubstantial for our Northern imaginations.

I was reared in the Lowland Scottish tradition of homely realism, and my Gamaliel was, strangely enough, a Celtic Irishman, one Paddy Haggarty, a servant on my aunt’s farm. Paddy was a quiet, modest little fellow, not dull, for he had a pawky mother-wit, but not much given to speech, and taking no part in the rough horse-play that passed for humour among his fellows. I was a diffident child, a little spoiled by loneliness and too much reading, and over-sensitive to jests; and Paddy and I struck up a friendship.
He slept in a small apartment off the stable, and after he had tested me sufficiently he admitted me to the intimacy of his chamber, a privilege never before accorded to any person about the farm. The first few nights passed pleasantly enough. Paddy had an extensive fund of country anecdote; and I unloaded on him the accumulations of some years of miscellaneous browsing among books, most of which I only partially understood. Though I failed to profit by Paddy’s lessons in the art of smoking, I made some progress in taking snuff. But the real glory of our friendship dates from the night when Paddy, after shuffling in silence on his stool for a long time, asked me suddenly, “If I knew anything of Rabbie Burns at all?” I answered that I knew nothing of him save the name; but that I had often intended to read his poetry, only there was not a copy in our house. To this day I can remember the almost reverent expression with which Paddy drew the dumpy little duodecimo volume from beneath his pillow. That night the harness-room Burns club was inaugurated.

For a long period I was content to fulfil the part of congregation at our worhippings, and remain a listener while Paddy read and expounded. I remember that he began with “The Twa Dogs,” and how the friskings of our own collie and mastiff rose before my eyes as he read. Till then my acquaintance with verse had been restricted to Pope’s 

_Homer._

This I encountered in an old-fashioned edition, in which the “s’s” were printed as “f’s,” so they seemed to me. They puzzled me a good deal. I never could understand what the dart meant by “hiffing on” before it “stretched in the dust the great Iphitus’ son”; but I accepted the reading without question, and the dart continued to “hiff” for me during many years. But I had read Pope for the bloodshed rather than for the poetry; and this was a new kind of poetry that Paddy was reading me. The note of sincerity touched even my childish heart; the homely dialect words sounded kindly in my Ulster ears. “Twa dogs that were na thrang at hame.” From that line onwards I listened with all my soul; and when the poem was finished I had become with Paddy a devotee in the worship of Rabbie Burns.

In general Paddy was sparing of commentary, and such exposition as he indulged in was apt to be coloured by his political opinions. When, for instance, he read in “The Twa Dogs” of the “poor tenant bodies, scant o’ cash, How they maun thole a factor’s snash,” he paused to explain that a factor was, with us, a land-agent. “And, God knows,” he added heartily, “the people of this country had plenty to thole from them, too, before Billy Gladstone’s time.” But I was rapt in the discovery that “thole” and “snash” were real words, and that I might use them in the future without shamefacedness; and Paddy’s agrarian bitterness passed by unheeding ears.

As became a younger disciple, I accepted without question Paddy’s selections from the inspired text. His favourites were mine, and with a few exceptions they have remained so. To Paddy as a ploughman perhaps the “Address to a Mouse” had the more intimate appeal; but I never had the heart to kill a field-mouse after. The homely truth of “The Farmer’s Salutation to his Auld Mare Maggie,” “The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie,” and “Hallowe’en,” charmed us both equally. We both assented heartily to the imprecatory “Address to the Toothache,” and even thought we derived some benefit from the use of it as an incantation, such triumphs has faith. Neither of us knew what a “haggis” was, but I am sure that had one been placed before us we would have partaken.
of it almost sacramentally. Together we shuddered over “Death and Doctor Hornbook” and the “Address to the Deil”; but I think I was more openly sympathetic than Paddy to the kindly relentings in the closing stanza of the latter; for Paddy was already in his bedchamber, and I had the dark yard to cross.

But “Tam o’ Shanter” was and has remained my favourite. Not even endless repetition – and we repeated it endlessly – could abate one single thrill I enjoyed even while I trembled. To this hour I can see Paddy lower his book and look at me as he delivered with solemn impressiveness:

That night, child might understand
The deil had business on his hand.

I feel still the stirrings among my hair. It was many a year before I could hear thunder after nightfall without a cautious glance round for His Majesty; and even now I am easier on a country walk by night when I have put a running stream between me and the powers of darkness.

II

The poems of religious satire Paddy passed over in silence, probably out of consideration for my feelings, but partly, no doubt, because as a Roman Catholic the Auld and New Lichts stood for him equally as darkness. But he was aware of the purpose of these poems. Looking back I seem to discern from his reference to them that he derived some such satisfaction from this fouling of the Protestant nest as a Protestant might be supposed to draw from Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* or Pascal’s *Provincial Letters*. The Songs neither of us read much. Here again Paddy may have been considerate of me; but he was a staid little fellow, and not much given to dalliance. The Bacchanalian poems of Burns, however, appealed to him strongly. Though Paddy could not fairly be called a heavy drinker it must be admitted that in the matter of porter he was prone to occasional steppings aside; and thirsty, mellow or repentant, his mood was reflected in our readings. When the convivial element began to predominate I knew that Paddy would shortly go on the spree; and I knew, too that when the spree was over we would read largely in Rabbie’s penitential psalms. Paddy used them as a kind of moral soda-water just as the hapless author must have done. But, however effective they proved as a cure, as a preventative they failed utterly, and at last after an unusually heavy spree Paddy betook himself to “the clergy” and solemnly renounced drink. He did not renounce Burns though; and it was with misgiving that I enjoyed his spirited delivery of “John Barleycorn,” some months later. I was justified by the event; for Paddy having occasion to go to the fair of C—— allowed himself to be persuaded by some casuist that lager beer was within the limits of his pledge, and was found that evening by a ganger of the local railway peacefully sleeping in the track of an oncoming train. I think at first he felt himself ill-used in this affair; for I remember that he subsequently recited the stanzas ending:
But if I must afflicted be
To suit some wise design,
Then man may soul with firm resolves
To bear and not repine,

as one rather bowing beneath the visitation of Providence than suffering from his own errors; but his remorse did not endure long; for a few nights after he read me “Scotch Drink” with a good deal of gusto, remarking cheerfully at the close that “Rabbie was no reading for a Temperance man”; and so far as I know he never renewed his pledge.

Although I worshipped at the shrine of his idol with at least as much fervour as Paddy, I began presently to decline somewhat from his pure monotheism. Having tasted of the sweets of poetry I was not content with my first sip, but began to range further, and diligently ransacked my aunt’s library for books of verse. I could never carry Paddy with me. Not only did he refuse to be tempted from his poetical faith, but he was even chary of subjecting himself to temptation. I remember that in my browsings I fell a victim to the nimble facility of the Ingoldsby Legends. But Paddy would have none of them; and after hearing the “Jackdaw of Rheims,” refused to listen further, on the ground that though he was no bigot he couldn’t be expected to like Orange poetry. I confess that on reading the poem again I sympathized with him, and was so appalled by my failure in tact that I abstained from the harness-room for a long time.

During this period of voluntary exile I unearthed, to my great delight, Bloomfield’s Farmer’s Boy, and hastened with it to Paddy as a peace-offering. But Paddy made short work of Bloomfield. He listened patiently enough till I came to the passage:

O’er heaven’s bright azure, hence with joyful eyes
The farmer sees dark clouds assembling rise;
Borne o’er his fields a heavy torrent falls,
And strikes the earth in hasty driving squalls.
“Right welcome down, ye precious drops,” he cries;
But soon, too soon, the partial blessing flies.
“Boy, bring the harrows, try how deep the rain
Has forced its way!”

then stopped me. “Tell me, Master Lynn,” he said, “did ye ever hear a farmer talk like that?” I had to admit that I never did.

“That’s where Rabbie has it over them all,” he went on. “Rabbie’s poetry is just like a labourin’ man’s talk, only someway or another it lilts itself into verses. Was this Bloomfield brought up to the land?”

I said he was. “Well, he got little good of his trainin’,” said Paddy. “I’ll hold ye Rabbie could ha’ made a guess of how deep a shower of rain went into a turnip field without turnin’ out a harrow an’ a pair of horses.”

But I shook Paddy badly with a little volume of Robert Fergusson’s poems. I conducted my attack better than I knew then; for Paddy was a fervent admirer of “The Cotter’s Saturday Night”; and I began with its perhaps greater original, “The Farmer’s Ingle.” I could see that the beautiful opening stanzas impressed him:
When goming grey out o’er the welkin keeks…

He listened to the end of the poem in silence, then took the book from my hand, and turned the leaves over discontentedly. “The man has got most of his words from Rabbie,” he said at length; “but there’s no denyin’ he handles them well.”

Presently he came on the lines:
When Father Adie first pit spade in
The bonny yard o’ ancient Eden
His amry had no liquor laid in
   To fire his mou’.
Nor did he thole his wife’s upbraidin’
   For being fou’.

His bairns had a’ before the Flood,
A langer tack o’ flesh an’ blood,
An’ on mair pithy shanks they stood
   Than Noah’s line;
Wha still hae been a feckless brood
   Wi’ drinkin’ wine.

Paddy closed the book with a smile of triumph. “I doubt,” said he, “he’s only a narrow body after all.”

From that night on he would hear no more of Fergusson, and always spoke of him afterwards as “that teetotaller.” Nor could I tempt him with other strange gods. “No, Master Lynn,” he would say, “Rabbie’ll do for me. Rich or poor, drunk or sober, there’s always somethin’ in him to suit a body. He’ll last me my time.”

If Paddy is above ground in the County Down he is likely of the same opinion still. The Gaelic Revival has repopulated the other three provinces, and the glens and mountains of Ulster, with fairies and leprechauns, whose airy tongues syllable a new language that is also old. But round about my part of the world we still people the dark hours with material and Gothic shapes, and call, in his own speech, on the great enchanter, Rabbie Burns.

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THE IMMORTAL MEMORY
By Lt. Col. David Mackay
The Caledonian Society of Colchester and District
Friday 26th January, 2001

Your Worship the Mayor, President of the Society, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I thank our Society for this kind invitation to speak tonight and for again entrusting me with proposing the toast to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns. This time last year I recall some difference of opinion as to when the new millennium should begin. As a simple soldier, I am inclined to accept the Government lead, but I can also see the other argument. Whatever views you hold, we will all be agreed that we are now into the new millennium. And, I think, into with a feeling of optimism. When one thinks of the railways, the Dome, the wobbing bridge, the new licence for the Lottery, the failure of the Hague Conference on the Environment and the US Presidential elections – the word chaos comes to mind. When things are that bad, they can really only get better. Yes, I think that we can approach the new millennium in a spirit of optimism. I am reminded of a group of people talking. One was a lady of the street, who remarked that she felt really quite proud to belong to the oldest profession. A farmer in the group said that the lady was thinking of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but someone had to grow the gardens – surely horticulture is the oldest profession. A Civil Servant said that really they had the best claim. Right at the start of the Book of Genesis it says, in effect, ‘in the beginning was chaos and God created and so on’. But who, said the Civil Servant, who do you think created the chaos.

Well, if we are in the new millennium, Robert Burns lived in the last. He was born on the 25th January 1759 – 242 years ago. Can he really have any relevance for us today? Can he speak to us today of things we need to hear? Haven’t we outgrown these old ideas? The last millennium began with the Battle of Hastings and ended, predictably, with two World Wars. However, it is a thousand years which has seen enormous change. On the cultural side, it is a thousand years which has seen such heavyweights as Chaucer, who died in 1400, Shakespeare, who died in 1616, John Bunyan and John Milton also lived in the 17th Century. The 18th Century saw Robert Fergusson, whom Burns admired so much, Burns himself and the great Gaelic poet, Rob Donn, with whom Burns had much in common though sadly they never met. William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott both did know Burns and lived on into the 19th Century, which also saw Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Louis Stevenson and many more. And now we are into the 21st Century. As the years unfold, change will be even more dramatic, we can be sure of that. But we are indeed fortunate to have such a rich cultural heritage. Now more than ever we need to hold on to it, appreciate it, keep it fresh and use it as a sheet anchor to help us to navigate the unkown waters the new millennium will bring. Robert Burns still has plenty to say to us.
Take wars for instance, At a thanksgiving for a victory Burns wrote on a pane of glass

Ye hypocrites! Are these your pranks? To murder men, and gie God thanks?
Desist for shame! Proceed no further: God won’t accept your thanks for Murther.

Or in the poem ‘Man was made to Mourn’

Many and sharp the num ‘rous ills Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves Regret, remorse and shame!
And Man, whose heav’n-erected face The smiles of love adorn,—
Man’s inhumanity to man Makes countless thousands mourn!

When France declared war and invasion seemed imminent, Burns was one of the founding member of the Dumfries Volunteers, recruited, like volunteer units around the Country, for home defence. Some old records, which just recently came to light, show how seriously Burns took his training. Even though it was near the end of his life, and his health was poor, his attendance was excellent. And he was busy too with his pen. A song to a catchy tune goes:

Does haughty Gaul invasion threat? Then let the loons beware, Sir!
There’s wooden walls upon our seas And volunteers on shore, Sir!

It is said that this one song did more for recruitment than all the fine speeches of Henry Dundas, then Secretary for War in Pitt’s Cabinet.

This song, which served the Country so well, is interesting for two other ideas. One of the middle verses goes:

O, let us not, like snarling tykes, In wrangling be divided, and later
Be Britain still to Britain true, Amang oursels united!
For never but by British hands Maun British wrangs be righted!

These are not the words of an advocate of the break-up of the United Kingdom, passionate Scotsman though Burns undoubtedly was.

But the last verse contains another idea, particularly important in Burn’s day. In view of the deportations, a bold idea to express.

Who’d set the mob aboon the throne, May they be damn’d together!
That was safe enough – the excesses of the guillotine had turned thinking people away from earlier support for the French Revolution.

But the next bit

Who will not sing ‘God save the King’ Shall hang as high’s the steeple;
But while we sing ‘God save the King’ We’ll ne’er forget the PEOPLE!

PEOPLE! Who cared about the PEOPLE? To suggest that the ‘people’ had any rights was regarded as seditious.

At the lawyer, Thomas Muir’s trial for sedition, at which he was, of course, found guilty and deported, the fact that he owned a copy of the Thetford man, Thomas Payne’s ‘The Rights of Man’ was used in evidence against him. Burns also had a copy of Payne’s book.
But Burns’ poem ‘The Rights of Women’ broke entirely new ground!

Burns had many friends, from wealthy patrons to ordinary folk who appreciated the simple eloquence of the way he fearlessly spoke out for them. But his sharp tongue and biting remarks made him enemies too. He was a religious man, but hated some of the ideas of the stricter sects of his day. His views made him no friends among some of these.

It is not easy, at this range, to form a real picture of Burns. He was a handsome man, a young man. He never did grow old. 5 foot 10 with blazing eyes and a glorious voice. Pictures of Burns show him well dressed and he always was well dressed. His wife, Jean, also. The material gingham had just been introduced and was very expensive. Jean was one of the first to have a gingham dress. Many speak of the brilliance of his conversation, at a time when fine conversation was appreciated. Dr John McKenzie, attending Burns’ father in his last illness said “Before I was acquainted with Robert’s poetical powers, I perceived that he possessed very great mental abilities, an uncommonly fertile and lively imagination. I have always believed that no person could have a just idea of his talents who had not an opportunity to hear him converse.”

So much for the ‘simple bard, rough at the rustic plough, learning his tuneful trade from every bough’ as Burns put it. In the opinion of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns had as good an education, mainly with his tutor John Murdoch, as anyone in Scotland. He made the dialect of the Lallands respectable at a time when the fashion was for English. He did have a magnificent command of English, was widely read, read novels in French and carried out his correspondence with one lady, Margaret or Peggy Chalmers, all in French. The Dumfries Journal, on the day after Burns’ death, contained an obituary by one who knew him well. It included: ‘His manly form and penetrating eye strikingly indicated extraordinary vigour. For originality of wit and fluency of phraseology, he was unrivalled. Animated by the fire of Nature, he uttered sentences which, by their pathos, melted the heart to tenderness, or expanded the mind by their sublimity. As a luminary, emerging from behind a cloud, he rose at once to notice, and his works and his name can never die, while divine poesy shall agitate the chords of the human heart.’

Burns died on the 21st July 1796, aged 37. Just before he died, he had called on his friend and colleague in the Excise, John Lewars and his sister – the 17 year old Jessie. Burns asked Jessie to play him her favourite tune and he would give her some words for it, which would please her. She played a tune and after a few moments Burns produced the lovely song which includes

\[ \text{Oh wert thou in the cauld blast,} \quad \text{I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee.} \]

Manly and protective, – but very soon it would be the other way round. With Burns’ wife, Jean, any day expecting their 9th child, it was Jessie who nursed Robert through his last illness. She also helped Jean by taking the other children to her own house for a meal, from time to time, to give Jean a break. One day, very shortly before he died, Robert was lying in his darkened room when his surgeon, Alexander Brown, called. He had with him a poster for a travelling menagerie which was visiting Dumfries, and handed the poster to Jessie – in a whisper as one does. Robert asked for it and, in a red crayon, wrote some lines on it:
Talk not to me of savages From Afric’s burning sun;
No savage e’er could rend my heart As, Jessie, thou hast done:
But Jessie’s lovely hand in mine, A mutual faith to plight,
Not e’en to view the heavenly choir Would be so blest a sight.

Burns handed the poster to Jessie and said “now it is fit to give to a lady.”

What a mind. So sharp that it could produce a thought like that at such a time. Yet the gossip mongers would have us believe that this was a mind addled by the drink which they said caused his early death. In fact the little Burns drank almost certainly prolonged his life. Burns died of a leaking valve in his heart, the result of rheumatic fever, which can be traced back to working too hard as a labourer on his father’s farm from the age of 13. At the time, Scotland led the world in medicine, but the stethoscope, which would have diagnosed the problem, was yet to be invented.

Burns died leaving his family comparatively well off. By the time money owed to them had been repaid, and with other moneys, Jean was left with no financial worries. But the rumours, which had begun before his death, gained strength and were faithfully recorded by Burns’ official biographer, Dr. James Currie. These false stories are perhaps only now being finally laid to rest. Drink and women. That is another myth, but Burns did love women. Surely in this he is not alone? I think of the two lawyers playing golf on the course at Musselburgh, the oldest golf course in the world. And ahead were two lovely ladies playing golf. One of the lawyers said “good heavens, you see those two – that is my wife playing golf with my mistress”. The other lawyer said “gracious me – so’s mine!” Two finely tuned legal minds in relaxed mode.

Of all the women associated with Burns’ life, other than his wife Jean who was very very special, I should like to mention briefly just one. She is known to us as Highland Mary, her name was Margaret Campbell. When he thought that he had lost his Bonie Jean, and with everything going wrong, he decided to emigrate. He intended to go with Highland Mary, but a few months later she died of a malignant fever. Victorian writers made a lot of Burns’ true love snatched from him by death. But even while planning emigration, Burns admitted to a friend that his real love was Jean and he loved her to distraction. Later, when Robert and Jean were married and happily settled in the farm house he had built at Ellisland, on the third anniversary of Highland Mary’s death, Burns thought of her and went out into the hay barn in the evening. There he composed the beautiful song ‘To Mary in Heaven’.

But the one and only real love of his life was his wife, Jean. He did by far his best work after he met Jean and she was an exceptional lady. She, too, suffered the kind of unpleasant rumours which plagued her husband.

One of the last songs he wrote was inspired by Jean, and began with a description of exotic things:
Their groves o’ sweet myrtle let foreign lands reckon,
Where bright-beaming summers exalt the perfume;
But then he goes on:
For dearer to me are yon humble brown bowers,
Where the blue-bell and gowan lurk lowly unseen:
For there, lightly tripping amang the wild flowers,
A-listening the linnet, aft wanders my Jean.

Generally speaking, Burns would write his songs and then, from his remarkable knowledge of tunes, select the one which went perfectly with the words. Many of these tunes were traditional dance tunes, mainly for the fiddle rather than the voice. They can be technically challenging, with their wide ranges and large intervals. Jean had a lovely soprano voice, well trained in a music school, and could easily handle this range. Also Jean was a most accomplished dancer, even to what was then thought of as being quite an elderly lady. Well, she died aged 69! You sometimes hear it said that Jean was illiterate. Of course we have letters written by Robert, one of which begins “My dear love, I received your kind letter with a pleasure which no letter, but one from you, could have given me—“and so on. But we also have some most beautiful letters written by Jean herself. And they are letters to people in all levels of society. Jean was a gracious lady, she was the widow of Scotland’s greatest poet and she treated everyone the same way. None of Jean’s daughters had survived long, only Robert’s two illegitimate daughters, Bess, who was brought up by Burns’ mother, and Betty, who was brought up by Jean herself as a twin for her own son William Nicol. Later, her granddaughter, Sarah, was brought up by Jean when her mother, James’ wife, died aged 32, Jean’s surviving sons did well, one as a Government official and William and James both eventually retiring to Cheltenham as colonels. And there are descendants of James still alive today.

Burns left us magnificent poetry, a fascinating collection of letters, about 350 songs of which only a very few are in use, the rest are still there to be enjoyed another day. His work has gone all round the world, translated into many languages. It was a Chinese philosopher, LIN yu tang, who called him ‘the universal poet of the world.’ Hans Hecht, the German professor of literature, calls Burns ‘a unique common sense genius’. In Russia, Samuil Marshak did a superb translation of Burns and Toshio Namba did the same in Japan. Burns’ message of:
Love of others,
Love of Nature,
Pride in your Country, your language, your heritage,
And, above all, pride in yourself
Is a message which appeals throughout the world, with no regard for National boundaries.

Consider the power and sincerity of his song:

Is there for honest poverty That hings his head, an’ a’ that?
The coward slave, we pass him by— We dare be poor for a’ that!
A prince can mak a belted knight, A marquis, duke, an’ a’ that!
But an honest man’s aboon his might—
Guid faith, he mauna fa’ that!
For a’ that, an’ a’ that,
It’s coming yet for a’ that,
That man to man the world o’er
Shall brithers be for a’ that.

What a wonderful message of confidence and hope to carry us forward into the new millennium.

And Burns left us one special gem. No function of this kind, or indeed many other functions, would be complete without Auld Lang Syne. Burns says that he took it down from an old man singing and in a letter to his publisher, George Thomson, he says “light be the turf on the breast of the heaven inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment”. It was the fragment he was talking about, practically the whole song is his own composition. Auld Lang Syne is a song of remembrance, Robert looking back on the happy days of his childhood with his brother, Gilbert.

We twa hae run about the braes
And pou’d the gowans fine;
But we’ve wander’d mony a weary fitt
Sin’ auld lang syne.
We twa hae paidl’d in the burn,
Frae mornin’ sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar’d
Sin’ auld lang syne.

But then the character of the song changes abruptly. From remembering the past, we are brought straight to the present.

And there’s a hand, my trust fie! And gie’s a hand o’ thine!

And with the hand of friendship, we go forward with confidence into whatever the future may bring.

As you sing Auld Lang Syne, think of Burns. Think of the message he left behind as a gift to all the world:

**Be proud of who you are and where you come from.**

I will finish with a little poem which was written by my Mother, after the style of Burns, for my Father to use when he had the honour to propose this Toast in Dalkeith half a century ago.

Here are we met as brithers a’
As ilka year we feast wi’ ye,
An’ mony a nicht we’ve cantie been,
An’ mony mair we hope tae be.

A welcome tae ye – ane an’ a’
We greet ye a’ richt merrily,
We offer ye, in friendship’s name,
A haund in welcome, cheerily.

We praise and honour Scotia’s bard
– Oor Robbie Burns – his memory
– Is ever green. His sangs we sing,
Robert Burns –
A Man Amongst Men
By the late The Rt. Hon. J. Ramsay MacDonald M.P.
(First Labour Prime Minister of Great Britain)

The question is put year after year when the blustery January winds blow into our minds the name of Robert Burns, why has this man won such an intimate and abiding place in the hearts of his fellow countrymen? The answer given even by Burns devotees is not always so satisfactory as it might be. He was intensely human, and his genius beating defiantly against the loss of his circumstance has given his critics an opportunity to blame him, and his admirers a cause to shake at times, an admonishing head at him. But the great gathering which accompanied his body to the grave in Dumfries, that sad day in July 1796 instinctively knew that it was not merely bidding farewell to a townsman, notable in his day, but was paying the first tribute to an immortal memory.

Whether one reads his poems or his letters, whether one searches the records left of his conversations, or studies the impression made by his personality on his contemporaries, one discovers a man cast in heroic mould and formed of the essential qualities of human attractiveness and greatness. This is the personality of Burns and though he was fated to play in life only minor and heart breaking parts, and was doomed to die an Exciseman in a little abode, crowded up in a narrow Dumfries street time has moved him to the company of those rare beings who never die.

He was a man amongst men, force of being and destination of mind gave him and his work immortality. He was not only for his generation; he was the embodiment of the individuality in weakness and in power, in tenderness and strength of his people and he was endowed with the genius to manifest them by an art at once robust and lyrical. His message was not a creed of the intellect, cold and unanswerable. It was a passion of the soul; eruptive and glowing like the molten floods of a volcano. The normal protest of
“The Twa Dogs” rising up to the sublime devotion of “The Cotters Saturday Night” is what is in the heart of every self-respecting poor man, expressed by one whose lips are the adequate servant of his feelings.

When Burns wrote that it was beyond one’s power to keep at times from being sour, when one saw how things were shared, there was no envy in his heart. The richly tender pictures of humble life and service, which glow in his poems are painted to establish a claim that these lives are the foundation of a great state.

“From scenes like these old Scotia’s grandeur springs”
The pith o’ sense and price o’ worth are higher rank than a that”

Here we have a deep and vital conviction regarding what are the qualities and virtues of personal and national greatness. It is that quality of the folk mind and the folk service appreciated and voiced by a man who himself is a piece of elemental greatness which secures immortality for Burns.

Burns revealed that quality in its essential contents; it is tender in its consideration and embraces everything from Auld Nick himself to the Mouse and the Daisy. It is one with nature in all it’s moods Nature is it’s companion in love and it’s consoler in death.

I see her in the dewy flowers
I see her sweet and fair:
I hear her in the tunefu’ birds
I hear her charm the air:
There’s not a bonie flower that springs
By fountain, shaw, or green:
There’s not a bonie bird that sings
But minds me o my Jean.

So also in that elegiac lyric on Captain Matthew Henderson, he enlists the glorious companionship of nature in his pageant of sorrow.

Another of the essential possessions of human power and greatness is the heart of the lover. Burns was supreme in his capacity to love, his love songs the music of devotion to the divinity of beauty with every chord of his being sounding in the swelling harmony. Terrible are the defects of a man if the melody of Burn’s love songs is not sleeping in his heart, sad with a world’s tenderness, happy with a world’s beauty, gay with a world’s devotion. His capacity to love was the inspired and inspiring inner core of his sense of value. He was a devoted son of Scotland “his auld respected mother” and he gave her “Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled” to renew her life through all times. When tremors regarding her safety, disturbed her, he sprang to her defence.

“Does haughty Gaul invasion threat”?

But in Burns the love of his country was not measured by his hatred of nor offence to another. During the year when he wrote his challenge to Gaul, he also wrote the lines
which have been more frequently quoted as the creed of peacemakers than any other

\[
\text{It's comin yet for a’ that’} \\
\text{That man to man the world o’er} \\
\text{Shall brothers be for a’ll that’}
\]

His being sustained by the breath of independence, ardent in it’s devotion to liberty, contemptuous of men and nations, who dared not lift up their heads, saw in a world of fraternity and peace the only conditions under which the great patriot could live and be satisfied.

The challenging songs he wrote in praise of liberty during the French Revolution rose to a musical and lyrical climax in dreams of peace. The last verse of “The Tree of Liberty” runs.

\[
\text{We plenty o’ sic trees, I trow} \\
\text{The world would live in peace, man;} \\
\text{The sword would help to make a plough,} \\
\text{The din o’war would cease man;}
\]

International harmony was the triumphant ending of the work of national heroes, who have struggled and the national causes which have inspired. Thus it is that as year after year passes we do homage to one of the greatest of men. He spoke to us in song he draws us to him by his lyrical genius, but he is more than a melody. The chords which he touched and the emotions which touched them belong to the permanent joys and beauties and harmonies which are the sources of life and of progress. So homage will be paid to him “till all the seas gang dry my dear and the rocks melt wi the sun,” or until the name of Scotland is lost and the hearts of her children cease to beat.
The Scots insist that Robert Burns is a poet of the people. Unlike Shakespeare, Goethe or Dante who appeal to an elite audience, Burns has a worldwide audience even though much of what he composed was in Scots dialect. Evidence of his universal popularity is expressed at New Year’s celebrations in the singing of Auld Lang Syne (Old Long Ago).

When it comes to evaluating Robert Burns with respect to his Christian commitment, there is a division of opinion. Some contend that he was a sceptic, a hostile critic of Christianity, and at best a “wistful agnostic,” but not a believing Christian. The other side embraces him within the faith once delivered to the saints in the Calvinist expression of the Scottish Kirk. Perhaps I should not proceed any further without warning the reader that the evaluators often find in Burns whatever suits their prejudice. My case is made as a first generation American of Scottish ancestry, and as a Presbyterian clergyman.

The case against Robert Burns as a sincere Christian believer is made on the following grounds:

1. Burns seems much more interested in Satan or Beelzebub than God. In his “Address of Beelzebub” he takes the part of the devil in advising the privileged to deal harshly with the poor and disadvantaged:

   “The young dogs, swinge them to the labour,
   Let WARK an’ HUNGER mak them sober!”

And in his “Address to the Deil” he reminds us of the devil’s appearance in the Garden of Eden incognito (as a serpent) and of satan’s power over Job.

   “An how ye gat him i’ your thrall,
   An’ brak him out o’ hous an’ hal’”

2. Burns is held to be a critic of church life rather than a supporter. One of his most famous and delightful poems, “Holy Willie’s Prayer” is a scathing criticism of one of the tenets of the hyper-Calvinism of his era, namely, the doctrine of double predestination whereby the Almighty with considerable delight consigns some to heaven and some to hell. This theology is placed in the imaginary prayer of a consummate hypocrite.

   O thou that in the heavens does dwell!
   What, as it pleases best thyself,
   Sends ane to heaven & ten to hell,
   A’ for thy glory
In one shot Burns blasts the despotic fatalism of the ultra-Calvinistic wing of the Kirk and exposes the sexual exploits of hypocritical Willie,

3. Burns is a self-confessed sceptic in matters of religion. He lived in the era of the continental Enlightenment in which Voltaire in France, Tom Paine in America and David Hume in Scotland raked Christianity over the hot coals of rationalism-empiricism. In a letter to Cunningham he says,

“I hate a man who wishes to be a Deist, but I fear, every fair, unpredjudiced Enquirer must in some degree be a Sceptic.”

4. Lastly, his lifestyle was that of a self-confessed rake who gloried in his sexual promiscuity without regard for the consequences, namely, bastard offspring. To be fair, he and his wife Jean did take one of them into their home. While flagrant sexual laxity is not proof of disbelief, it does seem inconsistent with a Christian lifestyle. In addition his interest in baudy sex found expression in his collection of ribald songs in *The Scots Musical Museum*.

**ON THE OTHER HAND**

At this point I am reminded of Harry Truman’s comment that he only wanted to talk to one-handed economists. Economists, he said, always hedged their advice by saying, “On the other hand…” As you would suspect there is another way to interpret Burns’ relationship to the Christian faith.

1. **The Devil**

The fact that he wrote so much about the Devil testifies to his acknowledge of the Bible where that unholy figure appears in the Garden of Eden and in the life of Job to tempt and to test. One wonders if such a prominent symbol in his poetry might suggest some inward struggles with temptation in Burns’ own life. Certainly, he was familiar with the teaching of the Bible on Adam’s Fall and the reality of evil in the world. Burns had fun with the Devil in more ways than one, and he would not be the only believer who was more conscious of evil than of grace. Moreover his compassion for the poor, and insistence of human dignity (“A man’s a man for a’ that”) may reflect not only his own humble origins, or Enlightenment independence, but a grasp of the Biblical teaching that humanity is made in the image of God.

2. **Critique of Hypocrisy**

Burns’ criticisms of Holy Willie, the Unco Guid and all forms of religious self-righteousness put him comfortably in the company of all the great prophets of the Bible and especially in the camp of Jesus, who blasted the hypocrites over and over again in the Gospels.
3. **Scepticism**

That he was a sceptic should not surprise anyone. All sincere enquirers are bound to be sceptics, doubters of God’s goodness in a world where the innocent suffer. His letters often fluctuate between belief and unbelief. He struggled. Late in his brief life he wrote to a friend, Mrs. Dunlop, about his son Francis Wallace and her godson:

> I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of Christianity is not only necessary by making us better men, but by making us happier men, that I shall take every care that your little godson, and every little creature that shall call me, Father, shall be firmly persuaded that ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses.’"^{6}

Now a cynic might say that Burns was simply trying to reassure a good Christian friend – telling Mrs. Dunlop what she wanted to hear. There are at least two reasons why I think that kind of cynicism in unfair.

When it was discovered that Jean Armour was pregnant by Robert Burns, the Kirk Session disciplined them both, and Burns appeared before the congregation. As far as I can discover he was not coerced. In spite of that humiliation, he continued to attend worship in his Kirk all his life. I assume repentant and forgiven.

Furthermore, Burns was brought up on the Bible in his home and wrote two paraphrases of the Bible, one on the first Psalm and another on “Jeremiah 15th Ch. 10V”. But familiarity with the Bible does not necessarily prove belief in its teaching. There is one poem of Burns that reveals profound Christian belief. It is the “Cotter’s Saturday Night.” While it is true that you cannot find anything else quite like it in any of his other poems, we must not confuse quantity with quality. This has the quality of faith.

It is commonly assumed that Burns is to some extent recreating a scene in his boyhood home where his father, as priest in his own household, leads the family in worship. In this poem Burns includes the sacred history of Abraham, Moses, alludes to David on the lyre, Job’s suffering, Isaiah’s prophetic fire, the atonement of Jesus’ blood for the guilty, the triumph of God over Babylon in the book of Revelation, the joy of family worship in the cottage and divine grace in their hearts. If you find that this poem soars with the Spirit both Christian and patriotic, perhaps it is because the author had a Christian spirit as well as a love for his native soil. Listen to it:

> The priest-like Father reads the sacred page…
> Perhaps the Christian Volume is the theme,
> How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed;
> How He, who bore in heaven the second name,
> Had not on Earth whereon to lay his head:
> How his first followers and servants sped;
Then kneeling down to Heaven’s Eternal King
The Saint, the Father, and the Husband prays
Hope ‘springs exulting on triumphant wing’…”

Perhaps in a more profound way than many of his ecclesiastical contemporaries, Robert Burns understood human failing and Christian redemption. If his self-confessed doubt eliminates him from the Christian fold, who then can claim “Grace divine”?

1 Maurice Lindsay, “Religion, Burns and,” The Burns Encyclopedia [article online], http://www.robertburns.org/encyclopedia/ReligionBurnsand.737.html.
4 Ibid., 126/
REV. HAMILTON PAUL
(1773-1854)
MINISTER OF BROUGHTON
HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH BURNS, CAMPBELL
AND OTHER LITERARY MEN OF HIS DAY

Hamilton Paul was born on the banks of the Girvan, 10th April, 1773. Cradled amidst romantic surroundings and living in a county which was realising the genius of Burns and other leaders of freedom in the democratic age which was arising, he early felt the fascination of poetry, and though he never attained front rank as an exponent of the poetic muse, he yet had the privilege of appreciating the works of genius, and enjoying the friendship of some of the most remarkable and gifted literary men which Scotland has produced.

Educated at the Parish School of Dailly, he thereafter entered Glasgow University, where he was the college friend and companion of Campbell (1777-1844) the poet, Lord Rector of the University.

Like him, he was a prizeman at college and both became tutors to families in Argyllshire.

It was not uncommon for divinity students at that time to earn money by teaching in private families, Paul having officiated in that capacity in five different families. Licensed by the Presbytery of Ayr, 16th July, 1800, he became assistant to the Revd. Dr. Shaw of Coylton, and also successively to the ministers of five other parishes.

His fondness for punning texts would have excited the ire of Lord Cockburn, though it did not affect their friendship, as Cockburn was an occasional visitor at the Manse. On the occasion of her birthday, Paul sent Lydia, the daughter of the minister of St. Quivox, to whom he was paying his addresses, a Bible, marked with red ink at the words in Acts – “And the Lord opened the heart of Lydia so that she attended to the words spoken of Paul.”

The hint was not taken as he remained a bachelor. Possessed of versatile gifts, he was partner in a printing establishment at Ayr, and for three years edited the “Air Advertiser.”

While resident there, he is said to have been “a member of every literary circle, connected with every club, chaplain to every society, a speaker at every meeting, the poet of every curious occurrence, and the welcome guest at every table.”

It was a strange and troubled time. The Napoleonic Wars had created widespread disaffection: the French Revolution had shaken society to its foundations, Britain had not escaped the storm, whose effects were seen in literature. In his passionate poetry, Burns voiced the heart of Humanity, asserting the note of independence – “A man’s a
man for a’ that!”

Scott stood at the head of those who originated the Renascence of Wonder in the nineteenth century. Campbell in his War Songs – amongst the grandest in the world, ranking with “Scots wha hae” – gave utterance to “Ye Mariners of England,” and “The Battle of the Baltic.” Hogg touched by the passing of Burns declared – “This formed a new epoch in my life. Every day I pondered of the genius and fate of Burns,” and as a shepherd lad on Scottish uplands bordering on Broughton midst its British forts, he resolved to be a poet – a resolve which was to bear fruit in “Kilmeny,” our finest fairy poetry, and other patriotic strains.

Living as he did, close to these inspired writers and great movements, Hamilton Paul could not remain unaffected.

He early appreciated the genius of Burns. At a time when the poet suffered obloquy and scorn, he revealed himself as a devoted friend and genuine admirer, with gift of insight.

His admiration deepen with the years. After Burns’ death, Paul with his relative, Boswell of Auckinleck, convened a public meeting to take steps for the erection of a public mausoleum to the poet. The meeting consisted of Paul and Boswell. Undaunted, they passed the resolution and proceeded to raise subscriptions, and the result is seen in the magnificent building, on the banks of the Doon, which yearly attracts pilgrims from the ends of the earth – for as Normal Macleod, whose memoir was written by his brother at Quarter House, Glenholm, truly says:– “There are two things which to me make Burns sufficiently memorable, one is his noble protest for the independence and dignity of humanity; another is his intense nationality – a noble sentiment, springing like a plant deeply rooted for ages in the soil and bearing fruit, which nourishes the manliest virtues of a people. Few men have done for any country, in this respect, what Burns has done for Scotland.

The first Chaplain of a Burns’ Club, Paul brought out an addition of the bard’s poems, bearing the following title page.

The Poems and Songs
Of
Robert Burns
With a
Life of the Author
Containing a variety of particulars, drawn from sources
Inaccessible by former Biographers.
To which is subjoined
An Appendix
Consisting of a
Panegyrical Ode
And
A Demonstration of Burns’ Superiority to every other
Poet as a writer of Songs
By
The Rev. Hamilton Paul,
Burns’ 1st Edinburgh Edition was in 1787.
The Appendix of Paul’s Edition is worth quoting.

The posthumous fame of Burns is without parallel in the annals of poetry. Soon after his death, meetings were held in various parts of the British Empire, commemorative of his excellencies as a son of inspiration.

Among the earliest of the anniversaries that were celebrated in honour of his memory was one which took place in the cottage wherein he was born.

The party was small but select, and formed a most interesting group, from the circumstances of nearly one half of the company having their names associated with some of the most gratifying particulars in the poet’s history.

The meeting consisted of the following sincere friends and admirers of their far-famed countryman:-

William Crawford, Esq. of Doonside, by whose father the father of Burns had been employed in the capacity of a gardener.

John Ballantine, Esq., to whom Burns addressed the “Twa Brigs o’ Ayr.”

Robert Aikin, Esq. To whom he dedicated “The Cotter’s Saturday Night.”

Patrick Douglas, Esq. of Garallan, by whose interest he was to have obtained a situation in Jamaica, had he followed out his intention of repairing to that island.

Primrose Kennedy, Esq. of Drumellan.

Hew Fergusson, Esq. Barrack Master, Ayr.

David Scott, Esq. Banker, Ayr.

Thomas Jackson, Esq. LL.D., Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews.

The Rev. Hamilton Paul, who had been previously solicited by Provost Ballantine, through the interposition of Captains Kennedy and Fergusson, to prepare a few verses suited to the occasion and who has since written eighteen anniversary Odes in commemoration of the birthday of Burns.

The meeting above mentioned took place in 1801. The succeeding festivals were honoured by the presence of the most distinguished characters in the town and neighbourhood.

“Friends, kindred, neighbours, first it doth embrace, Our country next, and next, all human race.”

On the last page, “Farewell to the Allowa’ Club, recited at the ninth anniversary, being the last at which the Author was present.

“Nine times the annual lyre I’ve strung
Nine times the Poet’s praises sung:
Thus have the Muses all, by turns
Paid homage to the shade of Burns.”
While you, the Patrons of the Nine
Delighted, charm’s, enraptur’d, fir’d
By love of poesy and wine
Politely listen’d and admir’d:
But should my day be overcast
And this effusion prove my last,
In words that oft have met your ear,
This last request permit me here:
When yearly, ye assemble a’
One round I ask it with a tear
To him, the Bard, that’s far awa’.”

It is no wonder Paul loved Ayr and Ayrshire, and, public spirited in high degree, sought its welfare in all ways.

Thus he addresses the following poem “Unto the Honourable the Trustees of the Roads in the County of Ayr, the Petition and Complaint of the Auld Brig o’ Doon:–

Must I, like modern fabrics of a day,
Decline unwept, the victim of decay?
Shall my bold arch that proudly stretches o’er
Doon’s classic stream, from Kyle’s to Carrick’s shore,
Be suffered in oblivion’s gulf to fall,
And hurl to wreck my venerable wall?
Forbid it! Every tutelary power
That guards my keystone at the midnight hour
Forbid it! Ye who, charmed, by Burns’ lay,
Amid these scenes can linger out the day.
Let Nannie’s sark, and Maggie’s mangled tail
Plead in my cause, and in that cause prevail,
The man of taste, who comes my form to see,
And curious asks – and asks in vain – for me,
With tears of sorrow will my fate deplore,
When he is told “The Auld Brig is no more!”
Stop then, O stop, the more than vandal rage
That marks this revolutionary Age;
And bid the structure of your fathers last,
The pride of this, the boast of ages past;
Nor ever let your childrens’ children tell
By your decree, the ancient fabric fell.

“May it therefore please your Honours to consider the Petition and grant such sum as you may think proper for repairing and keeping up the Old Bridge of Doon.”

(About 1813).

Presented by Richard Alex. Oswald, Esq. Jr. of Auchincruive to the United Parish of
Broughton, Glenholm and Kilbucho, he was ordained 30th December, 1813.

In the famous Waterloo year 1815, the Manse of Broughton was built and it became a noted centre for literary men of the day, Paul proving an admirable host with his unbounded hospitality and gifts of conversation and wit.

The Poet Campbell was a frequent visitor and to him Paul suggested “The Pleasures of Hope.” The first idea of the future poem “The Pleasures of Hope” was suggested to Campbell during his residence in Mull. In writing to his friend and correspondent Hamilton Paul, he had complained of his solitary lot, and begged him to send some lines calculated to cheer a lone hermit, in return for some of his own metrical translations from the Greek.

His friend, accordingly, returned to him a piece of twelve stanzas “The Pleasures of Solitude,” enclosed in a letter, in which he remarks “As you have almost brought yourself to the persuasion that you are an anchorite, I send you a few lines adapted to the condition of a recluse. It is the sentiment of Dr. Moore that the best method of making a man respectable in the eyes of others is to respect himself. Take the lines such as they are, and be candid but not too flattering. We have now three “Pleasures” by first-rate men of genius, namely “The Pleasures of Imagination:” “The Pleasures of Memory”: and the “Pleasures of Solitude.” Let us cherish “The Pleasures of Hope” that we may soon meet in Alma Mater.” Slight though the hint was, and forgot by the author as soon as it was written, it reached Campbell at a time when the means of occupation for his mind were extremely limited; and there is good reason to believe that in the hint thus given, we may trace the germ of the noble poem, which only three years afterwards established his literary reputation. Published in his 21st year on 27th April, 1799, the poet touches with a master hand some of the great problems of his day, and greatly helped the cause of Liberty.

With Lord Cockburn and Campbell, Hamilton Paul enjoyed an evening with congenial spirits.

What a meeting that would be indeed – Campbell, Cockburn and Paul drawing on their reminiscences.

We can picture the scene – the notable three at the dining-room table, near a roaring log-fire on a winter night: the glitter of cut crystal in glass and decanter and a steaming bowl of punch – in the decoction of which Paul was unrivalled – standing near the silver snuff-boxes.

Paul in priestgrey, with sparkling eyes turned on his gifted friends, conjuring up for them Burns, as he knew him – broad shoulders, manly limbs, strong features, dark expressive eyes and black hair, generally queued – with manly, independent manner, conversational powers truly astonishing, sense and shrewdness – now descanting on the beauty of the “Cotter’s Saturday Night,” then dwelling on the glamour of his songs, ‘the sweetest lyrics,’ in Paul’s words, ‘that ever appeared in any language’ Then Cockburn, his law books laid aside, enters heart and soul into the joyous hour, recalls the humours of his circuit journeys, calls them to fill their glasses and drink the toast, the round of toasts. “May the pleasures of the evening bear the reflection of the morning,” “May the friends of our youth be the companions of our old age.” There follows the special toast – the Poet Campbell. Paul passes in review the works of his friend which has made him a household word; and does he not twit him on the critism of Scott? Quoting Campbell’s poem of Gertrude of Wyoming with delight, he said, “What a pity it is, that Campbell
does not write more. He has wings that would bear him to the skies.” “What a grand idea is that, said Scott, about “prophetic boding or in common parlance, ‘second sight.’ “Coming events cast their shadows before.” “The fact is,” added he, “Campbell is in a manner a bugbear to himself. The brightness of his early success is a detriment to all his further efforts. He is afraid of the shadow that his own fame casts before him.

Now Campbell must reply. Does the blushing poet recite his War songs, the finest of their kind, “The Pleasures of Hope,” whose text the host had given.

Certainly that evening the poet did quote a line of his words:–
The first verse of Hohenlinden begins:

“On Linden, when the sun was low
All bloodless lay the untrdden snow
And dark as winter was the flow
Of Iser, rolling rapidly.”

So the evening passes. In spirit they have placed the laurel wreath on the Ayrshire Poet’s brow. Cockburn has eulogised his friends, Campbell has declared with pride his friendship for Scott, Paul, with his whimsical tales, has made them laugh even to tears, and now, as they retire, after the feast of reason, and the flow of soul, a voice is heard – “Who goes there?” and this time it is the voice of Campbell seeking his well won rest – “It’s I, Sir, rolling rapidly.”

If a Coleridge says,

“He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.”

Paul could lay some title to that; he was fond of his fellows, fond of the creatures. He had two pets at the Manse, a tame monkey and a tame crow.

On one such occasion while entertaining some friends, monkey was shut out in the dark and left to cool his heels in the frost.

But monkeys, as Shakespeare says of men, have their exits and entrances – He did a quick psycho-analysis. The door, it is barred, the windows are shut, I must get in somehow – there is only one way. By the roof. So up the roof he went. Down the chimney he came – unlike the sweep, he did not stick there, but reached the banqueting hall, a wild vision of delight in his success – a sooty gnome, bearing the brand not of monkey soap. What the guests said and did, history does not relate.

Of his pet crow, he was somewhat proud. Dubbing it “Pretty Poll,” he decorated it with recognisable mark and taught it various antics. One day the crow had a longing for a trip and flew away with some companions to the sorrow of his keeper.

Some days after, walking out with a friend, he spied his pet with his new found feathered mates on a tree.

So he said – “I will call on one of these crows, and it will come – shouting ‘Pretty Poll’ It obeyed, flew swiftly and lighted on the minister’s shoulder, crowing with delight. Mr. Paul’s face shone with pleasure, while his friend who had not shared the secret wondered,
if the minister had dominion over the fowls of the air.

His pulpit ministrations, it is said, were not of the kind calculated to attract the million. His manner, however, was calm and unimpassioned, his compositions, chaste and elegant, often abounding with touches of great beauty.

His sermons exhibited extensive learning and singular originality of thought; but his eccentric genius led him to express opinions and support them by illustrations, which though abstractly correct, verged upon the ludicrous and weakened the general effect of his discourse. From the acceptability of his private services and the warmth and kindliness of his disposition, he retained throughout his incumbency the respect and affection of his parishioners. In private society, he was universally beloved. In company, he was alike kind, affable and unostentatious. As a companion, he was most engaging and the best story-teller of his day.

His power of humour was unbounded – he had a joke for every occasion and a bon mot for every adventure. Had he chosen to be satiric, none had more eminent power, but he rather delighted in blending the complimentary with the pungent, and lessened the keenness of censure by the good humour of the utterance.

His anecdotes are familiar over a wide district and many of his sayings have become proverbial.

Few in his position enjoyed a more extensive acquaintance. Hospitable, kind, charitable to a fault, he was the friend alike of the rich and the poor, while the ease of his manner, the variety and extent of his information, the readiness and point of his wit, attracted men of taste and learning from many quarters.”

Publications, First and Second Epistles to the Female Students of Natural Philosophy in Anderson’s Institution. Friendship exemplified, A Sermon, Air, 1803, Vaccination or Beauty preserved, a Poem, Air, 1805. Poems and Songs of Burns with Life, etc., Air, 1819, 12 mo. Account of the Parish (New Stat. Acc. iii) Lines to the Memory of the Rev. Dr. Dalrymple (Crawford’s Funeral Discourses) – Songs, Helen Gray and the Bonnie Lass of Barr (Rogers Mod. Scott Minstrel I) while the song “Jeanie o’ the Crook” is a local favourite.

But his writings in many kinds of subjects, both in poetry and prose, each, the work of a sitting or uttered on the moment, are scattered over magazines, reviews and newspapers for about sixty years and exhibit great versatility of talent and versification, while they have attracted wide and warm admiration.

(Presb. Reg. – McKay’s History of Kilmarnock, Rogers Scottish Minstrel, &c).

He died unmarried, 28th February, 1854, aged 81.

The Rev. Henry Scott Riddell, distinguished for his poetical productions, especially the patriotic song “Scotland Yet.” which he sang occasionally on his visit to Cloverhill, was a native of Dumfriesshire and a scholar of Biggar.

While an assistant shepherd at Glencotho, Holmswater, he made his first attempt at rhyme, by linking the names of the different localities of the farm together. Devoting himself to the ministry, he supplemented the deficiencies of his early education by studying at Biggar, and while there composed a Border romance and had as a school companion, Mr. Clark, who became minister of Half Morton and whose sister, Eliza, he married.

The Rev. Hamilton Paul of Broughton in his poem entitled the “Presbytery Garland”
makes the following reference to this union:

“And what do you think my friend Henry has done? Tho’ I thought him a monk and took her for a nun
   Yet he’s come and he’s wed his Eliza, ye see,
   Oh, a’ bodies gaun to be married but me.”

After attending the Universities of Edinburgh and St. Andrews, he was licensed to preach the gospel and was settled at Teviothead which after a number of years through ill-health, he resigned.

His poems especially the lyrics are valued. “In his lyrics,” says one, “the ardour of patriotism, the affections of the heart, the beauties of Nature, and the endearments of home, are developed in such glowing and apt illustrations, that they will charm and delight so long as lyric poetry holds a place in the literature of our country.”

His signature from an original letter by courtesy of Colin Hunter McQueen.
We have received from Mr. W. M. Gray, of Warwickshire, particulars of a discovery of much interest to the readers of Robert Burns. It is, Mr. Gray believes, an original portrait of the poet, painted from life by William Anderson (1757-1837). Though exhibited some years ago at an historical exhibition at Dundee, it appears to have been generally overlooked.

The portrait is a half-length study, measuring 25in. by 30in., painted on an 18th century canvas, with an 18th century stretcher, in an 18th century frame. Mr. Gray regards it as one of the originals from which Skirving made his drawing of the poet, and he believes its having been overlooked is to be accounted for by the fact that the portrait of Burns by Alexander Nasmyth, although Sir Walter Scott thought very little of it, is almost a tradition, there being few homes in Scotland where there is not a representation of the Nasmyth portrait in some shape or other.

Mr. Gray came upon the portrait early last year (1918) in Dundee, when he was invited by an artist there who was an acquaintance of his to view a portrait of Robert Burns. The picture was in its original state, with an 18th century stretcher and 18th century canvas; it had been relined, but the liner had only carried his canvas about half an inch under and beyond the interior lines of the stretcher. Mr. Gray purchased the portrait, and in January it was brought to London to be cleaned. Mr. Gray had the lining stripped off in his presence, and its removal revealed on the back of the 18th century canvas the words distinctly painted in large lettering. “William Anderson, Painter, A.D. 1757-1837.” There is also on the stretcher and frame confirmation of a statement made by the Dundee artist that the portrait had been publicly exhibited at an historical exhibition in Dundee some years ago, for there is a small label bearing “Robert Burns, Oil Painting, lent by Colin McPherson.” Mr. Gray understands that Mr. McPherson was the previous owner of the picture, and it had been hung in a country house in Forfarshire for many years.

Mr. Gray believes that the portrait was probably painted at a very few sittings on the poet’s arrival in Edinburgh in 1786. It seems to have been painted rapidly. There is a long sweep of the brush in the painting of the dress. Satisfied with his portrait when he had finished the head and features. Anderson appears to have painted the rest with a full brush and rarely touched his canvas twice.

Mr. Gray does not claim that the portrait has great merit, but “it has a certain realism that seems to bring us nearer to the man than any of the other portraits,” and in contrast with the Nasmyth portrait, “which is almost a tradition, does not represent the poet as he is known in his life and works.” Mr. Gray suggests that there are in Sir Walter Scott’s description of Burns characteristics which are reproduced in the Anderson portrait, Sir Walter Scott says of Burns:– “His person was strong and robust, not clownish, a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity; his features are represented in Mr. Nasmyth’s picture,
but to me it conveys the idea that they are diminished, as if seen in perspective. I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. I would have taken the poet, had I not known what he was, for a sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch School, *i.e.*, none of your modern agriculturists who keep labourers for their drudgery, but the douce gudeman who held his own plough. The eye alone I think indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large and of a dark cast which glowed (I say literally glowed) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time.”

As to Skirving’s drawing of Burns, though it is a pleasing picture, Skirving admitted that it was not from life, but from memory and originals then in existence.

“This latest portrait of Burns,” says Mr. Gray, “represents the poet as Scott saw him, Burns the farmer, not only the farmer, but the ‘duce gudeman’ who held his own plough, with the great dark eyes, the sensuous mouth, the long massive Celtic skull, a frank open countenance, and what Scott terms ‘a certain dignified plainness and simplicity.’ In this portrait we are face to face with something which is very real and very human. The human element of the man is one of its distinguishing features, and I have no hesitation in saying that we look in vain for the human element in either the Skirving or the Nasmyth pictures. The Anderson portrait gives us a new conception of Burns. He looks more the poet, with greater intellectual capacity, than in the portraits with which we are so familiar.

If I have said anything which would seem to underrate the Nasmyth portrait or the Skirving drawing it is because I think Scott’s word picture more precious than either of these, and the Anderson portrait is nearer to Scott’s description than the others. I believe that all lovers of Robert Burns in the presence of this portrait by William Anderson, if they will consider the life and works of the poet and the hard lot in which his life was cast, will more fully realize with what unerring accuracy Scott must have described the poet.”

Great care, adds Mr. Gray, has been taken to preserve the matured condition of the portrait, the old varnish has been kept intact, and only the surface smut removed.

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**Extract from the “Greenock Telegraph”**

You may have noticed an article which appeared in the *London Times* in the early part of last year, announcing the discovery of a portrait of Robert Burns, by William Anderson, and while Anderson was not a portrait painter, he was an artist of some distinction, who seems to have been overlooked by all writers on the subject of Scottish Art and Artists. The Art Directories and the Dictionary of National Biography are all agreed that Anderson was born in Scotland in 1757, and that in early life he was a Shipwright, who in his spare time painted marine subjects.

In 1787 at the age of 30, and without ever having had a master, we find him exhibiting at the Royal Academy, London, and up to 1833 – according to Messrs. Graves’ catalogue, he exhibited 45 pictures at the Royal Academy, and 20 pictures at Suffolk Street, and the Water Colour Society’s Rooms – in all 65 pictures. Two of these can be seen at South Kensington, and a large drawing “The Battle of the Nile,” at the British Museum.
Anderson died in London in 1837.

When this latest portrait of Burns was discovered in Dundee, there was a small label on the back of the 18th century frame and stretcher, bearing the following:

PORTRAIT OF ROBERT BURNS
Oil Painting
Lent by Colin McPherson.

The 18th century canvas has been relined with a canvas of a later period, and its removal revealed on the back of the 18th century canvas the words in large lettering

WILLIAM ANDERSON
Painter
1757-1837.

A great deal of interest has been taken in the mystery of Anderson’s birthplace, and all the usual channels of information have been thoroughly searched by experienced Librarians at South Kensington, the British Museum, the Birmingham Reference Library, the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, and Edinburg has done everything possible to solve the mystery. All the authorities are agreed that William Anderson was born in Scotland: “But no man knoweth the place of his birth.”

Now, Sir, in the course of my research, certain important facts have come to the surface that seem to point to Greenock as the birthplace of William Anderson, and where he probably worked as a Shipwright. I have lately examined a work entitled “The Book of the Man Robert Burns,” by the Rev. Charles Rogers. In this work, Vol. I, pages 91 and 92, I find that Burns was betrothed to Highland Mary on Sunday the 14th May, 1786. She afterwards proceeded to Campbelltown, and continued to correspond with him, but as he determined to go to the West Indies, she accepted an appointment in the family of Colonel McIvor, Glasgow. On that situation she was to enter in the ensuing Martinmas and meanwhile, she accompanied her father to Greenock on the occasion of her brother Robert being apprenticed to Peter McPherson, Shipwright, who was her mother’s cousin, and here Burns met her by appointment. At McPherson’s there was a brothering feast on the occasion of her brother Robert being admitted to the craft, and at the entertainment Mary Campbell (Highland Mary) helped to wait upon the company. She died of a malignant fever in October, 1786, and her remains were deposited in a lair shortly before acquired by Peter McPherson in the West Church burying ground. Peter McPherson’s daughter Anne married James Anderson, Stonemason, and William Anderson, Shipwright and Artist, may belong to this family.

Mary Campbell had two brothers, both Shipwrights, and at that time in the days of sailing craft and wooden ships, there must have been hundreds of Shipwrights in a place like Greenock. All the authorities are agreed that in early life William Anderson was a Shipwright, and I think there is little doubt that Greenock will be found to be his birthplace, and where Robert Burns sat to him.

The owner of the Anderson Portrait who lent it to the Centenary Exhibition at Glasgow in 1896 was named Colin McPherson, and when the Burns Federation Delegates lately met in solemn conclave round the grave of Highland Mary, they would find inside the railing, and immediately in front of the monument, a small headstone. In its upper compartment are carved the tools of the shipwright, and underneath the names Peter McPherson, his
wife and children.

Peter McPherson, 1786, in whose grave Highand Mary lies, and Colin McPherson the owner of the Anderson Portrait in 1896 may be an extraordinary coincidence, – on the other hand it may be a sequence, and the very key to the solution to the mystery of Anderson’s birthplace and the Portrait of Robert Burns.

I find the details of Burns’ visit to Greenock are even more fully given in the life of Burns by Doctor Robert Chambers, revised by Wallace, vol. I pages 428, 429, 430, 431 and 432. These details may be well known to Burns’ experts, but they might be re-stated.

It may seem almost incredible that an original portrait of Robert Burns should be discovered more than a century after the poet’s death. “But facts are chiel that winna ding, and downa be disputed.” My claim that the Anderson portrait is an original work has been confirmed by the discovery of the portrait in the Memorial catalogue of the Burns Centenary Exhibition, held in the rooms of the Royal Institute of the Fine Arts, Glasgow, in 1896. This portrait is numbered 68, and while Nos, 38, 53, 54, 64, 70 and 71, Portraits of the Poet, are all catalogued as after Nasmyth, this particular portrait No. 68 is catalogued as a

PORTRAIT OF ROBERT BURNS
Painted Unknown
Lent by Colin McPherson

The selection committee of the Memorial Exhibition was a strong one, numbering some of the ablest men of that time, and drawn from all parts of Scotland.

Up till the time Burns visited Greenock I think I might say he had never been out of Ayrshire. This would explain the character of the clothes he wears in the Anderson portrait, and these were probably made in Kilmarnock or Ayr, or even Mauchline. The portrait represents Robert Burns as we know him in his life and works, as Sir Walter Scott saw him. “The sagacious county farmer of the old Scotch School; strong and robust, with a certain dignified plainness and simplicity.”

William Anderson lived in London from May, 1787, till his death in 1837, maintained a household and brought up a large family by painting pictures. He died at the age of 80 and worked at his profession till the very last.

Now there are three points I wish to elucidate, and it is just possible some of your readers may be able to help clear these up.

(1) Was William Anderson born in Greenock in 1757? 
(2) Did William Anderson work as a Shipwright in Greenock? 
(3) There is no record of Anderson in or about London prior to 1787. Did William Anderson live in Greenock in 1786?

Can any read supply a photograph of this painting, or know of its whereabouts. 

Editor
OUT AND ABOUT

PROVAND’S LORDSHIP

Provand’s Lordship stands in Castle Street in the heart of Glasgow, directly across from Glasgow Cathedral. Castle Street gets its name from the Bishop’s Castle which stood on the site but which was demolished in 1792 to make way for the forthcoming Royal Infirmary. Part of the site of the Castle is now occupied by the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life. Provand’s Lordship dates from 1471.

The original function of the house is uncertain. It has been said that it was an almshouse or hospice and was built between 1465 and 1471, by Bishop Andrew Muirhead, with endowments for the care of twelve men but the accepted view is that it was built as a prebend manse or town house for the canons or priests who were attached to the Cathedral. The canon who lived in this particular house was responsible for the parish of Provan where he held the title of “Lord of the lands of Provan – hence the name’s corruption of Provand’s Lordship.

This area of Glasgow became the religious and administrative centre of an extensive diocese. The Diocese of Glasgow covered a huge area with over 200 parishes, from Luss in the north to Gretna in the south. Around the Cathedral precinct and out along the Rottenrow was a range of ecclesiastical buildings. These were the town residences of the 32 Canons of the Cathedral Chapter who administered parishes within the diocese. The canons who lived in these buildings were supported in kind from their parishes in the form of corn, barley, crops etc.

I have been unable to ascertain the origin and date of the name Rottenrow, where these Canons of the Cathedral dwelt, so I will leave you to form your own opinions as to whether the name Rottenrow was there before the Canons moved in to their terraced dwellings or not.

In 1753 the house passed to Matthew Whitelaw, a maltman in whose time a small lean-to building (which came to be known as the Hangman’s House because of a later occupant) was built against the south gable. This was later demolished by the Provand’s Lordship Society (founded 1906). By the middle of the 19th century the building was sub-divided among different tenants and tradesmen – part of which was occupied by an alehouse, (as was Burns Cottage till 1881 – thirsty lot these 19th century characters weren’t they? If you didn’t lock your door on the way out to work in the morning you could return to find your front room overrun by wee drunk men shouting out for ‘more beer wench’).

By early 1900 part of the house was occupied by the Morton family, who operated a sweet shop and aerated water business on the ground floor. The machinery used for making sweets is now part of the museum collection but it is still not known how they managed to get the bubbles into their aerated water!!!

Provand’s Lordship was originally built as a sandstone tenement with 3 storeys, each with 3 separate chambers and fireplaces. Access to the first and second floor rooms was by a central wooden stair. In 1670 this was removed when additional rear chambers and
the present stone spiral staircase were added, providing access to all the rooms. This work was undertaken by the then occupant William Bryson, a local wealthy tailor. In 1978, faced with extensive repairs to the roof and fabric of the building, the Provand’s Lordship Society offered the property to Glasgow District Council. With the help of builder Frank Lafferty the building was restored and is now a Grade A listed building, with all major repairs and conservation work subject to approval by Historic Scotland.

In order to preserve the original 15th Century oak floor beams, false floors were introduced in the upper floors which, unfortunately, alters the proportions of the rooms and the fireplaces slightly. Conservation and restoration work was carried out on the south west gable which was in danger of collapse and the building was opened again in November 2000 after two and a half years of closure whilst the work was carried out. The oak floor beams can still be seen as part of the ceiling above each floor.

The house also has cloistered gardens to the rear. These gardens are divided into two distinct parts – one is based on a physic garden containing plants which were in common use in the 15th Century, while at the centre is a knot parterre based on a Celtic design. The covered cloister area contains carved grotesque heads (I’m saying nothing!) dating from 1737. The gardens were officially opened by HRH, the Princess Royal in 1995.

Provand’s Lordship is still an outstanding example of 15th Century Scottish domestic architecture and the unique collection of domestic furniture and fittings were acquired by the Provand’s Lorship Society, with the intention of recreating the interior of the house, much as it might have been in the 1700’s around the time of Burns himself. Admission to Provand’s Lordship is free, as in all Glasgow Museums.

J. Harkins

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ROBERT BURNS, THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, AND A’ THAT
By Professor Henryk Minc, Ph.D., FSA Scot
(Hon President The Burns Federation)

Robert Burns is Scotland’s national poet, and its national hero. No American poets can claim a similar distinction in their country. In fact, Burns is probably better known and more admired in America than most poets. A good many of the Americans have heard of “Bobbie” Burns and know some of his poems and songs. They certainly know the first stanza of “Auld Lang Syne”, with its last line “improved” to read “And days of auld lang zyne.” They may also know several other songs of the Scottish bard, and perhaps “To a Mouse” (at least, the lines “The best laid schemes o’ Mice an’
American contemporaries of Robert Burns read and valued highly his works. Indeed several editions of Burns were published in America shortly after they appeared in print in Scotland. Twenty-five of his poems were reprinted in The Pennsylvania Packet from 24 July 1787 to 14 June 1788. On 7 July 1788 the first American (pirated) edition of Burns poetical works was published in Philadelphia, and before the end of the year another American edition (also pirated) was published in New York. Of course, American publishers would have not pirated a book of poems written “chiefly in the Scottish dialect,” were they not convinced that there would be a strong demand for these works. Numerous editions of Burns were published in America during the two centuries following the poet’s death although relatively few of them can be found in the famous Burns Collection of the Mitchell Library in Glasgow.

Burns was a freedom fighter, using his pen as his weapon. His rallying call was “Liberty!” and his inspiration was the American Revolution. His credo is clearly formulated in the last quatrain of his revolutionary song “For a’ that and a’ that” which recently solemnized the ceremonial opening of Scotland’s new Parliament:

For a’ that, and a’ that,
    all
Its comin yet for a’ that,
That Man to Man the world o’er, world, over
    Shall brithers be for a’ that.


The fragment is a political satire composed in 1784. In April 1786 Burns wrote to his friend John Ballantine asking for his advice whether to include the ballad in the forthcoming Kilmarnock edition of his works:

I inclose you a parcel of pieces whose fate is undetermined; but if you can spare an hour to glance them against I come down on Wednesday to meet Mr. Aiken, I shall be in good measure decided by your and his opinion... To tell the truth I am almost decided against them all I here send, except the Fragments that begin, When Guilford good &c, and, Green grow the rashes.

It appears that the friends advised against the publication of both Fragments as neither was included in the Kilmarnock edition. However, both appeared a year later in the First Edinburgh Edition.

The ballad consists of nine octaves. It is a satirical catalogue of the incompetence and failures of British military and political leaders during the American Revolution. The first two stanzas of the ballad read:

When Guilford good our Pilot stood,
    An’ did our hellim thaw, man, helm, turn awry
Ae night, at tea, began to plea,
Within America, man
Then up they gat the maskin-pat,
And in the sea did jaw, man;
An’ did nae less, in full Congress,
Than quite refuse our law, man.

Then thro’ the lakes Montgomery takes,
I wat he was na slaw, man:
Down Lowrie’s burn he took a turn,
And C-rl-t-n did ca’, man:
But yet whatreck, he, at Quebec,
Montgomery-like did fa’, man,
Wi’ sword in hand, before his band,
Amang his en’ mies a’, man.

In the first stanza Lord Noth (Guilford good), the British prime minister during the American War, is charged with mishandling the Boston Tea Party incident. North was the Pilot who steered the ship of state out of line. It is of some interest to note that the Boston raid occurred on 16 December 1773, when Burns was only fourteen, fully ten years before Burns composed his ballad.

The second stanza is about the American Revolutionary general Richard Montgomery who commanded the Montreal expedition in the Quebec campaign and was killed in the assault on Quebec. The assault was successfully repulsed by its British Governor, Guy Carleton (C-rl-t-n).

The dramatis personae in the next two stanzas are military leaders: General Thomas Gage (Poor Tammy G-ge), Governor of Massachusetts; General William Howe (Willie H—e) who succeeded Gage as the commander in chief, and defeated Washington at Brandywine; British General John Burgoyne (B-rg-ne) who surrendered Saratoga (lost his way, ae misty day, in Saratoga shaw); Brigadier Simon Fraser (Fraser brave), who raised the 78th Frasers Regiment in 1757 and the 71st Highlanders Regiment in 1774, and was killed at the second battle of Freeman’s Farm; British General John Burgoyne (B-rg-ne) who surrendered Saratoga (lost his way, ae misty day, in Saratoga shaw); Brigadier Simon Fraser (Fraser brave), who raised the 78th Frasers Regiment in 1757 and the 71st Highlanders Regiment in 1774, and was killed at the second battle of Freeman’s Farm; British General Charles Cornwallis (C-rnw-ll-s) who defeated Americans under Horatio Gates and his successor Nathaneal Greene, but later surrendered at Yorktown; British General Henry Clinton (Cl-nt-n) who captured Charleston, but retreated when he heard of Cornwallis’s surrender.

In the last five stanzas of the Fragment Burns mocks the incompetence of British political leaders in their handling the American Revolution crisis: John Montague (M-nt-gue), First Lord of Admiralty under Lord North (Guilford); George Sackville (S-ckv-lle doure) who in 1746 fought at Culloden and was North’s Secretary of State for Colonies, Edmund Burke, (Paddy B-rke), a severe critic of British government’s American policy; Charles James Fox, (Charlie F-x) who opposed Lord North and, in particular, his American policies. Charles Watson-Wentworth (R-ck-ng-h-m) who opposed North’s colonial policies, and succeeded him as Prime Minister; William Petty Fitzmaurice (Sh-lb-rne meek) who concluded the Treaty of Paris, giving independence to United States;
William Pitt (Chatham’s Boy), Prime Minister from 1783 to 1801; and Henry Dundas (slee D-nd-s), Lord President and member of Pitt’s administration. Incidentally, when Dundas died about eight months after the publication of the Fragment it was Robert Burns who wrote his elegy.

The Fragment is a satire comparable to Burns’s brilliant, though bawdy, “Tippling Ballad” (“While Princes and Prelates”) written in 1792, in which he flyted the military leaders of Britain and of their Allies for disastrous defeats in the French Revolutionary Wars. The Fragment is a fine ballad. It is not as popular as it deserves to be. Perhaps the complexity of the American War history and the long catalogue of generals, statesmen and politicians makes it a rather tedious for modern readers. Nevertheless the ballad shows Burns’s impressive virtuosity in handling ballad octaves with internal rhymes in odd-numbered lines, and his knowledge of the history of the Revolutionary War and of the contemporary British political scene.

In June 1786, not long after he wrote his famous satire “Holy Willie” Burns composed another fiery satire “Address of Beelzebub” in support of five hundred Highlanders who, in Burns’s own words, “were so audacious as to attempt an escape from their lawful lords and masters… to the wilds of Canada, in search of that fantastic thing – LIBERTY –,” The Address is a monologue by Beelzebub, the Devil, directed to the Earl of Breadalbane, the President of the Highland Society which was considering ways and means to frustrate the plans of the Highlanders. The Address is dated: HELL 1st June Anno Mundi 1790.” The Devil forewarns the Earl that American Revolutionary leaders may inspire the Highlanders:

Some daring Hancock, or a Franklin,
May set their HIGHLAND bluid a - ranklin; blood
Some Washington again may head them,
Or some MONTGOMERY, fearless, lead them…

And he suggests to the Earl what to do with the Highlanders:

But smash them! Crush them a’ to spails! All to splinters
An’ rot the DYVORS i’ the JAILS! Bankrupts, in
The young dogs, swinge them to the labour, flog
Let WARK an’ HUNGER mak them sober! Work
The HIZZLES, if they’re oughtlins fawont, hussies, at all seemly
Let them in DRURY LANE be lesson’d! [“red light” district]
An’ if the wives, an’ dirty brats,
Come in thiggan at your doors an’ yetts,… begging, gates
Get out a HORSE-WHIP, or a JOWLER,… hound

“Address of Beelzebub” did not appear in print till 1818. It appears that Burns and publishers of early editions of his works were fearful of offending the genteel audience. Even some more recent editors preferred not to tempt the devil and excluded this sparkling satire from their editions of “complete” works of Robert Burns.
Burns returned to the theme of Liberty eight years later, in his “Ode [For General Washington’s Birthday].” In his letter of 25 June 1794 written in Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire to Mrs. Frances Anna Dunlop, enclosing a part of the Ode, he wrote:

The Subject is, LIBERTY: you know, my honored Friend, how dear the theme is to me. I design it as an irregular Ode for General Washington’s birth-day. – After having mentioned the degeneracy of other kingdoms I come to Scotland thus –

Here follow the last eighteen lines of the Ode. Essentially the poem is an ode to Liberty. It is just dedicated to Washington. Indeed George Washington’s birthday happens to be on 22 February. In any case, the Ode is not one of Burns’s great poems. It is certainly less effective than either of the two satires. Perhaps Burns was not comfortable with the irregular kind of measure coupled with neoclassic English idiom.

In the opening lines of the Ode the poet extols Columbia’s (that is, America’s) fight for Liberty.

See gathering thousands, while I sing,
A broken chain exulting, bring,
And dash it in a tyrant’s face!
And dare him to his very beard,
And tell him, he no more is feared,
No more the Despot of Columbia’s race.
A tyrant’s proudest insults braved,
They shout, a People freed! They hail an Empire saved.

But come, ye sons of Liberty,
Columbia’s offspring, brave as free,
In danger’s hour still flaming in the van:
Ye know, and dare maintain, The Royalty of man.

In the next parts of the Ode the poet deplores England’s support for the “Tyrant’s cause,” and turns to Caledonia:

To thee, I turn with swimming eyes –
Where is that soul of Freedom fled?
Immingled with the mighty Dead!
Beneath that hallowed turf where WALLACE lies!

Shew me that eye which shot immortal hate,
Blasting the Despot’s proudest bearing:
Shew me that arm which, nerved with thundering fate,
Braved Usurpation’s boldest daring!
Dark-queched as younger sinking star,
No more that glance lightens afar;
That palsied arm no more whirls on the waste of war.
But Wallace is dead, and “that palsied arm no more whirls on the waste of war.” It may be appropriate to conclude this Ode to Liberty and this article on Burns and the American Revolutionary War that inspired him, with the battle cry that he put in the mouth of another Scottish hero in the final quatrain of the song “Robert Bruce’s March to Bannockburn,” written composed several months before the Ode:

Lay the proud Usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
LIBERTY’S in every blow!
Let us DO – OR DIE!!!!

THE MERRY MINUTES OF THE MILLENNIUM
NEW CUMNOCK BURNS CLUB
2000 SUPER
by Chris Rollie, Past President

Upon a Janwar winter’s nicht,
When a’ the hills were bare,
A hunner’n’ fifty saw the licht,
An’ gied the chase tae Care.
They ventured oot, baith great an’ sma’,
Fae every dark direction,
Each sought his cronies, ane and a’,
For cheery, warm reflection
An’ crack that nicht.

Recalling tales o” yesteryear,
An’ nichts o’ fun an’ fair.
Now calming doon an’ sagely douce,
Addressin younkers a’,
How Shankland spie’ld the tim’rous mouse,
Robert Shankland, Past President
An’ silence filled the ha’,
Wi’ awe that nicht.

New Cumnock Burns Club’s annual bash,
Had brought them a’ thegither,
A supper, drink an’ witty clash,
Contentit every brither.
They a’ had gethered at the Croon,
The Crown Inn
Their nat’ral hame an’ cushion,
And as each ither lookit roun’,
The memories came rushin
Wi’ glee that nicht.

The auld anes pointed fingers here,
An’ gestured ower there,

They tellt how Pearson, Connel, Broon, William Pearson, William Connel, Guy Brown
An’ mony mair forbye,
all late members of the club (WP & GB Past Presidents)
Had charmed the crowd baith up an’ doon,
Wi’ stories sweet, an’ dry.
The young bluids keekit roun about,
An’ thocht it must be fable,
But ere that present nicht wis oot,
Sic tales themsels were able,
Tae tell that nicht.

The President wis first tae staun,
Farquhar Scott
An’ welcomed every ane,
The Selkirk grace wis taen in haun,
An’ ben came big McMinn.

He carried in the haggis braw,
An’ set it on the table,
The piper gied his pipes a blaw,
The claps tell he wis able
An’ skeigh that nicht.

The Crearie, Jock, then took the flair,
His knife, sae rustic, dighted,
Now sallied forth wi’ solemn air,
Before the beast he frightened.
He set about wi’ right guid will,
A trechin operation,
And a’ agreed, wi’ proper skill,
He’d laid a soun’ foundation
For sic a nicht.

The Weemin then cam ben the fauld,
Wi’ plates o’ neeps an tatties,
Some got theirs warm, an’ some were cauld,
While some still wanted haggis.
Till by an’ by their kypes were fu’,
O’ tarts an’ sticky toffee,
‘Twas then a neebor turned tae spew,
A mawk was in his coffee,
Right live that nicht!

The laughs gaed roun, as word o’ spread,
Among the young an’ hoary,
O’ sic a thing nae ane had heard,
An’ syne TAN got the story,
Whit feared him maist aboon the law,
An’ set him a’ pantin,
If word got round about the ha’,
Then ilka ane wid want ane
The same that nicht!

An interlude wi’ key an’ reed,
Then treated everybody,
While some anes smoked their pipes an’ weed,
Some filled their teas wi’ toddy
The quines then quat their clearin up,
Now steered back through the kitchen,

The boys were keen, an’ fain tae sup,
An’ wi’ a drouth were itchin’
Tae slake that nicht.

The President, young Farquhar Scott,
Then ca’d the nicht tae order,
An’ big McKenzie read the plot,
O’ year two thousand fodder.
He charged us a’ to keek afore,
Millenniums?, nae worry!
Wi’ suppers o’ high-tech. Galore,
A hologram Jim Murray
Tae chant that nicht.

The Broon the tooth, wi’ prudent care,
His young friend he epistled;
The boys a’ clapped an’ chantit, “mair”,
An’ some anes even whistled.
This gied the sign tae drouthy chiel,
Their jars an’ stowps tae clatter,
The sound o’ cans an’ bottle seals,
Tellt somethin mair nor watter
Wis gaun this nicht!

McKechnie next the lecturn took,
Wi’ tales o’ lack o’ money,
He read out fae his wee black book,
Nae land o’ milk an’ honey.
He tellt some jokes tae follow suit
And ev’ry ane a corker,
Till presently it did turn out,
He’d been back tae Mallorca,
Wi’oor cash last year.

And thus th’ imbalance wis explained,
Among oor funds an’ booty,
T’would “fill a nutshell”, he complained,
(Though Helen ay wis fruity).

And syne at last he said his piece,
Wi’ much o’ wish an’ waffle,
He said that to bring some release,
“Be gen’rous wi’ the raffle”
This vera nicht.
The Hastie, Wull, then clamb the brae,  
William Hastie, Past President
An’ ninety-nine wis mindet,  
He took his style fae Burns’s day  
An’ Service underlined it.  
Robert Service, Poet
Oor minds cast back a year ago,  
An’ Dougie Edgar’s story,  
Douglas Edgar, President in 1999
The Croon put on a richt guid show,  
The Club in a’ its glory,  
Back hame that nicht.

Now a’ the comp’ny cock their lugs,  
The officers’ election,  
Although the process and its plugs,  
Was staun nae great inspection.  
Yet nanethless, the boys are keen,  
An’ signal they are happy,  
Although it could, by some, be seen,  
Tae get back tae the nappy,  
An’ pish that nicht!

Then Farquhar Scott, his duty done,  
But for ane wee exception,  
The gavel hauns anither ane,  
An’ gets his due reception.  
The Kennedy, by Stephen kent,  
Stephen Kennedy, President in 2000
Wi’ visage warm an’ hamely,  
As if by his forebears wis sent,  
Tae keep it in the fam’ly

An’ kin that nicht.
An interval takes pressures aff,  
The blathers an’ the bowls,  
Allows the sports tae joke an’ laugh,  
The grave tae shake their jowls.  
The ha’ decants intae the bog,  
Intae the bars an’ loby,  
Here some are sharin secret grog,  
An’ there some crack o’ Bobby  
An’ sex that nicht.

Young Euan Bain then took the stage,  
And AE FOND KISS wis wafted,  
In book o’ love, the finest page,  
O’ song that e’er wis crafted.

The sentiments o’ parted hearts,  
He gave in his ain style,  
Wad blunt the pricks o’ ony darts,  
Tho’ t’were ten thousand mile  
An’ mair that nicht!

But now the cronies a’ are sat,  
In silent expectation,  
For Farquhar Scott, his breeks has wat,  
At thocht o’ his oration.  
The MEMORY is why we’re here,  
Is why we’re at the Croon,  
But up he got, baith loud an’ clear,  
He didnae let us doon,  
Or Rab that nicht  
Past President’s badge

The crowd sang oot, There was a lad,  
A rantan, rovin Robin,  
And a’ agreed he did no bad,  
Sic delvin an’ sic probin.  
The hauns clapped oot in honoured time,  
In staunin admiration,  
He’d got as high as he could climb,  
An’ deserved his ovation  
An’ badge that nicht.  

The seats were hardly warm again,  
When up gat big Jim Murray,  
The Star wis sung wi’ might an’ main,  
But haud, there cam a flurry;  
Before we kent, a dear auld frien,  
McLatchie, oor ain Colin,  
Was on the flair, clear tae be seen,  
A-rockin an a-rollin  
Wi’ fiz that nicht.

He cheered the crowd an’ strutted proud,  
As every note was belted,  
The key rang oot in L fur loud,  
And a’ restraint had melted.  
Son, Ian, looked an’ shook his heid,  
Ian McLatchie, Past President
(Though secretly he cherished),  
The grandsons sang an’ cheered the deed,  
Though Time himsel had perished,  
An’ fled that nicht.

McVicar next cam tae the fore,
And order wis restorin,
Although there cam familiar soun,
Tellt ane wis gently snorin.
But Euan Bain sang a’ tae hush,
Rogues parcel’d in a nation,
His cuddled words an’ singin lush,
Brought deserved acclamation,
An’ praise that nicht.

Accompanied by Jimmy Gow,
James Gow, distinguished Pianist

Who got his presentation,
As weel as piper, Ross McLeod,
The musical foundation.
The songs o’ Burns they played richt weel,
An’ set the feet a-tappin,
Nae matter whether air or reel,
For ought wis wished wad happen,
On sic a nicht.

Then Hazlett, Jim, fae Cumnock toun,
James Hazlett, Past President

Regaled the drouthy cronies,
His talk o’ women beddin doon,
O’ Philistines an’ phonies.
Whit marks him out fae ither anes,
(Apart fae tarts an’ Killie),
His kindness in forgivin sins,
Exceptin ane, King Billie,
An’ crew that nicht!

Then SCOTS WHA HAE, the boys rang oot,
Wi’ fervant adulation,
Ane near could hear the trumpets toot,
The saving of a nation.
Each crony sang an’ filled the ha’,
How Edward got his fairin’,
It should hae been The Deil’s Awa,
But whae the hell wis carin
Sae late that nicht!

The bold Jim Broon kept up the pace,
Wi’ rhymin, Ayrshire banter,
An’ tellt how witches gave the chase,
Tae tipsy Tam o’ Shanter.
He gave the tale without mistakes,
In perfect understaunin,
If e’er there wis recitin stakes,
Jim Broon wad be outstaunin,
An’ win that nicht

By now the boys were in full whine,
Jim Murray led the chantin,
He gied us first his Pint o’ Wine,
In voice, baith clear an’ dauntin.
He led the crew without a faut,
In chorus tae the ceilin,
His Willie brewed a peck o’ maut
Had a’ the comp’ny reelin-
Rockin that nicht.

By this we were ayont the tawl,
Between the late and early,
Some slung an arm about a pal,
While some were crackin rarely.
Here some were thinkin on their Pegs,
An’ some their Megs, or Madges,
There some examined cans fur dregs,
An’ some their ties an’ badges

We’ pride that nicht

But then, at last, the President,
(Some said wi’ greatest folly),
Ca’d forth the final testament,
‘Contributors’, fae Rollie.

He thanked them a’, baith auld an’ new,
For sake o’ a’ the geth’rin,
(Though like himsel, they a’ were fou,
An’ some were busy bleth’rin
Rale guid that nicht).

Without ado ilk quat their pew,
An’ tae their feet they fumbled,
O’ empty spaces there were few,
‘A great nicht’, sev’ral mumbled.
An’ sae we thocht on AULD LANG SYNE,
An’ joined oor hauns thegither,
Recallin mornin suns till dine,
On ev’ry haun a brither
An’ frien’ that nicht.

Postscript

Ben I’ the lounge, wi’ beer an’ grog,
The remnants busy pouring,
Wee Nodder, noddin in the bog,

Richard Kirkpatrick, Footballer

Big Cree, flat oot, an’ snorin.
An’ toasted a’ the lassies,
His talk o’ sex an’ tasty whore,
Wis steamin up his glasses;
But syne he brought it back tae Burns,
And orthodox contentit,
Although they’d find, wi’ bawdy turns,
The Bard himsel had penned it
On mony a nicht.

An interval again wis ca’d,
An’ noo the place wis buzzin’,
Some wi’ the drink were overawed,
An’ spield ten-tae-the-dozen.
The wiser anes that paces theirsels,
Passed comment on the turnout,
The ram-stam boys were drinkin wells,
An’ getting near tae burnout
An’ sleep that nicht

But back again, they a’ sat doon,

In honoured time the tales were tellt,
An’ wallets further dentit,
Then each returned tae where he dwellett,
An’ tae his bed, contentit,
Richt weel that night.

So change o’ hauns delved a divide,
The Crown Inn converts to a ‘night club’
An’ chased us oot o’ toun,
But while we a’ enjoy Lochside,
Lochside House Hotel, 2001 supper venue

We’ll ne’er forget the Croon.
So a’ in a’ Tan done us proud,
Wi’ bill o’ fare an’ tonics,
Each pairtin chiel said a’ was guid,
An’ promised histrionics,
Some ither nicht!

THE CONSTRUCTION TRADE CONTRACTOR’S BURNS CLUB

OOR RAB AT THE SAVOY

Looking back over the past sixteen years since the inauguration of the CTC Burns Supper, how the time has flown. The first supper was held at the Wembley Conference Centre, moving on then to the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane and then moving to one of the most marvellous settings in London, the Savoy Hotel, with its beautiful rose gardens at the embankment. Overlooking the gardens is the magnificent statue of the Bard, Robert Burns, his eyes firmly fixed toward the Thames South Bank and perhaps on towards foreign climes. The very walk that Provost David McKay, Captain Sneddon and Councillor Colin Ray Brown could have taken during that period in London when contemplating the commencement of what we now know as the Burns Federation.

The CTC, being a relatively new Burns Club, had no idea at the time that it would flourish into such a successful event. The need for Robbie in London proved to be very great indeed. Our Society was originally started by MacMillan, a native of Shotts, with fellow expatriate Scots working in London during an evening of celebration in a spiritual centre (a wee pub) at the heart of the massive Broadgate Project at Liverpool Street Station, sixteen years ago.
At the time, as Principal Construction Managers at Bovis, the senior staff wished to give back something to the local hospital, St. Bartholomew’s for assisting in every way possible with the unfortunate casualties from the project, so it was decided to hold a Burns Supper, with all the proceeds and donations going directly to the Children’s Cancer Research Programme. A proportion of the donations has gone in some way to help purchase a new machine for helping to detect eye cancer in children, at a very early stage. The machine is now being used regularly for the benefit of children throughout the United Kingdom – a Godsend in the fight against cancer.

The hospital itself has seen many changes over the years. St Barts is known all over the world and is one of the oldest and most distinguished. It was founded in 1123 by Rahere, a courtier at the court of Henry I who fell ill on pilgrimage to Rome and vowed to found a hospital for the benefit of the poor, inspired by a vision of St. Bartholomew, and built his hospital at Smithfield. The hospital survived the Great Fire of London and was rebuilt to the design of James Gibbs, between 1729 and 1770. It then merged with Royal London and London Chest Hospitals in 1994 to form the Royal Hospitals Trust. The longer term will see the hospital, in conjunction with the Royal London Hospital, London Chest Hospital and the Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry, developing cancer and cardiac services with associated training and research activities.

The hospital is one of the oldest teaching hospitals and has sent thousands of young men and women out into the world as trained doctors and nurses. Worth noting when next you visit London, pay a wee visit to the hospital Church and Great Hall with its many paintings gifted from numerous donors from across the world. The massive Hogarth regaling itself across the main entrance staircase if certainly worth seeing.

The dedication of the doctors and nursing staff in the fight against cancer is much to be admired. Doctors such as Judith Kingston, a sort of modern day Florence Nightingale, no matter whether day or night her unstinting desire to help the children is wonderful. Also a young man to be admired is Professor Ian Sanderson, so humble yet so brilliant. He trained at St Bartholomew’s and has recently returned from a high profile position at Harvard to take up a senior consultant’s roll at Barts bringing with him one of the finest research teams from around the world. Suffice to say his Mother hails from the highlands of Scotland.
During the last few years, the CTC commenced donations to another worthy cause, namely the construction industry’s Lighthouse Club charity for the wives and children of workers injured in the industry. It’s world wide activities have helped thousands of individuals through their immediate problems in their time of need. The Club was formed during an exhibition at Newcastle Upon Tyne in 1956 to continue the goodwill and cooperation enjoyed during the exhibition. The club was named after St. Mary’s Lighthouse, Whitley Bay a prominent landmark in the area, Edward Ward being the founder member of the Club. From small beginnings, the Lighthouse Club has grown to 5,000 members in the United Kingdom, all connected with the construction and civil engineering industries. Past Presidents include Ian McAlpine OBE MA, Sir William Francis CBE DSc LLdD, F.Eng. FICE – yes Scots or of Scots origin, and a host of other distinguished gentlemen.

A mention to the thousands of Burns Supper organisers throughout the world. Only they will appreciate the difficulties in getting the Supper right on the night. The CTC Burns Supper can be a little difficult, when taking 450, mostly non-Burnsians, to the Savoy for the evening. A great many have never heard of Robbie Burns, let alone understand his works. However, it is indeed a pleasure introducing them to the life and time of this great man. If they didna’ ken him when they cam in, they definitely ken him when they gang oot the Savoy. If during the evening’s ongauns we can get some of the uninitiated to focus on Burns, even remember him whilst waltzing merrily through the door at 2 a.m. towards their carriages, we firmly believe we have achieved a breakthrough in the advancement of the Robert Burns ‘Grand Cause’.

With the help of many prominent speakers and artists, including politicians, “thanks Charles”, from the districts of Ayr and Glasgow to London, they have helped tremendously to endorse the ‘gospel according to the Bard Robert’! We, in the south, that great bastion of the English, are particularly pleased that we are able to advance and keep alive the message of Burns. Our English friends are now beginning to take notice of Burns’ work and it is becoming noticeable during the last few years, how popular his work has become down in the deepest south. It is no longer a one night affair, Burns Suppers can last over a two week period and have been known to stretch into February, he has become so popular. It is now the fashion to have Burns Suppers in the local pubs, clubs and village halls (take note you Scots, you could soon be losing your bard to the English whilst the nation clicks on to Burns.com.)
Our national institutions, namely the BBC and ITV seem to have missed out. A wee peak showing of Burns on the glorious 25th January widna’ go amiss!! Perhaps they should repeat that famous black and white showing of John Cairney as Robbie – a memorable treasure indeed.

Well, it’s May 2001, time again for all the committees to be thinking abut next year’s Burns Supper. In the CTC case, it’s about organising recitations, the Immortal Memory, Scottish dances, a pipe band, a military band and a host of other performers, not to mention the fabulous Savoy Hotel’s organisational expertise – it has to be excellent or the complaints come flying fast and furious. However, all’s well that ends well!

Things are a’ changing, however. Gone are the days when you could call upon real Burns speakers without having to call upon the same old face year in and year out. In Scotland, no doubt, it’s different. Obviously, the Federation has got it right, catch ’em young at school and encourage them at a very early age to appreciate Burns’ work.

Last year CTC’s fifteenth annual Burns Supper raised the grand sum of £16,000 together with over £3,000 taken from the evening’s raffle. We also were able to present £2,000 to the Lighthouse Club which was received by Sir Peter Duffell KCB retired Colonel of the Gurkha Regiment. His Immortal Memory of Robert Burns was witty, educational and very entertaining. Earlier in the evening, the address to the haggis was performed in his usual excellent way by Mr. George MacPherson. His performance with his blade “sae rustic labour dicht” was stunning. Our very own Peter Rice, Caledonian Club member and Vice President of the Burns Club of London gave a marvellous recitation of “On Parnassus Hill”. This year was made special by the attendance of Professor Ian Sanderson, in full highland dress, together with his wife, taking a short break from his demanding duties at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital Cancer Unit.

The 450 gathering warmly welcomed throughout the evening, the London Scottish Regiment pipe band, together with those lovely wee dancers from the Janet Cooke School, the majestic Band of Scots Guards with lone piper, Neil Esslemont playing a tribute to Robbie – “The Star O’ Robbie Burns”. We managed, through the good offices of Chief Executive, Shirley Bell, to take dozens of the Federation Burns Chronicles and these were handed out to the interested parties attending the oonauns. Proceeds, of course, being donated to the World Federation.

The night was danced away into the “wee sma’ hours” to the music of the Denny Wise Orchestra. The early morning witnessed many kilted revellers dancing merrily on their way down the Strand singing tributes to Scotland’s greatest son, Robbie Burns (and ne’er a polisman in sight)!

Nae write-up aboot oor Savoy function would be complete without a wee mention of the most important ingredient, the thousands of marvellous people from all corners of the UK and Ireland, also many brothers from across the world who have attended over the years without fail, dipping into their pockets to give loads of money for this great cause. All done under the watchful eye of Robbie – oh, what this man has done for mankind!

A very worthy mention to those great construction people who, despite the stress and strain of building our roads and buildings, give of their valuable time to support our cause. Also a wee dedication to some remarkable individuals who have given so much to ensure the CTC’s success story. Mr. Evan Stone QC, our London judge, George
Henderson OBE, John Dennis from St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, Val Shanley, Richard Thorpe and Betty MacMillan our Secretary for all their had work, and many, many more, too numerous to mention.

As I strolled at 2.30 a.m. over to the embankment beside the lovely rose garden towards that great statue, glass in hand – ah! John Barleycorn was a hero bold of noble enterprise for if you do but taste his blood it will make yer courage rise! I could have sworn that Robbie’s heid turned and he winked – “another great night” I heard him say, or was it oor John Barleycorn talking! Either way, it was the end of another memorable evening, only another twelve months to wait for it a‘ tae happen again!
COMMON PEOPLE

Who was the “Common Man” or “Common Woman” of eighteenth-century Scotland? Most Scots, Robert Burns included, were peasants. At the time of Burns’ birth, eight or nine of every ten Scots depended on agriculture for a living, and three out of four were farmers or agricultural laborers. They tilled land belonging to someone else – land that they had almost no hope of owning – and they used agricultural methods that predated the Roman occupation of Britain.

What difficulties were they experiencing? A Burns song about a homeless mother touched me in such a way that I have returned again and again to this question.

BONIE DUNDEE
TUNE: Adew Dundee

‘O, whar gat ye that hauver-meal bannock?’
‘O silly blin’ booby, O dinna ye see?
I gat if frae a young brisk sodger laddie
Between Saint Johnston and bonie Dundee.

”‘O, gin I saw the laddie that gae me’t!
Aft has he doubl’d me upon his knee;
May Heaven protect my bonie Scots laddie,
And send him safe hame to his babie and me!

‘My blessin’s upon thy sweet, wee lippie!
My blessin’s upon they bonie e’e-brie!
Thy smiles are sae like my blythe sodger laddie,
Thou’s ay the dearer and dearer to me!

‘But I’ll big a bow’r on yon bonie banks,
Whare Tay rins wimplin by sae clear;
An I’ll cleed thee in the tartan sae fine,
And mak thee a man like thy daddie dear.’

1 All quotations of Burns’ works are from James A. Mackay, The Complete Works of Robert Burns.
Why was this young woman homeless? Why was she on the road? (I carelessly posed the question to my late friend, Bob Johnson, “What was she doing on the road?” and his reponse was, “We know what she was doing.”) Her cheery optimism, in spite of no material prospects, is a note that Burns sounds often about the people he championed in his poetry. What unsettling events or conditions might have set some of them upon the roads of Scotland, and were there few or many of them?

**TWO DIFFICULTIES**

Examples of hardship being readily available, I thought it well to ask: was life just hard, or was it harder than in other times? We will be able to answer that fully, but to me the more serious difficulty is: how do we determine what hard times would have been to an eighteenth-century Scot? After all, we are operating from the comfort and material abundance of our time.

Burns expressed such opposing points of reference in “The Twa Dogs.” Caesar, a rich man’s dog, observes:

…Lord man, our gentry care as little
For delvers, ditches, an sic cattle;
They gang as saucy by poor folk,
As I wad by a stinking brock.
I’ve notic’d, on our laird’s court-day,
(An monie a time my heart’s been wae),
Poor tenant bodies, scant o cash,
How they maun thole a factor’s snash:
He’ll stamp an threaten, curse and swear
He’ll apprehend them, poind their gear;
While they maun stan, wi aspect humble,
An hear it a’, an fear and tremble!
I see how folk live that hae riches;
But surely poor-folk maun be wretches!

To which Luath, a poor man’s dog, replies:

They’re no sae wretched’s ane wad think:
Tho constantly on poortith’s brink,
They’re sae accustom’d wi the sight,
The view o’t gies them little fright.
Then chance and fortune are sae guided,
They’re ay in less or mair provided;
An tho fatigu’d wi close empoyment,
A blink o rest’s a sweet enjoyment.
The dearest comfort o their lives,
Their grushie weans an faithfu wives;
The prattling things are just their pride,  
That sweetens a’ their fireside.  
An whyles twalpennie worth o nappy  
Can mak the bodies unco happy:  
They lay aside their private cares,  
To mind the Kirk and State affairs;…

If we start with Caesar’s notion that “poor-folk maun be wretches,” we will not advance our understanding. We will be stuck, like the rich child who had to write a school paper about a poor family. Having no knowledge of poverty, the child wrote, “The family was so poor that the gardener was poor, the maids were poor, even the butler was poor.”

But Luath’s assertion, “They’re no sae wretched’s ane wad think,” is Burns’ own point of view. We have to respect the truth of Luath’s words: that people get by, that they have their rewarding and pleasurable moments – that life is hard, but worth the effort. Tam O’ Shanter and Souter Johnnie seem to be having an easy go of it:

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,  
E’e drown’d himself amang the nappy.

As do the “merry, friendly, country-folks” who:

Together did convene,  
To burn their nits, and pou their stocks,  
An haud their Halloween  
Fu blythe that night.

And in “The Cotter’s Saturday Night” we read:

…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.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,  
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;  
Th’ expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through  
To meet their dad, wi flichterin noise and glee.  
His wee bit ingle, blinkin bonilie,  
His clean hearth-stane, his thrifty wifie’s smile,  
The lisping infant, prattling at this knee,  
Does a’ his weary kiaugh and care beguile,  
An makes him quite forget his labor and his toil,…
An even more endearing vignette, to me, is the description of the impromptu celebrations that occurred during Burns’ stopover at the farmhouse of Archibald Prentice, on his way to Edinburgh in 1786.²

As we go forward we must try to separate the unattractive constants³ of a society based on subsistence farming – poverty, hard work, high infant mortality, periodic deaths and famines, epidemics, and unsanitary conditions – from the changes which were to overtake and overwhelm that way of life. I want to lay particular stress on this point. Nothing here should be taken as a negative criticism of the way of life that Robert Burns was born into. The aspects of the hard times that we need to look at are the result of forces that converged during Burns’ day and radically altered that ages-old way of life.

OUTLINE

We will first draw a picture of rural Scotland as it appeared around the year 1700. The countryside and the way of life had changed little during the preceding centuries, so this will give us a starting point for measuring change during the ensuing century.

Next, we will survey how human beings adapted to a changing environment from forty thousand years ago to 1700. This will establish that, contrary to our modern view of progress, older societies were conservative to a remarkable degree, changing only when forced to. Seen in this light, the Agricultural Revolution was a response to a widespread crisis, not a progressive development based on the accretion of knowledge from previous centuries. Such a survey will allow us to view the social upheaval of the eighteenth century in an anthropological context rather than the more usual sociopolitical context.

We will identify three forces that converged during the eighteenth century to create the changes: over-population, a dramatic shift in climate, and the willingness of landowners to experiment with new ideas in husbandry.

In order to understand the way that Scottish agriculture changed, we will spend more than a little time on English agriculture. The revolutionary changes in Scotland were based firmly and consciously on it.

We will then trace the course of the Agricultural Revolution in the Lowlands and Highlands and begin to note some of the changes it caused in the lives of common men and women.

As the tempo sped up during Burns’ adult years, we will see how, joined by the increasing wealth from trade and by the Industrial Revolution, the transformation of agriculture created widespread upheaval in the lives of common people.

Note that, although eighteenth-century Scots were quick to “lay aside their private cares, / To mind the Kirk and State affairs,” I will say as little as possible about politics and religion. As the Arabs say, “The dog barks, but the caravan moves on.”

² James Mackay, A Biography of Robert Burns, 250, q.v. [Reproduced in part in “Additional Notes and Selected Texts.”]
³ Sed vide Lucile F. Newman, (ed.), Hunger in History: Food Shortage, Poverty and Deprivation, 57. Some of these “constants” of subsistence farming may have represented a relatively recent development, or at least a recent intensification. “Europe of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries… may represent a real nadir in the history of human health.”
Scotland was overwhelmingly rural in 1700. Instead of the upscale suburb of today, picture Alloway as a hamlet connected to Ayr by a muddy track “pock-marked with the hooves of animals, fit for cattle, suitable for a tough pony with panniers or bags slung across its back, or drawing a sledge.” There was a network of these muddy tracks connecting hamlets and towns throughout the Lowlands – Tam O’ Shanter’s “dub and mire,” his “mosses, waters, slaps, and styles.” There were no carts and no carriage roads, with the exception of a few that connected large burghs, such as Glasgow to Paisley or Glasgow to Edinburgh by way of Stirling.

The common settlement was a hamlet, not a market town such as Ayr. It would have grown up initially at the center of a ploughgate, the amount of land that could be plowed by two or three plow teams. Over time, the hamlet would become diffuse, spread out, not compact like a village or market town. Fields lay open, unenclosed by hedge or treelined windbreaks. Tillage went higher up the slopes than today, for drainage, and boggy bottomland would be left as waste. Many of the farmers would have been sub- or joint tenants, working a ploughgate in common (in a system called runrig) with from two to twenty husbandmen, the land being divided into stip and allotted by an agreed upon rotation. To keep order among so many, there were strict rules about when plowing, sowing, and harvesting were done, when animals could be untethered, and so forth.

Farms with a single tenant (like those of the Burns family), as well as ploughgates farmed under a mass tenure, were divided into a fertile infield (about a quarter of the arable land, not necessarily proximal to the farmhouse, or even all of a piece), an outfield with soil of poor quality, and wasteland. Barley and oats would be grown in rotation on quarter sections of the infield and oats on the outfield. Usually a small amount of hemp and flax was also planted in a heavily manured section of infield. No land would be left fallow, except when the outfield was temporarily exhausted. Kail and mustard were grown in the kitchen yard. The land would be plowed using a team of four horses or oxen to as many as twelve oxen. High, rocky land with thin soil (such as those regularly and regrettable acquired by the Burns family, père et fils) required a lighter plow and fewer draft animals, perhaps a team of two horses.

The tenant or joint-tenant who held land directly from a landowner was known as a husbandman or gudeman.

Inferior to the husbandman, and usually his own subtenants, employed by him as ploughmen (hinds), herds and threshers, were the crofters, cottars, and grassmen… All had a hut and a kailyard, a small amount of fertile land on the infield and the right to graze a few animals on the moor… Generally, country shoemakers, weavers and tailors… were also cottars with a holding of infield land.

5 Ibid., 127 f. While this usage of infield and outfield held true throughout the Lowlands and Highlands, there were local variations. In Galloway, flax monopolized the whole infield. “In East Lothian, Fife, the Berwickshire Merse and some parts of Angus a further quarter of infield was given over to wheat with here and there another division for peas and beans.”
6 Ibid., 145.
The important animals would include a milk cow, a horse or pony, oxen, black-faced beef cattle, two or more kinds of sheep, and a large number of goats and chickens. No arable land was allotted for pasture. The animals fed on stubble after a field was harvested, on the plants growing wild in an outfield forced to be left fallow, and in the bogs or other waste areas, where they were looked after by a herdsman, who kept them constantly on the move.

THE FARMHOUSE

The Burns Cottage in Atlanta is a reproduction of a better sort of Alloway farmhouse. The Burns family stood just below the gentry, for the tenant who leased his land directly from a landowner was an aristocrat among peasants. The Burns Cottage would therefore be larger and better built than those of the lesser peasantry.

This large room would be the byre. Picture a dairy cow, a pony and various farm implements sharing its dirt floor. In severe weather, all of the animals might be huddled in here. In any weather, chickens would be roosting in the open rafters, and the heavily cobwebbed ceiling would be the underside of the thatched roof.

The next room is the ben, or parlour, which was generally used only as the gudeman’s study, to entertain important guests, and perhaps as the bedroom of the gudeman and gudewife. It might have been floored with deal, though this one was floored with flagstones and included the box-bed where young Robert and Gilbert slept.

The earthen-floored but, or kitchen, would be the center of farm life. Here the gudewife put in her long day of churning, spinning, cleaning, cooking, candle making and a myriad of tasks critical to the economy of the farm, such as milking and tending the kailyard. She might also assist with shearing and mucking out the byre. The gudeman and gudewife would sleep in the box-bed (if they did not sleep in the ben), while the children, older girls, and servants would sleep on straw mats. (The Burnses, always trying to do better and always struggling, did not have any servants). Many families placed boards across the kitchen rafters as a kind of rough loft where the older boys slept. On nights when the fire was particularly smoky, older children might choose to sleep in the byre with the animals.

Search in vain for the plumbing. There was none. The multi-use kitchen midden was an ubiquitous feature of the Scottish farmhouse.

Consider, though, that the lower ranks of the peasantry generally lived in hovels. Their cottages, about twelve feet in length, would be built with five-foot high stone or turf walls. These dwellings would often be without a chimney, the smoke going out through a hole in the roof. In those with the usual but-and-ben configuratin, “the peasant’s cow lived in the ben and was only prevented from coming up to the fire-place by the box-bed that divided the house in two. One writer describes how his mother always knew it was time to put the porridge on the fire when she heard the family cow standing behind her pass water for the second time.”

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7 Alan Dent, *Burns in His Time*, 32. “Stalks of hemp often took the place of candles for lighting purposes, and even near the coal-fields and collieries whole months were spent in cutting, drying and stacking peat to serve as fuel.”

Remarkably, even the rudest dwelling would include not only a copy of the Scriptures but other reading material, ranging from pamphlets in a cotter’s hovel to a small library in a tenant’s parlor. Next to the scarcity of trees, Samuel Johnson was most impressed by the number of books he encountered everywhere in his Scottish travels.

**Diet**

Oatmeal was the foundation of every meal – mixed with water to make gruel, milk to make porridge, or baked into bannocks (oatcakes). Virtually everyone had cows, goats, or ewes for milk and to supply cheese and butter for the late winter months. They mixed a little kail with barley grain to make a broth. Chickens produced eggs as well as meat for soup. Most diets included salt herring and shellfish, but salt mutton and beef were not available every day – sheep were too valuable for their wool, and sheep and cattle were destined for market. Freshly butchered beef was almost completely absent. Note that the diet was deficient in vegetables. They grew mustard and kail in the kitchen garden, but as yet they had no potatoes, carrots, or turnips. They drank home-brewed barley beer, for which virtually all of their barley was grown, and they drank spirits on occasion, but wine was seen only at the laird’s table.

**Economy**

Scotland’s economy was in a deep recession in 1700. Between 1695 and 1700, £400,000, half of Scotland’s available currency, was lost in the attempt to establish a Scottish colony in the Central America. King William’s war with France disrupted Scottish trade with the continent, a trade already declining because of Dutch reliance on their own growing textile industry. High tariffs at the English border limited linen exports, Scotland’s major industry, and England’s onerous Navigation Acts blocked Scottish merchants from all but a trickle of trade with the New World. Add to this the famines and deaths by starvation and typhus between 1695 and 1700, and we find Scotland, seven years before the Act of Union, sunk into a gloomy, dispirited sense of resignation.

The Act of Union in 1707 only added to the economic distress. While taxation fell unfairly upon the Scots, as they suspected, the major financial drain was from Scottish landowners spending Scottish rent money in England. After the parliament was dissolved, many lairds either moved to London or spent part of the year there. Moreover, while the Navigation Acts no longer kept Scotland from trading with the colonies, London merchants had a near monopoly on it. In the long run, Glasgow merchants were able to secure more than half of the tobacco trade with the American colonies, but it would take them fifty years to accomplish it.

**The Highlands, Part I—c. 1700**

Like their Lowland counterparts, Highland tenants raised barley and a little flax on the

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9 To this day, Scots have the lowest per capita consumption of vegetables of any European country. Might the fact that they also have the shortest life expectancy of any Western European country be related?
infield and oats on the outfield, working their adjoining strips communally in the runrig manner. Similarly, their steadings were organised around hamlets. The diet was similar to that of the Lowlands, but more use was made of blood puddings in late winter, and kail only made it into the Highlands well after 1700.

In contrast, Highland agriculture was based more on animal husbandry. They sold cattle, goats, cheese, butter, and hides, and they bought additional grain from the Lowlands. While they, too, were mostly sub- or joint tenants, they generally remitted their rent to a tacksman, who may have been a close relative of the chief or laird. A tacksman may have been a chieftain (for example, of a glen within the clan territory), or he may have just been a major tenant, perhaps with added martial responsibilities.

Compared to the primitive infrastructure of the Lowlands in 1700, it might be well to consider the Highlands as having none at all. At any rate, there were no roads. Markets were more distant, and the Gaelic tongue limited access to them. Believing themselves to be related by blood to their chief, the bond between them was stronger than that between the laird and tenant of the Lowlands.

They made their own plows, more suitable for the thin, rocky soil, and they spaded steep ground. The plow would be pulled by three or four garrons, wild ponies caught in the spring for that purpose and for use as pack animals. Cattle were in very poor shape by spring, when they had to be lifted to their feet and carried to a grassy strip near the steading. Early in June came the flitting or ‘trial’, as the move to the summer shielings was variously called. The shielings were the dry and grassy hollows of the hill corries… where the sgitheil bothain or shieling huts stood, walled and roofed with turf. Early on the day appointed, the townships were as busy as ant-heaps, with the women scuttling around collecting churns, three-legged stools, bowls.”

A BRIEF SURVEY FROM 40,000 BC TO THE 18TH CENTURY

Scotland went through a remarkable transformation in the eighteenth century, most of it in the last half of Burns’ life. How did Britain move from “the Golden Age of the European Peasant” of 1500 to the agricultural crisis that was becoming evident around 1700? And how did the ensuing suite of solutions to that crisis create even more difficulty for tens of thousands of tenant farmers and agricultural laborers in England and Scotland? To answer the first question, we need to step back in time.

10 Smout, op. cit., 130. “Goats were an important dairy and meat animal, particularly in the Highlands where they existed in astonishing numbers: 100,000 goat and kid skins were sent to London in a single year at the end of the seventeenth century.”
11 W. H. Murray, Rob Roy MacGregor: His Life and Times, 44. The cattle were small enough to lift at the time. “All cattle were the black or brown, shaggy aboriginal breed known as kyloes. (The tawney-red Highland cattle are a nineteenth-century cross-breed).”
12 Ibid., 48. Vide pp. 43-55 for a description of Highland life in the late 1600’s, a life filled with purposeful and largely joyous activity. No statistical account can measure the tragedy of what was lost with its passing. This carefully drawn picture stands in stark contrast to the impoverished and demoralized Highlanders witnessed by Boswell and Johnson one hundred years later.
Population Growth and the Invention of Agriculture

Forty thousand years ago, about the time that small bands of anatomically modern humans – that would be us – began to filter into Europe, the world population was between 400,000 and 800,000. Every human being on earth could have attended, in succession, from four to eight major college football games. Or visualize, if you will, the number of teenagers who show up in Buckhead on Saturday night.

They – the anatomically modern humans, not the Buckhead teenagers – effectively hunted large Ice-Age mammals, such as the wooly mammoth, the huge steppe bison, and the wooly rhinoceros, and fended off such awesome predators as the saber-tooth cat, enormous Arctic wolves, and hyenas the size of a modern tiger. Being just as smart and inventive as we are today, they developed technologies suitable to the task. With the spear thrower, a three-foot long, notched stick used from Europe to Australia, the Ice-Age hunter could hurl a spear with great accuracy and velocity. The number of hunter-gatherer bands increased as retreating glaciers and better social organization opened new regions – northern Asia and the Wester Hemisphere, plus mountain areas, dense forests, and semi-arid regions.

The warming trend that followed the last glacial maximum of 18,000 years ago saw the spread of new grasses. Antelope, bison, horses, deer, wild sheep and goats, the auroch – ancestor of modern cattle – and others were able to thrive in the new environment, but around fifteen thousand years ago the wooly mammoth and many other large Ice-Age mammals began to decline, and by ten thousand years ago they were gone. In order to hunt the swift, or inaccessible, or elusive animals that survived, people invented snares, the harpoon, the sling, and the bow; fishing techniques improved; and they began to exploit a wider range of plant foods, including the new grasses.

Still, population rapidly reached the maximum that the land could support. This happened first in areas that had been picked over for the longest time: southwestern Asia, northern India, China, Central America, and the Andes; so that, even as hunter-gatherers were successfully adopting new ways, some were having to go a step further.

Between fourteen and eleven thousand years ago, people of the Natufian culture, in the area of present-day Israel, began building permanent villages near large stands of wild wheat and barley. By ten thousand years ago, people throughout the Fertile Crescent were cultivating – not just harvesting – these cereal grasses. At roughly the same time, demographic pressure led to cultivation of local cereal grasses in other parts of Asia and in the Western Hemisphere. Within another two thousand years, many animals had

13 L. Luca Cavalli-Sforze, et al., *The History and Geography of Human Genes*. All world and European population estimates are drawn from this work, particularly from p. 68. I have used a single source for consistency, but populations estimates for periods before writing, the Han Dynasty census, Roman and early church records, and so forth, vary greatly. Forty thousand years ago there could have been as few as three hundred thousand or as many as a million people; ten thousand years ago there could have been as few as five million or as many as ten million. There is broad scholarly agreement for figures from about three hundred years ago for Scotland, England and the British colonies, so I have taken these from a variety of sources.
14 Vide Charlton Ogden, Jr., “The First Discovery of America.” 92-99, for a thorough discussion of Ice-Age animals.
16 Ibid., 214 f.
17 Cavalli-Sforza, et al., op. Cit., 106.
been domesticated, the world population had risen to between three and five million, and farming had spread from Mesopotamia to Anatolia and the Balkans. It would spread to most of Europe in another two thousand years, by way of the Danube River and the Mediterranean coast.

While these pioneers prepared the soil with a hoe, the plow came into extensive use by the beginning of the Bronze Age. By the Iron Age, the Greeks and Romans also had a method of farming that facilitated the continual usage of land without loss of productivity – the method of fallow and of crop rotation (which included nitrogen-fixing legumes), with the fallow field being treated intensely with ashes and manure. By the time of the founding of the Roman Republic, world population had grown to about 160 million and would reach 770 million by 1750.

Europe’s numbers kept pace with the other five great population centers – China, southwestern Asia, northern India, Central America and the Andes. In 400 BC, Europe had a population of about twenty-three million. By 1000, thirty million; by 1500; sixty-six million; and by 1750, one hundred and nine million.

THE FIRST FORCE – THE MALTHUSIAN EFFECT

“By 1300, increasing human numbers and exhaustion of new lands became the continent’s nemesis.”\(^{18}\) The crisis was postponed by the plague of 1348, which killed fifty percent of the population. There followed a decline, not fully explained by recurring visitations, which reduced the population to a third of its pre-plague level. The population began to rebound after 1480.

Agricultural options were running out again during the 1600’s. New land represented a fraction of Europe’s arable land, so a farm family had little choice but to stay where they were. At the same time, population growth was accelerating. Human beings had reached another crossroads, as when the Ice-Age fauna collapsed and, a little later, when population outstripped natural resources on the eve of the invention of agriculture.

Clearly, the primary force that led to the Agricultural Revolution was this: subsistence farming, successful at sustaining population growth for ten thousand years, on every continent save Australia, could no longer fill every mouth, and there were more mouths on the way with each generation. This became so evident that the Rev. Thomas Malthus codified it in his famous 1798 “Essay on the Principle of Population.” In some areas, such as the Highlands, tenancies were growing absurdly small as they were divided among sons. In other areas, younger sons had to leave farming to become agricultural workers or else migrate to the towns or emigrate to the colonies.

The issue of health was a grim crollary to overcrowding. First, overcrowding was conducive to the spread of infectious diseases. Second, hunger haunted Scotland throughout both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Malnutrition from too little food as well as from not enough greens made people more likely to die when diseases struck.

Typhus was particularly virulent in the seventeenth century, only subsiding to the

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\(^{18}\) Newman, *op. cit.*, 115.
sixteenth century level after if helped to kill perhaps a quarter\textsuperscript{19} of the Scottish population during the famines of the 1694-1699 period. Smallpox then became the great killer of the eighteenth century, especially of children, but eventually yielded to inoculation, common after 1765, and to Jenner’s vaccination (1796). After about 1770, the potato (and greens such as carrots and turnips) reduced starvation and scurvy (pandemic in northern Europe, but especially so in Scotland). For every health gain, though, a new threat emerged as population increased and as Scotland became more urban. Thus, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis, and cholera became the major killers in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{20}

**MITIGATING FORCES – EMIGRATION…**

Before we talk about the second force, let me mention some counter-forces and events that helped prolong the viability of subsistence farming in Europe. The New World opened the possibility of land to clear and plant. “In 1713 the population of the twelve continental colonies was nearly 360,000. In 1760, with Georgia added, it approached 1.6 million.”\textsuperscript{21} Most of this increase was because colonial families were much larger than those in Europe. Still, the tide of immigration swelled the numbers. While the first transplants had been mostly English, the eighteenth-century immigrant was usually Germans or Scots-Irish, and, as the century progressed, the Scots-Irish predominated.\textsuperscript{22}

Scots migrated principally to England, Northern Ireland, and the New World. Large groups began emigrating from the Islands in the 1740’s, often organized by tacksmen. During the eighteenth century, most of the Highland and Lowland emigrants had some capital and could afford passage, unlike the emigrants of the next century, who were often cotters that had lost their holdings due to the Highland Clearances. While some would have left for religious or political reasons, the primary causes were at first overcrowding and hunger, followed later in the century by displacement associated with the Agricultural Revolution. “In the peak period (1768-1775) rather over 20,000 left for the colonies, about two-thirds of them Highlanders. Other Lowlanders were going to England to find work in workshops and offices where their relatively high standards of education often put them at a premium amongst Lancashire and London employers.”\textsuperscript{23}

While migration helped to mitigate the agricultural crisis, it would not have seemed so to those who stayed behind. Population increase gently outpaced emigration throughout the eighteenth century. “Less than a million people were added to the population [of Scotland and England] between 1600 and 1700. By the end of the eighteenth century however, there were a further three and a half million.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} Vide note 27 for a discussion of this figure.
\textsuperscript{20} Smout, op. cit., 271 ff.
\textsuperscript{22} Helen Horbeck Tanner, (ed.), *The Settling of North America: The Atlas of the Great Migrations into North America from the Ice Age to the Present*, 52.
\textsuperscript{23} Smout, op. cit., 264.
\textsuperscript{24} Rex Pope, (ed.), *Atlas of British Social and Economic History Since c. 1700*, 134.
...AND NEW FOOD CROPS

The introduction of higher-yield plants from the New World – the potato to western and northern Europe, maize to southern Europe – addressed the general agricultural crisis – more food per capita – without being as disruptive as later changes would prove to be. Anyone with a small plot could take advantage of these new plants, and it was among the poor that the potato had the greatest effect. It not only alleviated starvation during the frequent bad harvests of the eighteenth century, but the vitamin C in potatoes improved the general health of a population often ravaged by fatal diseases, especially when weakened by scurvy and hunger.

The potato had been grown in the gardens of the wealthy since the end of the previous century, but its acceptance became general as grain prices began a long, steady rise after the mid-eighteenth century. “It is probably true to say that by 1700 the potato was a common crop on the holdings of the poor throughout most of the Lowlands, and fifteen years later universal with one or two exceptions in all the Highland parishes.”

THE SECOND FORCE – A MINI-ICE AGE

A vast expansion of the Arctic ice pack deepened the agricultural crisis. Scotland was suffering an oscillation of climate that brought the greatest cold since the Ice Age. It began around 1550, ended around 1850, and reached its height in 1700, when inland lochs like Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond froze over. “The sea-temperatures off Scotland in winter slumped to 3 degrees centigrade (5 degrees below present). The eyewitness records were of hard, long winters and hot summers, interspersed with frequent bitter summers when harvest failed, cattle died, and woods were destroyed on exposed land.”

In the 1690’s, a series of disasters struck at Scottish agriculture. Grain prices fell in Europe. Disease spread among the cattle in Lowland and Highland pastures. And in four out of five of the years 1695-9 crops failed throughout the land. Misery and poverty were rife; hardly a district did not suffer. Hunger was accompanied by disease, notably typhus, which was a killer. Men dropped dead trying to eat grass in the fields… Nearly a quarter of Scotland’s population of about 1.25 million died in these last years of the seventeenth century.

Bad weather continued to threaten harvests throughout the century. There was a near famine in 1740, and crop failures were recorded in 1756, 1762, 1771, 1782, 1795 and 1799.

25 Smout, op. cit., 270.
26 Murray, op. Cit., 44.
27 Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry, The History of Scotland, 183. Smout, op cit., 242, also supports a roughly 20-25 per cent mortality for these years, citing contemporary accounts; but R. A. Houston, The Population History of Britain and Ireland 1550-1750, 17, posits a population of 1.23 million in 1691, dropping by 10-15 per cent by 1700, and rising to 1.19 million by 1755.
Concerning Robert and Gilbert Burns at Mossgiel, we read:

The 1780s are now known to have been one of those clusters of severe weather towards the tail-end of the ‘Little Ice-Age’ (1550-1850) and Gilbert does not exaggerate when he speaks of the two frosty years (1784-5). They were preceded by three years of exceptionally long and hard frosts (1781-3) resulting in poor harvests and crop failures all over Scotland. In particular, 1783 was a year of atrocious weather, with snow lying till April and piercing cold wind in May followed by continuous heavy rain in late May and June.  

THE THIRD FORCE – “ENGLISH HUSBANDRY”

The first two forces, population and climate, would alone have led clever human beings to seek an agricultural solution. In China, for example, agricultural output was increased by a gradual freeing of serfs and by developing labor-intensive methods that relied upon terracing and irrigation. The solution in Scotland and England, however, proved to be at least as disruptive as the problem it addressed. This third force was a fashion for scientific farming techniques, called “improvement.” We can use the word fashion with confidence. Many of the early improvers (both in Scotland and England) were dilettantes, somewhat carried away with the clarity of understanding that the Scientific Revolution was providing.

THE ROMAN WAY YIELDS TO FLEMISH IMPROVEMENT

To understand the social upheaval that “improvement” brought about in Scotland, we must start with English agricultural reform, which Scottish reformers consciously imitated. English agriculture was based on the Roman three-field system. Wheat was grown in one field, barley in another, while the third lay fallow, its fertility replenished through the incidental happenstance of nitrogen-fixing plants, by the droppings of sheep and other grazing animals, and by plowing it all under when the field could once more be tilled.

Until certain Flemish farmers developed a new method, farmers had to choose, from very early in the Agricultural Age, whether to use fields for tillage or for grazing.

28 Mackay, Biography, op. Cit., 135 f.
29 We can perhaps get inside this heady experience by recalling our first reading of the Sherlock Holmes stories, how Holmes used his “Science of Deduction and Analysis” to clarify what was to Watson (and to us) a scene devoid of feature or, worse, made up of a plethora of undifferentiated detail.
30 “Agriculture.” Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910, I, 389. [Some aspects of Roman agriculture had fallen into desuetude in Medieval Europe. In England, the invading Anglo-Saxons kept up crop rotation and fallowing, but all other techniques dropped away.] “Lupine, beans, peas and vetches were grown for fodder, and meadows, often artificially watered, supplied hay.” And quoted ibidem from Virgil’s Georgics. “Either let the land lie fallow every other year or else let spelt follow pulse, vetches or lupine. Repetition of one crop exhausts the ground; rotation will lighten the strain, only the exhausted soil must be copiously dressed with manure and ashes.”
31 David Grigg, The Transformation of Agriculture in the West, 17. “The fallow in the three-field system began to be eliminated in part of Flanders in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when legumes and root crops were grown in rotation with the cereals.”
The process [of enclosure and improvement] began in the 17th century when Sir Richard Weston, a royalist landowner in Surrey, who fled to Flanders during the Civil War, learned from a Flemish merchant in 1644 why farmers on the poor soils between Ghent and Antwerp were so prosperous. They rotated their crops: first flax, then turnips, then oats undersown with clover. The turnips and clover provided large quantities of food for their livestock, which in turn gave far larger quantities of manure than could possibly have been obtained in the old system; and this manure raised the fertility of the soil.\(^{32}\)

Note that, instead of having to devote fields exclusively to sheep or cattle raising, animals could be rotated along with the crops. The fallow field could now be planted with vegetation that would feed far more animals and enrich the soil at the same time – through the great increase in the quantity of manure, by the nitrogen-fixing qualities of turnips and “artificial” grasses, such as sainfoin, lucerne, and clover, and by the addition of humus when the plants were plowed under.

Although Sir Richard, his lands having been sequestered, was not able to apply this idea, a few who read his writing in England began trying the Flemish method.

Still further improvement resulted when Jethro Tull invented the seed drill in 1701 by which seed could be sown in rows instead of broadcast, thus allowing inter-row tillage and the killing of weeds while crops were growing. Fallowing thus became unnecessary; all the arable land could be cropped every year, and turnips were the cleaning crop.\(^{33}\)

Why was this so radical? Until Tull began a study of how plants draw nourishment from the soil, farmers did not have the idea of planting in rows to allow cultivation, that is, weeding and periodically breaking up the soil around the plants. Tull’s mechanical seed drill also permitted a very frugal usage of seeds. Up to then, grain was broadcast with prodigal disregard for how much of it actually produced mature plants, and tares freely competed with grain for nurture.

Tull lacked the gift of persuasion, and his system was not adopted even by his neighbours\(^ {34}\) till it had been taken up in Scotland [beginning around 1714]. In 1730 Charles Townshend, 2nd Viscount Townshend (1674-1738), retired from political life to his estate at Raynham, Norfolk, and elaborated what is now called the Norfolk rotation (turnips in drilled rows, barley, clover, wheat). He also revived the ancient practice of marling light soils. The results were astonishing and fortunes were made: one farm rose in rental value from £180 to £800, others even more. Nevertheless, the improvements spread very slowly. Forty years after Townshend’s death, Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester, driven to farm his light land at Holkham, Norfolk, because some of this tenants could not, used Townshend’s

\(^{32}\) “Agriculture.” Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1959, I, 358 f.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 359.
\(^{34}\) That is, till Tull taught Townshend to till.
methods and grew good crops of wheat on land that had previously borne only miserable crops of rye.35

ENCLOSURE IN ENGLAND

Enclosure was essential to this new method of agriculture. Stockbreeding and the control of disease, impossible where the varied and scrubby native stock was allowed to breed randomly on the commons, required it. Other forms of improvement, such as reclaiming marginal land, laying in of tile drains, importing fruit trees and other new plants, were beyond the means of the tenants. When it became clear to a sufficient number of landowners that enclosed and improved land farmed by hired laborers would bring in far more than could be collected in rent, the English tenant’s way of life was doomed.

Considering that eviction followed virtually every Parliamentary Act of Enclosure in England, the following figures make clear how vast the changes were for the entire class of tenant farmers:

The scale of movement was enormous; some 5,300 Acts were passed (from the first in 1614), the bulk falling in the period 1750-1850… The total area involved was about 6.8 million acres (4.5 million being arable, the rest commons and wastes), or about one-fifth of the land area of England. The result was not just an agrarian reorganization, but also a topographical one, in which the enclosed areas (chiefly the Midland plain) acquired their large fields, straight hedgerows, and farmsteads separated from the village, lying in the newly-created enclosed fields.36

A CONSIDERATION

We have surveyed the spread of agriculture and the growth of population in order, among other things, to make it clear that the Agricultural Revolution’s time had come round at last. We have seen that people throughout time made major technological adjustments to the food problem when – and only when – they were forced to, then used the new methods with little change for millennia. People smart enough to invent the spear thrower did not have to wait thousands of years for the slow accretion of knowledge in order to invent the bow. Similarly, people who were smart enough to build permanent villages near stands of wild cereal grasses could have invented agriculture then, not two to four thousand years later.

As with the technological innovations that allowed human beings to sustain population growth during the Ice Age, agriculture, once invented, needed little improvements to sustain growth for ten thousand years. Of course, there were important developments along the way. Goats, sheep, pigs and cattle were soon domesticated. The hoe gave way to the plow, and oxen were put to draft. Farmers discovered that legumes and other plants increased the fertility of a field, and they developed crop rotation, irrigation, the horse collar, windmills, and other improvements, but the basic idea of subsistence farming was

36 Pope, op. Cit., 3.
in place from the start: clear some land and grow enough food (animal and plant) so that you do not have to depend on hunting and gathering.

Whether caused by the introduction of sheep into the Highlands or by enclosure and improvement elsewhere, the eviction of tens of thousands of peasants from the land during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was driven by necessity. The changes eventually proved to be so efficacious that they became profit driven, but whatever the motive, a major change was inevitable. The old agricultural methods could not feed a population that was doubling and redoubling in spite of emigration and death by starvation and disease. We may be deeply saddened by the pain of those hard times, and we may be indignant at the inequity of the few growing rich while the many faced ruin:

They hung the man and flog the woman
Who steals a goose from off the Common,
But leave the greater thief go loose
Who steals the Common from the goose.37

But no other outcome was likely. We will see that, while enclosure and clearance took different forms in England, the Lowlands, and the Highlands, they led to a major population shift from the country to towns and cities. A single set of figures shows the magnitude of the demographic shift: in Scotland in 1750, only one person in eight lived in towns of greater than 4,000; by 1820, it was one person in three.38 There are examples of landowners and agricultural reformers in Scotland and England who tried to mitigate the demographic effects of the Agricultural Revolution. “Sir John Sinclair, the Scot who first brought the Great Sheep into the Highlandes during the brief experimental period, pleaded for a policy different from the barbaric clearances. He had envisioned slower and more considerate change. His plan was to encourage small tenants to join their land, hire from among themselves herdsmen in common, and buy small flocks at the nominal price.”39 They would still have had to leave the land; sheep need land, not owners. Very few of the tenants would be needed as herdsmen, with the rest just taking up grazing land.

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37 Cf. Oliver Goldsmith’s long poem, “The Deserted Village,” for a sense of contemporary reaction to enclosure. It reads in part: “A time there was, ere England’s griefs began, / When every rood of ground maintain’d its man; / For him light Labour spread her wholesome store, / Just gave what life required, but gave no more: / His best companions, Innocence and Health; / and his best riches, ignorance of wealth.”

38 Smout, op. Cit., 260 [Further, the census of 1851 showed that for the first time in British history the urban population was greater than the rural.]

THE AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION IN SCOTLAND
A COMPARISON

Before the Agricultural Revolution, England and Scotland – the Highlands and Islands included – were farmed principally by tenants, many of whom worked their open fields in a system of common tenure. (Additionally, England had a considerable number of farmers who owned and worked their own land – yeoman farmers – while Scotland had relatively few, known as bonnet lairds.)

Whereas English farmers used the three-field system of fallow and crop rotation, all of Scotland used the less efficient system of infield and outfield, with almost no planned fallow and limited crop rotation. How did this profound difference arise?

There are no written records of British agriculture before the Roman occupation, but consider these facts: the Romans built five thousand miles of roads in the course of their four-century occupation, during which time England became an exporting region within the empire; that is, England moved from subsistence farming to producing a substantial farm surplus. Since the Romans did not appreciably extend the amount of land already under cultivation, it was evidently “more intensely cultivated to meet Imperial demands.”

Further, the intensely cultivated area did not include any of Scotland, which enjoyed only a periodic Roman military presence. Corresponding precisely to the area of Roman colonization in England, the infield-outfield method was replaced by the three-field method, indistinguishable from the agriculture then being practiced in Rome. North of Hadrian’s Wall, the Lowlands, Highlands and Islands stayed with the older form.

When the Romans left, and as European trade and manufacture began to collapse, England slipped back into subsistence agriculture. Germanic and Scandinavian invaders did not bring radically different agricultural methods with them; they tilled land the way it was already being done when they moved into an area. The “sharp contrast between Celtic and Saxon agricultural systems is a delusion… Britons and Saxons did, in fact, face their problems the same way and work with the same kind of ploughs and the same methods.”

Saxons continued the three-field method in England and the infield-outfield method in the Lowlands. Similarly, the Normans reorganized agriculture in England and the Lowlands under the feudal manor system, but the method remained unchanged.

THE LOWLANDS, PART II – EARLY AND MIDDLE IMPROVERS, 1714-1760
A SHAKY START

Recall that “Turnip” Townshend adopted the Flemish four-course rotation and Tull’s method of planting in drilled rows. Certain Scottish landowners began practicing “English husbandry” as early as 1714, decades before it became popular in England. They formed the Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture in Scotland in 1723, which soon had upwards of three hundred members, wealthy men who could indulge their new agricultural hobby. But timing is everything. With bad roads and backward market

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40 G. O. Sayles, The Medieval Foundations of England, xvi. Vide Chapert X for a discussion of how the open-field system – that is, communal farming – may have arisen.
41 Ibid., 12.
towns, Scotland lacked the infrastructure to support it. “In the Lowlands the main roads were constructed under the Turnpike Act, the earliest of which was obtained in 1750.”42 These enthusiasts lacked business savvy and farming experience; and, while the market for Scottish linen and cattle was strong, it was too narrow to assure a return on their extravagant investments.

Because there was no clear financial advantage to the new methods, other landowners were slow to follow the lead of these pioneers. The tenancy scorned their amateurish efforts and kept to the old ways, but, lacking capital and faced with a primitive infrastructure, they could not have followed at this time anyway. “The state of land communications was both a reflection and a cause of peasant subsistence. Had there been more goods to move, there would have been an incentive to improve the roads. Had the roads been better, farmers would more readily have attended market to sell their grain.”43 It may be worthwhile to note here some other reasons that would keep the tenantry out of the game for a while.

As we have seen, for reasons of order and equity where land was tilled in common, every phase of agriculture was regulated – the timing of planting and harvesting, the number of animals allowed to graze on common land, when fences could be lowered to allow livestock to forage on the stubble, and so forth. These were not mere habits of usage, but legally binding rules, the infringement of which made up a large portion of the cases heard in the Baron Courts “on our laird’s court-day.”44 Changes required by improvement, then, would be difficult for one joint – or subtenant to effect.

Alongside this were customs and beliefs that contributed to resistance to change. Farmers would not clear the wrack because weeds “keep the corn warm.” Musty, moldy hay collected from bogs “brings cows a-bulling.” Trees would “wrong the undergrowth.” Trenching for drainage would cause “the loss of the five or six foot strip of grass.”45 and that in a country in which most bottomland was too wet to cultivate. (“If you can see Ailsa Craig from the Ayrshire coast, it means it’s going to rain; if you can’t, it’s raining already!”)

There was a tendency, well noted at the time, for tenants to eschew permanent improvements that would result in a rent increase, and the vast majority of Scottish farmers paid rent. “The landowners were not numerous – outside the southwest where very small estates were common there were probably less than 5,000 men who possessed the right to inherit or to sell the ground they held… At the apex of the pyramid stood fewer than a hundred great families, those of the nobility and principal Highland chiefs… The remaining landowners… were not of noble rank: they were comprehended under the general title of laird.”46 Because of entail,47 the purchase of land was a complex process and, at any rate, beyond the means of the tenantry.

43 Smout, op. cit., 120.
44 Vide ibidem pp. 123-126 for a discussion of the Baron Court and how it was constituted in various jurisdictions. Since the court was generally presided over by the laird, or by his representative, such as his baillie, the tenant was at a disadvantage in disputes with the laid.
45 Ibid., 123.
Though improvement did not catch fire in this early period, it had long-lasting effects that would eventually transform Scotland, and certain features of it set the enclosure movement in the Lowlands apart from the course it would take in England and in the Highlands. The experiences of anglophile John Cockburn of Ormiston contain many of these features:

His interest in agriculture was a cultural one rather than an economic one. This was his bit for Scotland, his way of dragging her into the Britain of the eighteenth century. He succeeded to his lands in 1714 and immediately set about enclosing with ditches and hedges a farm in his own possession: four years later he began a system of giving nineteen-year leases... providing the tenants undertook enclosure on the model of the home farm... All the steadings on the estate were rebuilt. The sons of his tenants were sent at his expense to the best cultivated counties of England to learn the new husbandry... The second step of the programme was to rebuild the local farmtoun into a modern English-style village, to serve as a market for the surplus the new farmers were producing. He feued out the ‘new town’ of Ormiston under strict controls about the accommodation and appearance of the houses, built a brewery and distillery, laid out at a bleachfield and introduced workers from Ireland and from Holland to teach the best methods of flax preparation.48

Cockburn overreached himself and in 1747 was forced to sell out. Several other high-profile fellow improvers bankrupted or were crippled by debt. A minority of them succeeded and increased their wealth through good sense and good management.

Note the main features (shared by several of his fellow improvers) that distinguish Cockburn’s effort from the tragic course that enclosure would take in England and the Highlands in the latter part of the century. He was motivated by the idea of improvement rather than profit. He offered long leases instead of evicting and replacing tenants with laborers. He improved the physical condition of his estate, including the building of a new farmtown, such that the level of the tenantry improved along with the estate.

The work of Cockburn and his fellow improvers was not lost. They had broken the mold and showed that new ways could work. So much of what they did was educational that landowners and tenants began to adapt and build on the knowledge, so that the new agriculture slowly expanded.

Unlike in the Highlands and in England, improvement included some of the peasantry.49 Many small holders and agricultural workers would lose their little patches and became paid laborers or worse, but a few tenants at the top – at Burns’ level – had the opportunity to become middle-class farmers.

46 Ibid., 135.
47 “Scotland.” Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910, XXIV, 422. “[A] stricter law of entail [was] introduced in 1685. Thus the largest estates remain in the hands of the old hereditary families. The almost absolute power formerly wielded by landlords, who within their own territories were lords of regality, hindered independent agricultural enterprise, and it was not until the abolition of heritable jurisdictions in 1748 that agriculture made real progress.”
48 Smout, op. cit., 293.
AYRSHIRE ON THE EVE OF CHANGE

Recalling Ayrshire as it appeared about 1750, one writer shows us how little it had changed since 1700:

There was still hardly a practicable road in the country… The farm-houses were mere hovels, moated with clay, having an open hearth or fireplace in the middle, the dunghill at the door; the cattle starving, and the people wretched. The few ditches which existed were ill constructed, and the hedges worse preserved… no fallows – no green crops – no sown grass – no carts or waggons – no straw yards; hardly a potato, or any other esculent root, and, indeed, no garden vegetables; unless a few Scotch kail, which, with milk and oatmeal, formed the diet of the people. There was little straw, and no hay except a scanty portion of the coarsest quality collected from the bogs… The ground was scourged with a succession of oats after oats, as along as they would pay for seed and labour, and afford a small surplus of oatmeal for the family, and then remained in a state of absolute sterility, or over-run with thistles, till rest again persuaded it to reproduce a scanty crop.  

Nevertheless, the slow, piecemeal process of improvement continued. We read from an official Agricultural Report of 1793 concerning the period just after 1750:

About forty years ago, the late Earl of Eglinton, who possessed a very large and valuable property, dispersed over a great extent in the most improvable parts of Ayrshire, resolved to rescue his estates from the condition in which he found them. An eminent farmer, Mr. Wright of Ormiston, was brought from East Lothian to introduce the proper mode of ploughing, leveling ridges, farrowing, drilling, turnip-husbandry, and rotation of crops. Great attention was bestowed on the breed of horses and cattle. Ploughmen and dairy people were brought from various parts of England. Fences were made on an extensive scale, and the country was beautified by a multitude of three-clumps, belts, and plantations… The demand for cheese and butter to supply the multiplying wants of Glasgow, Paisley, Greenock and Port-Glasgow, led to increasing care respecting milch-cows and dairies. The English market afforded ready sale for black cattle; and the growing manufactures of the country introduced the benefits of opulence.

Roads, ditches and bridges would soon be improved in the Lowlands under the Turnpike Acts. Recall that in 1700 the Highlands had no roads, so all traffic was on foot. A cattle drive meant walking along with the herd and guiding it up hill down dale, fording

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49 One excepts the mass evictions that sparked the Levellers Revolt and kept Galloway and Dumfriesshire in turmoil in the summer of 1724. These evictions and enclosures were not based on improvement, but on the failure of tenants to keep up rent following several years of bad harvests. Here the land was enclosed and converted to the profitable raising of cattle for the English market. The short-lived furor sparked a national debate, however, which may have played a part in mitigating the harshness of later enclosures and evictions in the Lowlands.

50 Quoted opere citato, Dent, 31.

51 Note that Wright was a former tenant of John Cockburn, but now risen to the newly forming middle class of farmers.
streams along the way. Lowland hamlets and towns, with few exceptions, were connected by a network of tracks, unsuitable for wheeled traffic. The situation did not begin to change in the Highlands until General Wade constructed the excellent military roads between 1725 and about 1735, and it was only after mid-century that land communication improved in the Lowlands, beginning with the first Turnpike Act (1750), which authorized tolls to fund the creation and improvement of roads and bridges and to maintain ditches for drainage, critical in such a rainy land.

We have considered the economic effect of poor roads, but there was also a social effect – that of isolation. Scots in most of the eighteenth century traveled only when compelled by necessity. With travel so infrequent, the few inns offered little in the way of comfort or cleanliness, and travelers usually arranged to stay overnight with a friend or relative, as did Burns on the way to Edinburgh in 1786. He would pen his “Epigram on Rough Roads” the same year:

I’m now arrived – thanks to the gods!
Thro pathways rough and muddy,
A certain sign that makin roads
Is no this people’s study:
Altho I’m not wi Scripture cram’d,
I’m sure the Bible says
That heedless sinners shall be damn’d,
Unless they mend their ways.

THE LOWLANDS, PART III – OPTIMISM, 1760-1780
THE QUICKENING

By the 1760’s, the gloomy, depressed mood of 1700 was rapidly changing to one of high spirited optimism. Linen sales increased. Scotland’s tobacco trade with the American colonies, with almost all of it re-exported to France, went from ten percent in 1707 to more than fifty percent of British tobacco trade by 1760. Next, between 1755 and 1771, the value of all exports (including re-export) rose by 250 percent and amounted to between five and ten percent of all British trade.53

Wealth was pouring into the west from the colonial tobacco trade, particularly to Glasgow merchants, but nearby towns were also on the rise. “Greenock and Paisley, Kilmarnock and Renfrew, for instance, were mushrooming with their neighbour on the Clyde and full of thrusting business and ambitious merchants.”54

Lord Auchinleck, James Boswell’s father, is often mentioned as one of the important improvers during this middle phase. His estates were five miles from Mauchline. In Samuel Johnson’s words of 1773:

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52 Quoted opere citato, Dent, 32.
53 Smout, op. cit., 244.
Lord Auchinleck, who is one of the Judges of Scotland, and therefore not wholly at leisure for domestick business or pleasure, has yet found time to make improvements in his patrimony. He has built a house of hewn stone, very stately, and durable, and has advanced the value of his land with great tenderness to his tenants.  

Evidence of the improving infrastructure might be inferred from the fact that Boswell and Johnson, having taken leave of the Highlands (and having just completed a visit with Lady Eglinton, whose improved Ayrshire estates were just mentioned), “were now in a country not only ‘of saddles and bridles,’ but of post-chaises; and having ordered one from Kilmarnock, we got to Auchinleck before dinner.”  

In 1760 almost all districts had at least some large landowners practicing “English husbandry,” and by 1775 a few places were using clover and turnips, which allowed them to send more cattle to the Falkirk tryst. James Small’s iron plough, invented in Berwickshire in 1763, was coming into wider use. The modern pattern of enclosed fields was on the rise. “It had probably gone furthest in the Lothians, on some estates of the north-east and black-cattle lands in Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire; but even in these regions it is unlikely that as much as a third of the total land surface was yet enclosed.”  

In 1776, William Burnes took possession of Lochlie. “The farm was to be enclosed, sub-divided and limed by McClure [the landowner] at the rate of 100 bolls of lime per acre,” an arrangement that included two elements – enclosure and liming – indicating a great advance in the thinking of the tenantry. William Burnes and his sons, Robert and Gilbert, did their utmost to become part of the merging middle-class of farmers, but their sheer bad luck at selecting farms doomed the effort. All of the farms had poor, rocky, acid soil. One, Mount Oliphant, was rented by William Burnes in 1766 for £50 per year. “Thirty years later, despite the revolution which had taken place in agriculture in the interim, the annual rental of Mount Oliphant was actually £5 less than Burnes had been paying.” In the decade of the 1780’s, Robert Burns attempted to leave farming to become a flax heckler (1781), made firm plans to emigrate to Jamaica (1786), and finally took employment as an exciseman (1788).  

THE HIGHLANDS, PART II – SOCIAL COLLAPSE AND IMPROVERS, C. 1700-1790  

It is convenient to view the collapse of the Highland culture as a singular occurrence based on the failure of Prince Charles Edward Stuart to install his father upon the throne of Scotland and England in 1745 and 1746. This view depends upon an understanding of the Highlands as a proud and isolated land, bypassed by time and pursuing its own ancient ways until the end. However, that way of life was changing even in the last half of the previous century.

54 Ibid., 365.  
55 Samuel Johnson, A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, 142.  
57 Smout, op. cit., 246.  
58 Mackay, Biography, op. cit., 113.  
59 Ibid., 41.
“By 1700 or 1730… several things were manifestly different from what they had been within the living memory of most men’s fathers.”60 The grandest courts, such as Dunvegan, had declined. A Macleod steward writing in 1703 claimed that it had been sixty years since any of the island clans had put a young chief to the test by making him lead a raid on his neighbors. “The last full-scale private battle between two clans had been fought between the Campbells and the Sinclairs at Atlimarlich outside Wick in 1680.”61 The old way was going out of fashion. A chief, for example, might encourage a cattle raid, and even organize it, but now stood aloof from the actual proceedings.

The failed Jacobite uprising of 1715 undermined both the clan system and Highland culture in three ways. First, two peers and many important followers were executed. One hundred and sixty people were banished from the realm and forfeited their estates. Second, beginning in 1725 and extending for about ten years, General George Wade directed the building of 250 miles of military roads and forty bridges in the Highlands, where before there were neither. This road system, far superior to the Lowland roads, opened the Highlands to the same market forces to which the rest of Scotland and England were subject. Even the building of the roads had an insidious effect – that of putting clansmen to work as paid laborers, even when their chief or laird opposed it. Third, General Wade organized Highlanders into patrols – the Black Watch – whose job was to be alert for cattle thieves as well as Jacobites.

Emigration, especially to Canada, began before the final Jacobite uprising. Some of these exoduses were large, where a tacksman would organize a significant portion of a clan to emigrate as a group, (though most of these occurred after 1750, when tacksmen emigrated on their own initiative or were dismissed so that landowners could work directly with their tenants, increasing the amount of rent flowing to them.)

Of course the failure of the ‘Forty-five hastened the disintegration of the clan system by crushing the most warlike clans.

The nucleus of the Jacobite army was not composed of loyal followers of the House of Stuart. It was composed of men who families had been on the edge of starvation for more than a year because of failed crops due to the harsh Scottish winters of 1743 and 1744. For six months before the Prince’s arrival, not a scrap of oatmeal was to be found in the upper Highlands.”62

Prince Charles distributed captured grain to the families in the area where he had landed, but that, of course, is not why they rose. Going to war did not require personal loyalty to Tearlach, but to their chiefs, who called them out. Consequent to the destruction of the Highland army the following year, the clan chiefs lost the right to raise armed levies, the tartan plaid was outlawed along with the bagpipe, and none but drovers were allowed to bear arms. Forfeited estates were administered by a committee of lawyers in Edinburgh.

Did the collapse of the clan system cause the collapse of the Highland culture? A chief without the right to levy troops was still chief, and loyalty to the chief was a way

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60 Ibid., 340.
61 Ibid., 342.
of life, based on the supposed blood tie and long occupation of a clan territory. We have already seen evidence of erosion of the clan system. We might consider a further clue: Prince Charles was able to raise an army of only five thousand men (initially only eighteen hundred) from a Highland population of a quarter of a million or more.

In this light, we can see that economics rather than politics undermined and then destroyed the Highland culture, and the potato played as great a role in that collapse as the Lowland sheep. Potatoes allowed the Highland population, already crowded onto small plots of arable land, to continue its rapid growth, and the potato would grow on moorland that was unfit for grain; that is, when good, tillable land was converted to pasture, the tenants could still hang on. (The Sutherlands defended the notorious eviction of ten thousand of their clansmen in the next century on this basis, saying that they had no choice, that the land would not support the people any longer.) By the 1780’s, when improvement caught fire in the Lowlands and Highlands alike, the sheer unwieldiness of so many people on so little land was the principle bar to installing “English husandry.”

The potato also allowed the Highlands to grow and import even less grain. As the price of grain rose after 1760, the price of sheep, wool and cattle rose even faster and stayed high through the Napoleonic Wars, pressuring Highland agriculture to shift even more sharply toward animal husbandry.

We should probably assign one effect to the late failed uprising – it may have speeded up change by allowing the younger chiefs and lairds, many schooled in England (or most likely, in the Lowlands), and well aware of “English husbandry,” to take over in place of their fathers, who may have been more inclined to hold to the old ways.

Highland landowners like Lowlanders planned to rest the new husbandry of their estates upon enclosure. Runrig must be abolished… In 1784 [concurrent with the return of forfeited estates to former Jacobite chiefs] the Highland and Agricultural Society was created in order to further this adaptation… publishing essays and giving gold medals to those who wrote on such subjects as the management of cattle, enclosures, the cultivation of grass and green crops, and the improvement of waste and heath ground.63

The Highland landowners expected improvement to follow the Lowland model, with some tenants displaced to become laborers and others becoming capitalist farmers. Seeing the success of new villages such as Ormiston in East Lothian and Cuminestown in Aberdeenshire, they founded Ullapool, Beauly, Grantown, Oban, Tomintoul, and many others. There are several reasons why the Lowland model did not work for the Highland improvers. We have mentioned the burgeoning Highland population and the tiny holdings, and we have seen that the price of animal products outpaced the price of grain, encouraging a shift from uneconomical tillage to animal husbandry. In addition, the new Lowland model was capitalist, so tillers of the thin, mountain soil would be hard pressed to compete with Lowland farmers. There were not sufficient numbers of merchants, brewers, artisans, and professionals to occupy the new towns. Chiefs and lairds dismissed

63 Smout, op. cit., 346.
their tacksmen, taking a more direct hand in managing their land (though often merely replacing the middlemen with agents – rent collectors – who worked on commission). The tacksmen were the closest thing to a managerial class that the Highlands had, and they were gone. Finally, the Highland peasant, with even less capital than his Lowland counterpart, could not take a strong role in improvement.64

Twenty-seven years after Culloden, and nineteen years before the Clearances began in earnest, Highland culture was a shambles. Samuel Johnson observed in 1773:

We came thither too late to see what we expected, a people of peculiar appearance, and a system of antiquated life. The clans retain little now of their original character, their ferocity of temper is softened, their military ardour is extinguished, their dignity of independence is depressed, their contempt of government subdued, and their reverence for their chiefs abated. Of what they had before the late conquest of their country, there remain only their language and their poverty.65

THE HIGHLANDS, PART III – THE CLEARANCES
AN AGES-OLD CONFLICT

I do not wish to suggest that the Highland Clearances were anything but tragic and brutal but a cursory review of the historical conflict between tillers and pastoralists will put the Clearances into a wider context. Long before the classic conflict was memorialized in the story of Cain and Abel, the need for dedicated pastures for the newly domesticated sheep, goats, and cattle competed with the older needs of the tillers. We have good documentation of the conflict from the Roman period:

In the early days of the Roman republic land in Italy was held largely by small proprietors… The later tendency was toward the absorption of smaller holdings into large estates… The low price of grain, which was imported in huge quantities from Sicily and other Roman provinces, operated to crush the small holder, at the same time as it made arable farming unremunerative. Sheep-raising, involving larger holdings, less supervision and less labour, was preferred by the capitalist land-holder.66

The plague of 1348 reduced the population of Europe by half. The consequent rise in the cost of labor cut landowners’ margin of profit, leading many in England to enclose their holdings and convert to sheep farming. Edward III encouraged sheep raising and home manufacture of woolen goods. “Later on, the increasing abandonment of arable husbandry for sheep farming brought about a less demand for labour, and rural depopulation was accelerated as the peasant was deprived of his grazing-ground by the enclosure of more

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64 Contemporary writers had their own list of reasons for why improvement did not work in the Highlands, mostly concerning the temperament of the Highlander, but the reasons seem invidious compared to purely economic ones.

65 Johnson, op. cit., 50.

and more of the waste land."\(^{67}\) Beginning about 1488, during the reign of Henry VII and continuing through the reign of Elizabeth I, the crown made a number of statutes attempting to convert pastoral land back to tillage and to limit the number of sheep a landowner may own. In face of the soaring price of wool, the laws proved ineffective.

With their introduction into the central southern Highlands in 1764, almost thirty years prior to the Cheviot, or Great Sheep, Lowland sheep were already impoverishing crofters by destroying grazing and taking farmland for pasture. After a single season of such grazing, the shielings were useless as summer pasture for cattle.

**THE COMING OF THE GREAT SHEEP**

*My heart’s in the Highlands, my heart is not here*

*My heart’s in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer…*

Half of the more than one million Scots lived beyond the Tay in 1750, and a quarter of them lived in the five Highland counties that would be almost utterly depopulated by the first half of the following century.\(^{68}\) Robert Burns sojourned briefly in the western Highlands in 1787, and he would have encountered growing numbers of displaced Highlanders in Ayrshire and in his travels as an exciseman and collector of songs.

Here, in brief, is the story of the Highland Clearances. Frustrated in their desire either to keep to the old ways or to improve their holdings using the Lowland model, Highland landowners yielded to the pressure of rising prices for animal products. They converted farmland to pasture, at first expanding grazing for cattle and (pre-Cheviot) Lowland sheep, forcing the peasants onto marginal land fit only for potatoes; then, in the period after the coming of the Great Sheep in 1792, forcefully removing the peasants altogether, using troops, truncheons, bayonets and fire.

The creatures that were to displace those [small native] sheep, and most of the Highlanders along with them, had been created by a talented breeder in the Border country to the south. His end product, the Cheviot (or Great Sheep, as it was to be called in the Highlands)… was introduced into the Highlands [in 1790] with the object of learning whether it could stand the more rigorous climate here. It could. After two years’ trial the British Wool Society, an organization dominated by London wool buyers and large English sheep raisers, offered to provide flocks at nominal cost to all Scottish lairds ‘who aspire to the character of being active and intelligent’…

Raising and sheering the Great Sheep required very few workers, but what the sheep did need was pasture. Not only were the indigenous subsistence farmers and their families thus unnecessary for the work, they were in the way. The clearance of them from the land to make was for pasture was brutal…

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68  Smout, *op. cit.*, 119.
Many died of starvation, disease and other hardships accompanying and following the evictions. Some Highlanders migrated to the nearest cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh, but Glasgow and Edinburgh were themselves poor places with stagnant economies. They could offer only poverty and idleness in slums, where tuberculosis rates are believed to have been then, and were for long afterward, the highest in the world. A few drifted south to London. Some migrated to Ulster… Some were absorbed into regiments of Highlanders in the British Army… Some were sold by their lairds as indentured servants to those plantation owners in the West Indies and South Carolina who had use for Scottish overseers of their black slaves. Many emigrated to Canada, especially Nova Scotia.  

The wholesale clearances began in 1792 and extended to about the middle of the next century. In that short span, the Highlands came to be as they are today – empty.

THE LOWLANDS, PART IV – AFTER 1780

TAKEOFF

Scotland began to change dramatically after 1780. The price of grain, wool, sheep and cattle rose after 1760 and would remain high for the next half-century. Farms that were already improved became very profitable. More and more landowners began to copy them by enclosing their estates. Between 1780 and 1800, virtually all landowners embarked on improvement schemes, and the tenantry, with an improved infrastructure and a good return at market, could afford to follow suit. By 1800, most of Scotland had been transformed. Aided by Small’s plow and Andrew Meikle’s power-driven threshing machine (1786), production of grain probably doubled within a generation or two, and animal production may have increased six fold.

While many landowners followed the early and middle examples of improvers such as Cockburn, Eglinton and Auchinleck, the last phase saw some lairds raising rent and leaving improvement to a new breed of tenant. This new tenant was willing to risk meeting the higher rent by increasing output and selling it at rising market prices.

Wigtown, distant from the Lothians, where Scottish improvement began and had progressed the furthest, was almost to the end of the century still “paying traditional rents to traditional lairds for lands they held at will but seldom risked losing by dispossessing, and that consisted of open, ridged, stoney fields, wide pools of boggy water and tall thickets of whins.”  

The Earls of Galloway purchased an old Wigtown estate in 1787 and chose to offer leases to the highest bidders at a public auction held at the Wigtown courthouse. Farmers came from all parts of Scotland.

Rents were offered then that never had been dreamed of by a Galloway farmer… Men of energy and capital came on to the field, and a great change passed over the spirit of peoples’ dreams generally. The old clumsy wooden plough became a thing of the past, iron ones were substituted with machinery “of

69 Jacobs, op. cit., 79 ff.
a’ dimensions, shapes, and metals” for clearing and pulverising the soil; draining and fencing went on with an energy truly surprising.71

Where Scotland had been backward compared to England and Holland, it now became the leader in agricultural improvement; and it was to Scotland that people from all over Europe came to learn new techniques, which they began to call “Lothian husbandry,” rather than “English husbandry” or the “Norfolk rotation.” Scotland led in drainage technology: it was reported in 1829 that the tens of thousands of yards of covered drainage put in during the previous sixty years had given the greatest return on investment than any other improvements.72

The American Revolution interrupted the wealth that had poured into Glasgow from tobacco purchased in Virginia and re-exported to France, but Scottish merchants were quick to fill in with West Indies and European trade. When cotton textiles ushered in the Industrial Revolution after 1779, Glasgow merchants were slow to re-establish their American contacts. Still, Scotland had two thousand seagoing vessels by 1800, where in 1707 there had only been a hundred.73

The Industrial Revolution, evident in embryo by the establishment of the Prestonpans Vitriol Works in 1749 and the Carron Iron Works in 1759, was really born during the crucial decades of the 1780’s and 90’s, when the cotton textile industry took off, replacing the linen industry in the west (though elsewhere linen production increased). “The first cotton mill was built at Rothesay by an English company in 1779, though Penicuik also lays claim to priority. The Rothesay mill was soon afterward acquired by David Dale, who was the agent for Sir Richard Arkwright… Dale also established cotton factories in 1785 at New Lanark.”74 Glassmaking pushed up and sustained the price of kelp, and papermaking rose from eighty tons a year in 1740 to 1,140 tons by 1796.

“The enormous upheavals in agriculture and in the cotton industry led to all kinds of ripples and repercussions extending far and wide through the body of Scottish economy.”75

The need for coal increased even before steam power became common in factories because farmers needed huge amounts of it to burn limestone, which they used to dress their acidic soil. “More coal meant more canals to carry it to the consumer. The Monkland Canal and the Forth-Clyde Canal were both finished in 1790.”76 The cotton finishing industry fueled a boom in bleaching products, printing and dyeing.

**DISPLACEMENT**

Some men and women, made redundant by improvement, found work in the new or expanding factories, where the men might be housed in barracks, called bothies. As agriculture became more mechanized, especially after 1800, bothies became a common way of housing male agricultural workers. (This sounds a sad note for me: bothies were

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70 Smout, *op. cit.*, 310 f.
71 Quoted *ibidem*, 311.
73 “Scotland.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1959, XX, 158.
74 Smout, *op. cit.*, 246.
summer shelters at the shielings, now falling into ruin as sheep displaced the Highland tenants). Mostly, though, women and children were hired to do the factory work. Of course, they could be had cheaply, but they were also more accustomed than the men to a fourteen-hour, rigidly controlled workday.

“The army of vagabonds which always existed in Scottish society was enormously swollen in times of bad harvest.” For a meal, roving beggars would tell you a story, distribute the midden onto a field, or gather thistles from the waste to be used as fodder. A tenant turned them away at his peril. They were everywhere, not just on the road “between Saint Johnston and bonie Dundee,” but in every highway and byway of the land, and in Burns’ day their numbers were growing.

The story of James Somerville is representative of the changes that agricultural improvement and the early Industrial Revolution were effecting. He was a small tenant who lost his holding in the Ochils when his landlord consolidated. He went to Alloa and supported himself as a carter.

When his only horse died there he had been too poor to buy another, and took work as a docker at Lymekilns in Fife: he abandoned this when his brother who worked at the same job died in a horrible accident under the limedust in a ship’s hold. He ended as an agricultural labourer, ploughman, and quarryman, sometimes in very straitened circumstances, on the improved farms of the Berwickshire Merse.

Of the many thousands like him, some struggled to find a place in the changing rural economy, but others lost out and became roving beggars or moved into the slum tenements of Glasgow or Edinburgh. While Burns’ stay in Edinburgh occurred at the apex of its brilliant intellectual (though not economic) ascent, he would also have encountered some of Europe’s first and worst slums, with tenements as tall as fourteen stories, lacking plumbing, sometimes housing multiple families per floor. Edinburgh had grown from a city of 30,000 in 1700 to perhaps 70,000 by the time of Burns’ visits in 1786-87. An important percentage of this population increase represented former agricultural workers, failed tenants, and displaced Highlanders.

James Boswell described Samuel Johnson’s first day in Edinburgh in 1773, thirteen years before Burns’ first visit:

Mr. Johnson and I walked arm-in-arm, up the High Street, to my house in James’s Court; it was a dusky night: I could not prevent his being assailed by the evening effluvia of Edinburgh… The peril is much abated, by the care which the magistrates have taken to enforce the city laws against throwing of foul water from the windows; but, from the structure of the houses in the old town, which consist of many stories, in each of which a different family lives, and there being

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76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 154.
78 Ibid., 315.
no covered sewers, the odour still continues. A zealous Scotsman would have wished Mr. Johnson to be without one of his five senses upon this occasion.\textsuperscript{79}

A description of Edinburgh in the same year reads:

Before the building of the New Town, English visitors found that one of the most remarkable things about life in Edinburgh was the way different social classes inhabited the same buildings… There were, admittedly, some ruinous tenements occupied by Highland ‘chairmen’ (the men who carried the sedan chairs through the city) and unskilled porters… But much more typical were the tall tenements along the High Street, the Pleasance, the Cowgate, and the West Bow, and in the wynds and closes that led off them. Here the social division was denoted… horizontally, according to which floor one lived on. The most respectable floors were generally the second and third, presumably because one thereby lived above the worst of the smell but had not so many steps to climb as if one lived on the fourth or higher. In 1773 for instance, one tenement in the High Street had a fishmonger’s house on the ground floor, a respectable lodging house on the second floor, the rooms of the dowager Countess of Balcarres on the third floor, Mr. Buchan of Kelly living above that, the “misses Elliots, milliners and mantuamakers” above that, and the garrets occupied by “a great variety of tailors and other tradesmen.”\textsuperscript{80}

And of Burns’ 1786 visit, we read:

Edinburgh must have been one of the most densely packed cities anywhere in the world. By the time of Robert’s first visit the New Town had been laid out from its east end as far as Hanover Street… but the Royal Mile was still largely the bustling, crowded human ant-heap which it had been for centuries. Its coffee houses and taverns were still the favourite resort of professional and businessmen, and for a country boy like Burns, whose only experience of urban living had been confined to Irvine and Kilmarnock, Edinburgh must have been a traumatic experience.\textsuperscript{81}

Some of the conditions that Burns would have witnessed, bad enough in the last part of the eighteenth century, would become horrendous in the nineteenth, with four and five people to a room in some tenements, and still no plumbing. Cholera outbreaks would kill many in Edinburgh, beginning in 1832. Tuberculosis, already widespread in Burns’ day, would become a cruel killer of young people in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The life expectancy in the Gorbals district of Glasgow at mid-nineteenth century was said to be less than thirty years.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} Boswell, \textit{op. cit.}, 170.
\textsuperscript{80} Smout, \textit{op cit.}, 269 f.
\textsuperscript{81} Mackay, \textit{Biography, op. cit.}, 251.
Life in rural Scotland was rich in diversity, with time for fairs, festivals, journeys, poetry and song. As Luath said, “They’re no sae wretched’s ane wad think.” The historian T.C. Smout, writing about the Highlands, observes... “It is tempting to say of such a society, tribal, inefficient and in material terms unrewarding to the great majority of its members, that it must also have had a timeless and unchanging character.”

But time ran out. Scottish agriculture suffered stresses that led to unprecedented changes, which, along with the spectacular growth of the merchant class and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, transformed Scotland from a co-operative to a capitalist economy. It is not to say that the peasant of the Lowlands suffered as much as the Highland peasant; it is just that the peasant as such ceased to be. During the last years of the century, the Scottish tenant became idle, became an employee on a farm, in town, or in a factory, became a capitalist farmer, or emigrated. The close-knit social fabric based on communal work and reciprocity among the peasant classes and between peasant and laird or chief unraveled. The doings of the “merry, friendly, country-folks” could already be cherished as a nostalgic idealization by the time Burns’ century ended. Rural Scotland had persisted in a condition of static equilibrium for hundreds of years, but the accumulation of forces was irresistible, and the way of life celebrated in Robert Burns’ poetry passed into memory.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


“Agriculture.” I, 388-421.


“Scotland.” XXIV, 412-460


“Agriculture.” I, 357-429.

“Scotland.” XX, 138-171


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82 Somerset Fry, *op. cit.*, 205.
83 Smout, *op. cit.*, 340.


P. 53. “Summer idylls such as [described in the poem, ‘Handsome Nell’], however, were few and far between in the grim existence at Mount Oliphant. To the barrenness of the land must be added a run of sheer bad luck, as starkly described by Gilbert.”

My father... soon came into difficulties, which were increased by the loss of several of his cattle by accidents and disease. To the buffettings of misfortune, we could only oppose hard labour and the most rigid economy. We lived very sparingly. For several years butcher’s meat was a stranger in the house, while all the members of the family exerted themselves to the utmost of their strength, and rather beyond it, in the labours of the farm. My brother, at the age of thirteen, assisted in threshing the crop of corn, and at fifteen was the principal labourer on the farm, for we had no hired servant, male or female. The anguish of mind we felt at our tender years under these straits and difficulties was very great. To think of our father growing old (for he was now above fifty) broken-down with the long-continued fatigue of his life, with a wife and five other children, and in a declining state of circumstances, these reflections produced in my brother’s mind and mine sensations of the deepest distress.

“Gilbert, in referring to five other children, meant of course in addition to himself and Robert. That William Burnes could not afford the £4 or £6 a year which farm-labourers received is indicative of how near the poverty line the Burnes family was at this time.”

P. 249 f. “Early on the morning of Monday, 27 November, Robert mounted a pony borrowed from George Reid of Barquharie and rode eastwards, through Sorn and Muirkirk and Douglas along the route of the present A70 Ayr-Edinburgh road. At Hyndford Brig-end he made a detour southwards to Covington Mains farm, a mile north of Thankerton. The reason for the detour was that George Reid had not only provided the ‘pownie’ but had made arrangements for the poet to break his journey and spend the night with Archibald Prentice... All the farmers of the district had by now read the Kilmarnock Poems and were eager to meet their author. They were all asked to meet at Covington for a late dinner, and the signal of Burns’s arrival was to be a white sheet attached to a pitchford, put on the top of a cornstack in the centre of the barnyard. The farmer’s son, Archibald Junior, has left a vivid account of the poet’s reception.”

My father’s stackyard, lying in the centre, was seen from every house in the parish. At length Burns arrived... Instantly was the white flag hoisted, and as instantly were the farmers seen issuing from their houses, and converging to the point of meeting. A glorious evening or night, which borrowed something from the morning, followed, and the conversation of the poet confirmed and increased the admiration created by his writings. On the following morning, he breakfasted...
with a large party at the next farmhouse, tenanted by James Stodart… took lunch also with a large party at the Bank, in the parish of Carnwath, with John Stodart, my mother’s father, and rode into Edinburgh that evening.

MACKAY, JAMES A. THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS.

[The farms of William Burnes and his sons, extracted from pp. 27, 28, with supplemental information from A Biography of Robert Burns. Seventy Scottish acres is about ninety English acres.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Acquisition Year</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
<th>Annual Rent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mount Oliphant</td>
<td>1766</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>£40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lochlie</td>
<td>1777</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>£130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mossgiel</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>£90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellisland</td>
<td>1788</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>£50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EDINBURGH
“EDINBURGH,” ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, 1910, VIII.

P. 943 f. “Even so late as 1450, when it became for the first time a walled town, it did not extend beyond the upper part of the ridge which slopes eastwards from the castle. So long, however, as its walls formed the boundary, and space therefore was limited, the citizens had to provide house-room by building dwellings of many storeys. These tall tenements on what is now High Street and Canongate are still a prominent characteristic of the Old Town… In the narrow ‘wynds’ the nobility and gentry paid their visits in sedan chairs, and proceeded in full dress to the assemblies and balls, which were conducted with aristocratic exclusiveness in an alley on the south side of High Street, called the Assembly Close, and in the assembly rooms in the West Bow. Beyond the walls lay the burghs of Calton, Easter and Wester Portsburgh, the villages of St. Cuthbert’s, Moutrie’s Hill, Broughton, Canonmills, Silvermills and Deanhaugh – all successively swallowed up in the extension of the modern city.”

P. 944 “In 1763 the first North Bridge, connecting the Old Town with the sloping ground on which afterward stood the Register House… was opened; a little later the Nor’ Loch was partially drained, and the bridging of Cowgate in 1785 encouraged expansion southwards. Towards the end of the 18th century, the New Town began to take shape on the grand, if formal lines which had been planned by James Craig (d. 1795),… and the erection of Regent Bridge in Waterloo Place (formally opened in 1819 on the occasion of the visit of Prince Leopold, afterward king of the Belgians) gave access to Calton Hill. The creation of Princes Street, one of the most beautiful thoroughfares in the world, led to further improvement. The earth and debris from the excavation of the sites for the houses in this and adjoining streets had been ‘dumped’ in the centre of the drained Nor’ Loch. This unsightly mass of rubbish lay for a while as an eye-sore, until the happy thought arose of converting it into a broad way joining the new road at Hanover Street with the Old Town at the Lawnmarket.”
The following sampling of events is taken from pp. 317-371:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1690</td>
<td>Population of England: 5 million (1600: 2.5 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>England and Scotland: 7.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1702</td>
<td>Many German towns lit by oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1703</td>
<td>Isaac Newton elected president of the Royal Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1706</td>
<td>English inventor Henry Mill invents carriage springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1712</td>
<td>Last execution for witchcraft in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1717</td>
<td>Smallpox inoculation introduced in England by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1724</td>
<td>Gin becomes popular in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td>Four-course system started in Norfolk by Viscount “Turnip” Townshend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1742</td>
<td>Cotton factories established in Birmingham and Northampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1748</td>
<td>Abolition of hereditary jurisdiction in Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>Carron Ironworks in Stirlingshire: cast iron first converted to malleable iron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>James Watt invents condenser, first step toward steam engine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>Potato becomes most popular European foodstuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1768</td>
<td>First weekly number of the Encyclopaedia Britannica published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Sir Richard Arkwright produces first spinning mill in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>James Watt perfects his steam engine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Scottish millwright Andrew Meikle invents threshing machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>James Watt and Matthew Boulton install steam engine in cotton-spinning factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td>Earliest attempts at internal gas lighting in Germany and England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>John Sinclair: “The Statistical Account of Scotland”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>Board of Agriculture established in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>First horse-drawn railroad in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1796</td>
<td>English physician Edward Jenner introduces vaccination against smallpox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1797</td>
<td>Royal Technical College, Glasgow, founded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Population of Scottish cities and towns in 1700. Extracted from p. 157:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>About 30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>12,000 to 14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen and Dundee</td>
<td>About 10,000 during the civil wars; less by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[Population of Scotland. Extracted from pp. 258, 259:]

1707  1,000,000  Estimated
1755  1,265,000  Quasi-official census
1801  1,608,000  Census
1811  1,806,000  Census
1821  2,091,000  Census

P. 261 [From Table II.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>1755</th>
<th>1801</th>
<th>1821</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>57,000</td>
<td>81,600</td>
<td>138,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>31,700</td>
<td>83,700</td>
<td>147,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>15,600</td>
<td>27,400</td>
<td>44,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundee</td>
<td>12,400</td>
<td>26,800</td>
<td>30,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inverness</td>
<td>9,700</td>
<td>8,700</td>
<td>12,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>14,800</td>
<td>19,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunfermline</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>9,900</td>
<td>13,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paisley</td>
<td>6,800</td>
<td>31,200</td>
<td>47,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumfries</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilmarnock</td>
<td>4,400</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>12,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montrose</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>7,900</td>
<td>10,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falkirk</td>
<td>3,900</td>
<td>8,800</td>
<td>11,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenock</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>17,400</td>
<td>22,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS: ROBERT BURNS’S TOURS IN 18TH CENTURY SCOTLAND

On November 10th, 2001, the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington played host to a one-day conference held under the aegis of the North West Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, which incorporates the former Samuel Johnson Society of the North West. I have for many years flown my false, eighteenth-century colours at the Johnson Society meetings where I have made good friends and fond memories. I was moved to contribute a paper to the conference, whose theme was “Charting Spaces and Places: Metaphors of Displacement in the Age of Reason:”

This conference will focus on the complex ways that placement and displacement are expressed in Eighteenth-Century culture. We will explore the development of internal and external empire; the development of geographies both regional and national/international; the expression of place in poetry and fiction; and the complex ways identities were forged and mapped in the relationships between indigenous peoples and a newly developing “nation state”. Papers might consider texts as distinct as Boswell and Johnson’s journey to the Western Islands of Scotland or Mungo Park’s travels to Africa; Defoe’s attempts to chart identity in both Britain and abroad; the poetry of place in Gray or Wordsworth; or the spaces created by women romantic writers in the late decades of the century. The conference will explore how diverse cultural forms such as the slave narrative, travel writing, scientific essays, personal journals and letters, periodical essays as well as novels and poetry attempt to chart both places and different spaces during the century.

It seemed to me that a discussion of Robert Burns’s travels in 1787 would fit the theme of the conference and also be of interest to readers of the Chronicle. This is an expanded version of the paper “The Pilgrim’s Progress: Robert Burns’s Tours in 18th Century Scotland.”

The theme of the conference, “Charting Spaces and Places,” has to be placed in its spiritual context and in that of earlier literary attempts to grapple with metaphors of placement and displacement before attention can be focussed on the Age of Reason.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen… These… confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.1

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1 Hebrews 11: 1, 13. All quotations from the Bible are from the Authorized (King James) version with which Burns was familiar.
We need to harken to the pilgrim note sounded in chapter 11 of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The heroes there depicted, from Abraham to the Maccabees, are in search of the true fatherland of their spirits, confessing “that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” – peregrini et hospites super terram, as the Vulgate so grandly has it. The practice of pilgrimage, journeying to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion, seems to fulfil a basic human impulse. In our tradition, we have those who wander the earth in the desert of its equivalent in other climates as peregrini pro amore dei, pilgrims for the love of God. In the Middle Ages, Chaucer’s pilgrims set out for Canterbury to visit the shrine of St Thomas à Becket while others make their pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham or travel further afield to Rome, to Santiago de Compostela, to Cologne where the Magi supposedly are buried, and to the Holy Land.

A journey has often been used in literature as a metaphor for the religious life – Moses, Ulysses, Aeneas, the Wanderer. And in John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress of 1678, the pilgrimage is the progress of a human soul in quest of union with God. Memorable indeed are the landmarks on Christian’s perilous journey toward salvation: the Slough of Despond and the Delectable Mountains, Doubting Castle and the Palace Beautiful, Vanity Fair and the Celestial City. In the 18th century, when the Augustan Age was coming to terms with the Romantic and Gothic spirits in English literature, Johnson and Boswell were not alone in touring Scotland, for in 1787 Robert Burns left Edinburgh in search of his literary, historical and personal roots. He wrote to Alexander Pattison on May 17, “I was out of Edinburgh making a slight pilgrimage to the classic scenes of this country,” (CL 308) and to Josiah Walker on September 29, “I should go on to tell you the particulars of my pilgrimage after you saw me.” (CL 355).2 And he left Auld Reekie on May 5 like an Old Testament prophet: “My loins are girded, my sandals on my feet, and my staff is in my hand” [a paraphrase of Exodus 12: 11]. (CL 304)3

Flushed with the success of the Edinburgh edition of his poems and lionized by the literati in the “Athens of the North,” Burns in 1787 set out on four trips to tour the Borders and the Highlands: May 5 – June 1 he toured the Borders with Robert Ainslie; in late June he made a tour of the West Highlands as far as Inveraray; August 25 – September 16 he went on his Highland tour with William Nicol; and October 4-20 he made a tour of Stirlingshire with Dr Adair. In his letters he speaks to these enterprises as “pilgrimages,” and it is fascinating to note what happens on his tours. He finds opportunities for dalliance with the ladies, of course, but he is stirred in his inmost soul by the landscapes he views and the sense of the sublime they present to his poetic consciousness; these conspire to fire his imagination and to produce memorable poetic ruminations on the fate of the Stuart monarchs, on the beauty unfolding before his pilgrim gaze, and on the human condition. His sense of place and its inspiration of his poetry reveal what happens when a man of Burns’s sensibilities goes on a pilgrimage in his native land and is rewarded with glimpses of the divinity that subsists in nature.

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3 Exodus 12: 11 – “And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord’s Passover.” [Quoted to Mr. Fyfe, Surgeon College (sic)]
Robert Burns has been dubbed a pre-Romantic, and with some justification – he can write in as fine an Augustan style as the next Pope in one poem and in another pen such wild and whirling, enthusiastic words as would grace the verse of a Wordsworth or a Byron in search of the sublime. Yet to pigeon-hole Burns in such manner is to do his memory a disservice, inasmuch as he was at base essentially a Scottish bard and did not espouse any single literary credo, switching from heroic couplets to the standard habbie to write on a variety of themes and in a variety of styles as his very personal muse dictated.

Burns was also realist enough to recognize that his fame in Edinburgh would prove ephemeral, and that he would perforce return to relative obscurity once his days in the limelight were over. On May 4, just before leaving on his first tour, he wrote to Rev. Dr. Hugh Blair, minister of St. Giles and professor of rhetoric:

I often felt the embarrassment of my very singular situation; drawn forth from the veriest shades of life to the glare of remark: and honoured by the notice of those illustrious Names of my country, whose works, while they are applauded to the end of time, will ever instruct and mend the heart. However the meteor-like novelty of my appearance in the world might attract notice, and honour me with the acquaintance of the permanent lights of genius and literature, those who are truly Benefactors of the immortal nature of Man, I knew very well that my utmost merit was far unequal to the task of preserving that character, when once that novelty was over; and have made up my mind that abuse or almost even neglect will not surprize me in my quarters. \((CL\ 288)\).

That his fears were justified he confessed to William Nicol, classics master at the High School of Edinburgh, writing from Mauchline, June 18:

I am now arrived safe in my native country after a very agreeable jaunt… I never, My friend, thought mankind very capable of any thing generous; but the stateliness of the Patricians in Edinburgh, and the damn’d servility of my plebian brethren, who perhaps formerly eyes me askance, since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. – I have bought a pocket Milton which I carry perpetually about with me, in order to study the sentiments – the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid, unyielding independence; the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great Personage, Satan. \((CL\ 343-4)\).

While one would not wish to assert that Burns was a former-day Rushdi about to pen Satanic verses, it is interesting to note the frame of mind in which Burns toured his native heath. He even named his mare Jenny Geddes after the independent Scotswoman who refused to have mass said at her lug.\(^4\) Mackay notes further preparatory reading of travel literature – Jean-François Marmontel’s *Les Incas, ou la destruction de l’empire du Perou* and Rochette de la Morlière’s *Angola, histoire indienne*.\((Biog.\ 304)\) So, aware that it was now or never in his career for such tours, harbouring Miltonic sentiments in his breast, he
dragged his open heart across the face of 18th century Scotland in search of the sublime.

Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy* imposed on the mediaeval church the view that all earthly life is a pilgrimage, the *via dolorosa* each one of us must needs tread in exile from our true home in heaven; true happiness is only in heaven with God, so forsake this world and its pleasures. “The earth is not your country; go forth, pilgrims, to the kingdom of God.” Such eschewing of this world led to asceticism and monasticism, to the pursuit of what Milton was to condemn as “a fugitive and cloistered virtue.” Virtue, untested in the vale of human experience, is not virtue at all. The renaissance changed the universe from a theocentric to a geocentric one, and changed the concept of the ideal hero from the mediaeval, other-worldly Galahad to the earthly lover with a classical education in rhetoric. By the Age of Reason, the 500 monasteries had become ruins, quarries for stone for halls and hermitages which provided a Gothic context for 18th century views on the sublime. Peter Quennell notes:

For Pope and his friends, a truly picturesque scene must include a shade of Gothic gloom. Only in Gothic could they discover the perfect image of their own fantasies and waking visions – of the anarchic impulses that they managed somehow to reconcile with Augustan cult of law and order.5

Quennell traces the taste for the Gothic in English literature, beginning with John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* and continuing through Milton to Pope, Gray and Horace Walpole (*The Castle of Otranto, Vathek*). He writes eloquently of the new ideas of the sublime:

One of the chief functions of creative art is constantly to reinterpret nature; and henceforward the whole universe, viewed through the eyes of poets and storytellers, began to undergo a subtle change. Its colours deepend, it shadows darkened. Mountains, hitherto regarded as annoying natural obstacles, were now pregnant with ‘ideas of religion and poetry’; and gothic ruins, formerly dismissed as so much architectural rubbish, of interest only to the antiquarian, were voted deeply moving and sublime. ‘Horrid’ became a poetic keyword; fear, a favourite literary emotion. Every ancient building must have its ghost, just as every gentleman’s park required a tame hermit. (9-10).

Quennell chooses an apposite sample from Pope’s Ovidian epistle of 1717, *Eloisa to Aberlard*, which has a Gothic setting. “The poet dwells upon [the Paraclete’s] sad antiquity and, to make its situation all the more impressive, throws up a range of gloomy mountains. These surroundings are attuned to his heroine’s mood, just as, in Webster’s play, a Gothic background reflects his hero [Antonio]’s sorrows”:

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4 Jenny Geddes threw her stool at Bishop Lindsay in St Giles in 1637 when he tried to introduce *The Book of Common Prayer*. (Biog. 304)
The wandering streams that shine between the hills,
The grots that echo to the tinkling rills...
No more these scenes my meditation aid,
Or lull to rest the visionary maid:
But o’er the twilight groves, and dusky caves,
Long-sounding aisles, and intermingled graves,
Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws
A death-like silence, and a dread repose:
Her gloomy presence saddens all the scene,
Shades ev’ry flow’r, and darkens ev’ry green,
Deepens the murmur of the falling floods,
And breathes a browner horror on the woods.

Quennell adds, “When he describes the effect of her miserable solitude upon his heroine’s imagination, Pope might also be describing the advance of the Romantic Spirit across the English literary landscape.” (11) And we must add that he might well have been describing the advance of Robert Burns’s Romantic spirit across the Scottish landscape of his time. Put beside the Pope passage Burns’s *Lines on the Falls of Fyers*:

AMONG the heathy hills and ragged woods
The roaring Fyers pours his mossy floods;
Till full he dashes on the rocky mounds,
Where, thro a shapeless breach, his stream resounds,
As high in air the bursting torrents flow,
As deep recoiling surges foam below,
Prone down the rock the whitening sheet descends,
And viewless Echo’s ear, astonish’d, rends.
Dim-seen through rising mists and ceasless show’rs,
The hoary cavern, wide-surrounding, lours:
Still thro the gap the struggling river toils,
And still, below, the horrid caldron boils– (CW 292).

Burns frequently describes the Scottish landscape as “savage,” writing to William Cruikshank, “I have fought my way severely through the savage hospitality of this Country” (CL 359), to his brother Gilbert of travelling “many miles through a wild country among cliffs grey with eternal snows and gloomy, savage glens,” (CL 357) and to Robert Ainslie, “I write you this on my tour through a country where savage streams tumble over savage mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, with starvingly support as savage inhabitants.” (CL 328) Such sentiments characterize his verse, as in *On scaring some water-fowl in Loch Turit*:

In these savage, liquid plains,
Only known to wand’ring swains,
Where the mossy riv’let strays
Far from human haunts and ways,  
All on Nature you depend,  
And life’s poor season peaceful spend. (CW 296-97).

His Verses written with a pencil over the chimney-piece, in the parlour of the inn at Kenmore, Taymouth link the sublime to poetic inspiration:

Admiring Nature in her wildest grace,  
There northern scenes with weary feet I trace;  
O’er many a winding dale and painful step,  
Th’ abodes of covey’d grouse and timid sheep,  
My savage journey, curious, I pursue…

Poetic ardours in my bosom swell,  
Lone wand’ring by the hermit’s mossy cell;  
The sweeping theatre of hanging woods,  
Th’ incessant roar of headlong tumbling floods—…

Here Poesy might wake her heav’n taught lyre,  
And look through Nature with creative fire… (CW 287-88).

Enthusiastic stuff, using personification, pathetic fallacy and key words such as “savage” and “horrid” to paint his Gothic impression of the sublime. Burns sounds positively Blake-like when viewing the dark, Satanic mills of the Carron Iron Works:

We cam na here to view your warks  
In hopes to be mair wise,  
But only, lest we gang to Hell,  
It may be nae surprise.  
But when we tirl’d at your door  
Your porter dought na bear us:  
Sae may, should we to Hell’s yetts come,  
Your billy Satan sair us. (CW 286)

This Impromptu on Carron Iron Works is a graffito scratched on the window of the inn with a diamond-pointed engraver’s stylus which Burns carried with him on his tours. On this occasion, his wrath was stirred when the caretaker at the Carron Works would not admit Burns and Nicol to enter on a Sunday.

Secondary sources of information about Burns’s tours are the correspondence and the commonplace book or journal entries of the poet and others; but the primary evidence is as always his verse. Burns being Burns, the gentle laughter of love is frequently found. With Robert Ainslie and his sister Rachel, Burns attended Duns parish church early in May and listened to the “hell-fire and damnation” sermon of Dr. Bowmaker, after which
he wrote in the fly-leaf of her Bible this *Epigram to Miss Ainslie in Church*:

Fair maid, you need not take the hint,  
Nor idle texts pursue;  
'Twas guilty sinners that he meant,  
Not angels such as you. (*CW* 277)

Pestered by a would-be versifier for his opinion, Burns told *Symon Gray*

Such damn’d bombast no time that’s past  
Will show, or time to come,  
So, Cimon dear, your song I’ll tear,  
And with it wipe my bum. (*CW* 279-80)

This smacks of the apocryphal reply to a reviewer which is attributed to various wounded writers, “Dear Sir, I am seated I the smallest room in my house. Your review is before me. Shortly it will be behind me. Yours sincerely…”

Burns to some extent behaved like a media idol of today, handing out prints of Beugo’s engraving of himself, scribbling graffiti on window-panes with his diamond-tipped stylus, and writing epigrams and short verses thanking those who offered him hospitality; examples include his *Note to Mr Renton of Lamberton* (*CW* 280), his *Epigram at Roslin Inn* (*CW* 281), and his *A Highland Welcome*, written on September 2 when Burns and Nicol went up the Garry to Dalnacardoch and Dalwhinnie:

When Death’s dark stream I ferry o’er  
(A time that surely shall come),  
In Heaven itself I’ll ask no more,  
Than just a Highland welcome. (*CW* 292)

His *The Bard at Inveraray* deals with inhospitable people in angry lines scratched on the window of an inn in Argyll whose landlord was too busy serving a large house-party of the Duke of Argyll to bother with him. (*CW* 281)

Burns had little interest in England and even less in London, sensible of being a peculiarly Scottish bard laureate in the Scottish capital, yet he and Ainslie made a brief excursion south of the Border. In Carlisle Jenny Geddes was given a parking ticket in the municipal park known as the Bitts; the mayor fixed the ticket lest Burns write an apposite epigram – which he allegedly did anyway:

Was e’er puir poet sae befitted,  
The maister drunk – the horse committed;  
Puir harmless beast! Tak thee nae care,  
Thou’ll be a horse when he’s nae mair [mayor]. (*Biog.* 314)

And anticipating my American audience in November, Burns made everything crystal
clear to William Nicol, writing from Carlisle “June 1, 1787 – or I believe the 39th o’ May rather:”

Kind, honest-hearted Willie,

I’m sitten down here, after seven and forty miles ridin, e’en as forjesket and forniaw’d as a forfoughten cock, to gie you some notion o’ my landlowper-like stravaguin sin the sorrowfu’ hour that I sheuk hands and parted wi’ auld Reekie. – My auld, ga’d Gleyde o’ a meere has huchyall’d up hill and down brae, in Scotland and England, as teugh and birnie as a vera devil wi’ me… I hae daunter’d owre a’ the kintra frae Dumbar to Selcraig, and hae forgathered wi’ monie a guid fallow and monie a well-far’d hizzie. – I met wi’ twa dink quines in particular, ane o’ them a sonsie, fine, fodgel lass, baith braw and bonie; the tither was a clean-shankit, straught, tight, weil-far’d winch, as blythe’s a lintwhite on a flowrie thorn, and as sweet and modest’s a new blawn plumrose in a hazle shaw. – They were baith bred to mainers by the Deuk, and onie ane o them has as muckle smeddum and rumble-gumption as the half o’ some Presbyteries that you and I baith ken. – They play’d sik a deevil o’ a shavie that I daur say if my harigals were turn’d out, ye wad see twa nicks I’ the heart o’ me like the mark o’ a kail-whittle in a castock. – (CL 342)

So now the Americans know!

Ainslie records Burns’s fervently patriotic behaviour upon entering England at Coldstream:

The weather was charming, the travellers youthful and in good spirits, and the poet delighted with the fine scenery and the poetical assocations connected with it. When they arrived at Coldstream, where the dividing line between England and Scotland is the Tweed, Mr. Ainslie suggested going across to the other side of the river by the Coldstream Bridge, that Burns might be enabled to say he had been in England. They did so, and were pacing slowly along on English ground, enjoying their walk, when Mr. Ainslie was surprised to see the poet throw away his hat, and, thus uncovered, kneel down with uplifted hands, and apparently rapt in a fit of enthusiasm. Mr. Ainslie kept silence, uncertain what was next to be done, when Burns, with extreme emotion, and an expression of countenance which his companion could never forget, prayed for and blessed Scotland most solemnly, by pronouncing aloud, in tones of the deepest devotion, the two concluding stanzas of the ‘Cotter’s Saturday Night’. (Biog. 305-306)

Even if only half-serious on this occasion, such fervour is found in Burns’s poems associated with his “pilgrimage”. In all his writing and poems about his tours, Burns is always aware of that sublime landscape of which we spoke earlier. Into that landscape he sets 18th century Scotland’s people, songs, history and poetic inspiration. Mackay
notes, “For Robert, landscapes were secondary to the men and women, especially the women, who peopled them,” (Biog. 305) and “the people he encountered provoked greater comment than the scenery and landmarks.” (Biog. 306) Yet the people to whom he pays compliment are firmly set in the landscape, a landscape which is frequently idealised and Arcadian. For example, *Yon Wild Mossy Mountains* pays tribute to an unknown Lanarkshire girl encountered en route and, using the objective correlative, sets her in an Arcadian landscape:

Yon wild mossy mountains sae lofty and wide,  
That nurse in their bosom the youth o’ the Clyde,  
Where the grouse lead their coveys thro the heather to feed,  
And the shepherd tends his flock as he pipes on his reed.  
Not Gowrie’s rich valley nor Forth’s sunny shores  
To me hae the charms o yon wild, mossy moors;  
For there, by the lanely, sequestered stream,  
Resides a sweet lassie, my thought an my dream. (CW 284)

The same is true of the *Lament for the Absence of William Creech, publisher* with its “Eden scenes on crystal Jed:”

Up wimpling, stately Tweed I’ve sped,  
And Eden scenes on crystal Jed,  
And Ettrick banks, now roaring red  
While tempests blaw;  
But every joy and pleasure’s fled,  
Willie’s awa!…

May never wicked Fortune touzle him,  
May never wicked men bamboozle him,  
Until a pow as auld’s Methusalem  
He canty claw!  
Then to be blessed new Jerusalem,  
Fleet-wing awa! (CW 277-79)

And when Burns finds folk songs to adapt for James Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum*, he associates them with their landscapes – *The Birks of Aberfeldie* (CW 288-89), *Theniel Menzies’ Bonie Mary* (CW 294), *Lady Onlie, Honest Lucky* (CW 295), or *Blythe was She* (CW 295-96). And in *Bonie Dundee* the pregnant girl of the old ballad has a relationship with the landscape inasmuch as she will clothe her baby in tartan by the banks of the Tay:

6 Mackay is quoting Robert Ainslie in *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, 28 April 1832.
But I’ll big a bow’r on yon bonie banks,
    Whare Tay rins wimplin by sae clear;
An I’ll cleed thee in the tartan sae fine,
    And mak thee a man like thy daddie clear. (CW 280)

Of course, when Burns meets the fiddler Neil Gow at Dunkeld, Scotland’s native music is clearly linked to the landscape:

    Amang the trees, where humming bees
      At buds and flowers were hinging, O,
Auld Caledon drew out her drone,
    And to her pipe was singing, O.
‘Twas Pibroch, Sang, Strathespeys and Reels –
    She dirl’d them aff fu clearly, O,
When there cam a yell o foreign squeels,
    That dang her tapsalteerie, O! (CW 289, *Amang the Trees*)

Scotland’s history is also fitted into the Arcadian landscape, as in *The Young Highland Rover* in which Prince Charles Edward Stuart is linked to the world of cheerful nature:

    The trees, now naked groaning,
      Shall soon wi leaves be hinging,
The birdies, dowie moaning,
    Shall a’ be blythely singing,
And every flower be springing:
    Sae I’ll rejoice the lee-lang day,
When (by his mighty Warden)
    My youth’s return’d to fair Strathspey
And bonie Castle Gordon. (CW 293-94)

Burns segues from the Augustan law and order of his Arcadia to his vision of the sublime in *Castle Gordon*:

    Wildly here without control
Nature reigns, and rules the whole;
    In that sober pensive mood,
Dearest to the feeling soul,
    She plants the forest, pours the flood.
Life’s poor day I’ll, musing, rave,
    And find at night a sheltering cave,
Where waters flow and wild woods wave
    By bonie Castle Gordon. (CW 293)
In neither of these poems is there any hint of the problems with Nicol of which Burns
writes to James Hoy, librarian and companion to the Duke of Gordon, from Edinburgh, October 20:

I shall certainly, among my legacies, leave my latest curse to that
unlucky predicament which hurried me, tore me away from Castle Cordon.
– May that obstinate Son of Latin Prose be curst to Scotch-mile periods,
and damn’d to seven-league paragraphs; while Declension & Conjugation,
Gender, Number and Time, under the ragged banners of Dissonance and
Disarrangement eternally rank against him in hostile array!!!! (CL 361)

Such is the difference between (auto)biography and poetry.
Truly Gothic is the window-pane engraving comparing the Stuarts and the House of
Hanover Written by Somebody on the window of an inn in Stirling, on seeing the royal
palace in ruin:

Here Stewarts once in glory reign’d,
And laws for Scotland’s weal ordain’d;
But now unroof’d their palace stands,
Their sceptre fallen to other hands;
Fallen indeed, and to the earth,
Whence grovelling reptiles take their birth.
The injured Stewart line is gone,
A race outlandish fills their throne:
An idiot race, to honour lost–
Who know them best despise them most. (CW 286)

Not “politically correct,” no doubt, and Burns later smashed the window-pane, but
the lines make sense in terms of the Gothic ruin.
Or consider the objective-correlative, Jacobite sympathies of Strathallan’s Lament put
on the lips of the 5th Viscount Strathallan, whose father was slain at Culloden:

Thickest night, surround my dwelling!
Howling tempests, o’er me rave!
Turbid torrents wintry-swelling,
Roaring by my lonely cave! (CW 287)

In The Humble Petition of Bruar Water, written ostensibly to thank and compliment his
host and hostess at Blair Atholl on his way north during the Highland tour, Burns places in
his landscape the kindly and noble people, the Bard, and Scotia herself, noting to Josiah
Walker, “Rhyme is the coin with which a Poet pays his debts of honor or gratitude… you
know from experience the bedlam warmth of a Poet’s heart” (CL 354):
Here haply, too, at vernal dawn,  
Some musing Bard may stray, 
And eye the smoking, dewy lawn 
And misty mountain grey… 
So may, old Scotia’s darling hope, 
Your little angel band 
Spring, like their fathers, up to prop 
Their honour’d native land! 
So may, thro Albion’s farthest ken, 
To social-flowing glasses, 
The grace be– ‘Athole’s honest men 
And Athole’s bonie lasses!’ (CW 290-92)

And all the threads of the pilgrimage in search of the sublime come together in Burns’s *Elegy on the Death of Sir James Hunter Blair* (July 1) – the objective correlative, the pathetic fallacy, homage to the Stuarts and sentimental attachment of the Jacobite cause, the association of landscape with poetic inspiration, and personification of Caledonia lamenting her fallen son:

> The lamp of day with ill-presaging glare,  
> Dim, cloudy, sank beneath the western wave;  
> Th’ inconstant blast howl’d tro the darkening air,  
> And hollow whistled in the rocky cave.

> Lone as I wander’d by each cliff and dell,  
> Once the lov’d haunts of Scotia’s royal train;  
> Or mus’d where limpid streams, once hallow’d, well,  
> Or mould’ring ruins mark the sacred Fane.

> Th’ increasing blast roared round the beetling rocks,  
> The clouds, swift-wing’d, flew o’er the starry sky,  
> The groaning trees untimely shed their locks,  
> And shooting meteors caught the startled eye.

> The paly moon rose in the livid east,  
> And ‘mong the cliffs disclos’d a stately form  
> In weeds of woe, that frantic beat her breast,  
> And mix’d her wailing with the raving storm.

> Wild to my heart the filial pluses glow;  
> ‘Twas Caledonia’s trophied shield I view’d,  
> Her form majestic droop’d in pensive woe,  
> The lightning of her eye in tears inbued.
I submit that the visions of the sublime which Burns had on his four tours of 1787 went far to inspire his poetry and to make him Scotland’s national Bard. But did this stranger and pilgrim on the earth find in the sublime what his innermost heart was seeking? To return to *Hebrews*:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen… By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country… For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (*Hebrews* 11: 1, 9, 10)

That he found it is clear from the words of the Beadsman in his suitably Gothic and sublime hermitage in the 1788 poem *Written in Friar’s Carse Hermitage, on Nithsdale*:

Life is but a day at most,
Sprung from night, – in darkness lost:
Hope not sunshine ev’ry hour,
Fear not clouds will always lour…

Thus resign’d and quiet, creep
To the bed of lasting sleep:
Sleep, whence thou shalt ne’er awake,
Night, where dawn shall never break;
Till future life, future no more,
To light and joy the good restore,
To light and joy unknown before.
Stranger, go! Heav’n be thy guide!
Quod the Beadsman of Nithside. (*CW* 325-26)

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January is not only the anniversary month of the birth of Robert Burns, our national bard, but of the death of his mother. **ANGUS MacDONALD** suggests she deserves a warm place in our remembrance then also.

If William Burnes, father of Robert, had a hard uphill struggle all his life, it was no less so for the girl he was to marry — and her troubles began at an even younger age than his. When William left his home in north-east Scotland, he was a grown man of 27 with farming and gardening skills and some education. When Agnes Broun left her home on the family farm at Craigenton, near Kirkoswald she was but 12. She never learned even how to write her own name. All she had to support her were her capacity for hard work, a talent for singing, cheerfulness — — and, when required, a fiery temper.

When Agnes’s mother died, she was only ten. She was the eldest of the family of six and then had to help look after her father and younger brothers and sisters. Two years later her father brought a new wife to Craigenton. Unhappy with the stepmother, Agnes left the family’s 300-acre farm home, and went to live with her maternal grandmother in the historic village of Kirkoswald, a dozen miles or so from Ayr.

Grannie Rennie taught the girl three things. The first was hard work, for the lass was put to the fields for ploughing and threshing and in the home spinning wool, no doubt among other domestic chores. The second was singing. The old lady discovered Agnes had a good voice and a musical ear and she herself had a great storehouse of old songs and ballads. Agnes would often

*From the description given by her daughter Isobel Burns — of a “sonsy figure, below average size, reddish hair, pink and white complexion and dark eyes” is created this model of the Bard’s mother for the Burns’ Cottage family group. The child, with the same colour of hair as her mother, would be Agnes, eldest daughter and third of Agnes’s seven children.*
sing for the old lady and a blind uncle, including one song which her own son would develop and make famous. (Man was made to mourn). The third was a strict moral code, for Grannie had a strong recollection of the persecuting times of the Covenanters. Agnes appears to have adopted this code. After a five-year engagement with Will Nelson, who helped her with the ploughing, Agnes broke it off because she discovered he had been “playing around.”

Some might have said she wasn’t improving her prospects when, just over a year later in 1757, she married William Burnes, the hard working, conscientious but little-hope market gardener. She was 25 years of age and he was 36. Fortunately, he appears to have been everything she wanted, admired and respected, even held in some awe. He also recognised a like spirit in the little chestnut-haired woman with the beautiful pink and white complexion and the dark eyes. If intellectually, they were wide apart, she had “uncommonly sound and good judgment,” according to her youngest daughter, Isobel.

But, in her short constrained childhood, Agnes had been through the mill and Isobel mentions that her mother also had a temper “often difficult to control”! Isobel tells how, on one occasion, Mrs Burnes lifted the fire-tongs to threaten her eldest son. For the most part, however, Robbie’s sister adds, her mother had “an easy and collected manner.”

Not to beat about the bush, it must be doubted if a “national poet” would have been produced from that Alloway cottage without the inestimable contribution of the “wifie” who couldn’t even write her name. She obviously instilled at an early stage a love of Scots songs in her son. Though he couldn’t sing himself, Burns’ first verses were written to be sung and songs became his often unpaid obsession, particularly in his later years.

No scenes of “swaggering riot” as once described by the Bard in today’s douce town of Kirkoswald. This is the native village of Agnes Broun, mother of Robert Burns, and two of Burns’ well-loved characters, Souter Johnnie and Tam O’Shanter. On the busy road stands the thatched cottage of the souter (cobbler) whose wife, Ann Gillespie, had at one time been in service to Agnes’s father.
Agnes also brought to the house as a helper, her cousin’s widow, Betty Davidson. Her own singing, and Betty’s songs and tales of the supernatural helped create the cultural ambience in the smoky, crusie-lit Alloway cottage that encouraged the genius of her eldest boy.

There were contemporaries who said Robert took after his mother in looks — other than their respective black and reddish hair — while Gilbert took after the father. Mother and oldest son were certainly both of a romantic personality and Robert does not appear to have taken his love of music and dancing from his kindly but sober-sided old father.

Even so, there is evidence that mother and eldest son did not always see eye to eye. An example of this is the fire-tongs incident. Robert had been scornful of his mother’s praise of a minister’s prayers for a neighbour’s dying child. How could she believe such prayers would be of any service? he remonstrated. But she was of Covenanting stock and proud of it, and he was lucky to dodge the fire tongs. Then, of course, she thought he should marry Elizabeth Paton, mother of his first illegitimate child. Betsey was a girl with whom she got on well. Robert also had a high regard for Betsey, even if she was plain of face, but he did not marry her.

Agnes was a woman of action. An insight into her energy, plus her close working relationship with Betsey and her devotion to her husband was provided in later years by daughter Isobel. In this incident, William Burnes had come in from sowing, very weary. He had used all the thrashed-up grain and now needed to prepare some for the horses. Agnes, seeing his fatigued state, insisted he should rest. Isobel goes on: “The heroic little woman then went to the barn with the servant, Lizzie Paton and the two soon had the necessary corn both threshed and winnowed.” That would not be an easy task in these

![Ancient and historic church of Kirkoswald where are buried the relatives of Agnes Broun, Souter Johnnie and Tam O’Shanter.](image)
days of the threshing “flinging tree.”

No doubt the singing of Agnes Brown would continue as long as her hardy spirit would allow but it must have become increasingly difficult as the years went by — a mother of seven children by the age of 39; over the next two decades moving from cottage to farm and then another farm in search of elusive financial stability; not always eating well; constantly making do — “garring auld claes look amaist as weel’s new” — tending the house, the byre, making cheeses for sale, watching and worrying about the children, seeing her husband grind himself into the ground.

Then, just when the threat of ruin from three years of litigation was lifted and things might have got better, old William died. She was now a widow at 52 and the singing, if any, would be sad and lonely, made worse a year later by the death at 16 of her youngest son, John. Robert at 25 was in charge. He loved and cared for his mother but he would not be to her the rock of moral steadiness that the father had been and Gilbert was also to be. The Betsey Paton affair occurred within 12 months, a similar pregnancy predicament following in yet another year with Jean Armour, who was to be Rab’s wife.

Oh yes, Rab was to be the one eventually, whose finances would help to keep a roof over the head of his mother and the rest of the family. His loan to Gilbert and the family of a large part of money he made from publishing was no small gesture and was only paid back long after he was dead. Rab was self-mocking about it, however. The scale of the balance was heavily charged against him, he once wrote, and “a little filial piety” might affect it in his favour in “the Grand Reckoning.”

But when Rab died in 1796, his 64-year-old mother was with the son who was probably most like the man she had married and she remained with him to the old age of 88 years. Gilbert has been described by historians as timid and to some extent inadequate for the national Burnsiana spotlight that thereafter shone on the family but, in the ordinary business of earning a living and providing for the family of 10, which included his mother, he was stable, hard working conscientious and, a respected elder of the kirk.

As a factor and farm manager, one who got involved in local meetings, surveying and drawing plans, he was a respected member of the community. People of high degree liked to come to visit him at his two-storeyed thatched house at Grant’s Braes, including Jane, the famous wife of famous Thomas Carlyle. On slender means Gilbert looked after all his family and ensured that his sons got a “classical education.” They went to the mathematical school at Haddington where the teacher was another person destined for fame, Henry Irving. Grandmother Burnes might think such schooling a far cry from the Alloway cottage and the days of teacher John Murdoch, but no doubt she looked back on these days with William as a partnership she would not have missed.

Even if these must have been the happiest years of the family’s life, sorrow was never far away. Gilbert lost by death in one year over at Grant’s Braes two daughters — seven-year-old Isabella and 15-year-old Agnes — and, the following year, 18-year-old Janet. Even so, other grandchildren of Agnes Burns survived to prosper and to make their mark in far parts of the world and, of course, there was always the international fame of her oldest boy.

What the illiterate old lady thought of it all, at the end of her days, far from her native Carrick hillside, her home village of Kirkoswald, and the resting place of her husband
at Alloway kirk, little is known. We can only speculate as John Russell did, way back in 1896, imagining the singing plough girl with her first-born child in that dark little cottage in January 1759

But dreamt she ever as she sang to still
His infant heart in slumber sweet and long
That he who silent lay the while should fill
Half round the world with song?

(First published in The Scottish Farmer)

ROBERT BURNS

at the
Caledonian Club of San Francisco’s
134th Annual Scottish Gathering and Games
by
ROBERT DENSMORE BRILL

Lest auld acquaintance be forgot,” Annual Scottish Gathering and Games have been family affairs wherever in or out of Scotland that they are held. Around the world we hear the skerrel of the pipes and see the proud wearing of tartans and kilts and the Royal Stewart Lion and Scots’ flags. In the United States the American Stars and Stripes take the commanding position on flag poles and Colour Guards above, or to the right of, our “Guests” colours, but all are asail in the August heat of a San Francisco Bay Area breeze, as if from Burns’ “Sweet Afton”. The smell of haggis and neeps wafting about the Celtic Heritage stages of Alameda County Fairgrounds compete for the pedestrian traffic of over a hundred-thousand attendees in all manner of California and Highland regalia. This annual scene would not be possible if Scots’ National Bard, Robbie Burns, had not protected the Highlands’ and Scots’ culture and language in his poetry, “mainly in The Scotch dialect,” from the swath of sword and sickle of the King of the United Kingdom, George II.

The earliest California-transplanted Caledonians were able to scrape together notions of their ancient culture and old rituals of the Highland Games from Burns’ works, and from which they produced a “Games,” in 1865. This was the first Games that the old gold prospectors and miners of the “Mother Lode” of ‘49 turned into ready cash and business in San Francisco. Their Games have since become an annual event in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as around the world. Whether errors of spelling, as in Acquaintance, above, or in tartan accuracy, which many say did not even really exist before Queen
Victoria allowed their being made again into kilts, without Robert Burns capturing—even making hostage of—Scottish language and traditions into poetry and verse, we would not have the capacity to celebrate anything which one can recognize as Scottish. All this Burns began while correcting the printer’s proofs at his cotter uncle, James Allan’s Fairlie Estate cottage, in Dundonald, for what is now the priceless Kilmarnock Edition of his poems and songs. The connection of Burns and his Allan cousins, Alexander and John, and the latter’s foster son, never crossed the Atlantic.

In that Scottish tradition of pride and heritage, and in search of that connection, this member of the Caledonian Club of San Francisco travelled first to Kilmarnock, Irvine, and Greenock, to pay homage to his past Chiefs of the Club, Jimmy Hamilton and Jack Scott, who had asked him to visit as many Burns Clubs in Scotland as possible. His more personal purpose of this travel was to satisfy his own renewed sense of having Scots ancestors, someone named Whitlow, and to show his Japanese-American wife something of that ancestor’s Scottish culture. That ancestor had been forced from somewhere in Scotland to travel to the United Kingdom’s colonies in America to fight during the Revolutionary War. Kinsman Whitlow would fight for King George II (of the House of Hanover), but stay after it was over—to “jump ship”, as his mother, Claire Josephine Lee, would tell the story of her own “oral” knowledge of that first ancestor from Scotland. Before his mother died in 1995, this was not information in which the author was interested, as his father who raised him as a single parent was an American of parents with origins from Frankfurt, Germany. Consequently, as with so many other Americans, who can neither trace ancestry nor our origins to “Mother” Scotland—we simply know that we are here! In the intervening two hundred and fifty years (250), we find ourselves with many of the 300 million Americans, transplanted, confused, and ignorant of just who they are?

Unlike most members of The Caledonian Club of San Francisco, this writer has never been able to penetrate into his genealogical history before 1803, to some place in South Carolina. Consequently, regardless of any proposed oral traditions of his mother, this member of the Club is what is called an Associate. Oh, to know who that poor devil was who was ripped from his own mother’s company and pressed into service of King George! Never mind, unlike our sister club, the Saint Andrew’s Society of San Francisco, that does require proof of Scottish genealogy for membership, I was allowed to join. My Japanese-American wife, Grace, and I have learned much since I joined this club, not the least of which was from our several trips to Scotland, thereafter.

Our acquaintance with The Burns Federation began at the Dick Institute Kilmarnock when its Local Research Librarian at the time, Anne Geddes, assisted us with an impromptu meeting with the then Secretary, John Inglis. During that brief meeting, John presented Grace and I with several pieces of literature about Robert Burns, of whom we knew very little, even though we both hold California credentials as teachers. One publication that has since become very special to our own research is the Burns Chronicle of December 1996. Margaret Craig, the Federation’s administrative assistant, gave us a “souvenir” copy of The Robert Burns Bicentenary, published by the Southern Scottish Counties Burns Association. We would subsequently make extensive use of those, and many other publications about Robert Burns. Especially, if not singularly important, were pages from an elderly resident of Dundonald, Robert Kirk, in whose book A Pictorial History
of Dundonald gave the “missing link,” of the connection of Burns’ cousins, Alexander Allan of Dundonald to John Allan of Irvine, both of whom take center stage in our book about an American writer and thinker born in Boston.

The point here is that we first went to a San Francisco Scottish Gathering and Games because we had heard so much about them during the preceding thirty years, and what became an interest in learning about my Scottish origins. I have never found them during the intervening five years of membership with the Club; however, I have been vastly more enriched by membership in this Club than ever anyone could have known. This article is about just one of those incidents of enrichment. As part of one’s membership in the Caledonian Club of San Francisco, all are expected to contribute and participate in the production of our Annual Games. This is a two day event with a never-ending, and on-going cycle of meetings, planning, funding, and refinement over the first Games of 1865. Obviously, it draws from a considerate body of Club history and tradition. But one of this largest and oldest Highland Games outside Scotland would not improve every year without the strong guidance of our Club Chief, presently Ralph Black, formerly of Glasgow. The Chief is supported by a staff of First, Second, Third, and fourth Chieftains, and the Club’s Trustees. All of these posts are elective office, and require Scottish pedigree.

During my first Games after joining, I became one of several forklift drivers of The Operations Committee. This Committee is one of thirty-plus that are lead by a Chairman, and who does not have to have a strict family tree back into “Mother” Scotland. Past Chief John Burton, an American of Scottish pedigree, has held the Chairmanship of that Committee for almost twenty years. He has a staff of more than forty people, and is charged with the setting up of the Games’ equipment, among other tasks, for our Labor Day event. Scottish Games’ World Championship events are conducted at each venue Past Chief Burton and his people erect. Chairmen are selected by the Chief of the Caledonian Club of San Francisco when a vacancy occurs. The Chairman of each committee, in turn, has a body of assistants and volunteers, a budget, and other management obligations, all of which are discussed at monthly Games’ Meetings, separate from monthly business meetings. The Committee’s activities are by the sole discretion and responsibility of the Chairman. As a consequence, each Chairmanship is a highly prized and regarded appointment. However, as holders of the various Committee’s Chairmanship change, subtle or profound differences of events at the Games may occur from one year to the next.

Within two Games as a member of the Operations Committee, the Chief, Johnny Johnston, of Glasgow, asked if I would take the Chair of the Living History, Re-enactment, and Military Displays. He felt that my earlier work for Past Chief Jimmy Hamilton’s Literary Committee indicated that I would be better employed by the Club than driving a forklift. –Yes, but driving the forklift was fun, not work! Grace, by the way, drove all of the VIPs of our Games around for the Operations Committee Games Crew. Wives and female loved ones usually assist the Committee of the man’s assignment. By this time I had become deeply committed to a biography of Edgar Allan Poe’s Scottish Period and Connections, but was assured by the former Living History Chairman, Elliot Myles, now a Judge in Alameda County, that very little time would be required to administer the Committee! However, his Law Offices had several secretaries and other staff who provided the clerical support. Moreover, Elliot’s father and grandfather had been past
chiefs of the Club, going back over eighty years of family evolvement. Such lineage carried great efficacy and weight within Club politics. However, Chief Johnny Johnston promoted Elliot to the Chair of the Sponsorships Committee, in which he would negotiate and write contracts for the Club.

Realizing that if I took over as Chairman of the Living History venue, I could promote Robert Burns and The Burns Federation at our Games, I reluctantly agreed. Readers can understand how a combination of altruism and ego worked to lead me into a position that utterly overwhelmed my resources of time, computers, and money, so that within four months of taking the Chair, indications of total collapse were visible. For example, someone had stolen my internet password (for America Online), and getting a new one and correcting the horrors of that event took six months. As much of my immediate communications to prospective participants of Living History depended on the internet, it was a serious obstacle to effective and timely communications. However, I was now fully committed to representing The Burns Federation at the 134th Scottish Gathering and Games. I love doing things that are very original, and with this in mind, I knew that the Caledonian Club of San Francisco’s Annual Highland Games would be the first-ever to feature The Burns Federation.

I began to write several journalist articles, and which mentioned Scottish heritage and Robert Burns’ works. I wrote to every Superintendent of every elementary and secondary school district and to every Community College District in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area, about thirty. I wrote Press Releases to local and regional newspapers and every other avenue of public relations that I had learned about during my tenure as a California State Legislative Lobbyist of Family Law issues. I gave talks to groups, and visited local cultural events in my efforts to get the word out that I was the Chairman of the Living History venue at the Games. And I sent notices to my colleges and law school alma maters of my appointment. I received many replies of congratulations, and was mentioned in all of the publications for graduates of Sacramento area campuses where I had earned degrees.

Unfortunately, outside of a rather insular Scottish ex-patriate community, that includes members of the Caledonian Clubs and St. Andrew’s Societies and their families, very few Californians either know or have heard of Robert Burns. For some years those of European-American ethnic identity have gradually taken the position of the “minority,” and this is especially so here in the San Francisco Bay Area. Moreover, outside of the rather large group of patrons to the Scottish Highland Games, not many local residents even know about Scotland – that it exists, is part of Great Britain, and in the United Kingdom. Madonna’s wedding at Skibo Castle hotel, in Dornoch, has helped bring visibility of the Scots, but not necessarily helped non-Scots’ attendance to our Games. Moreover, except for the few hearty Americans interested in the drive from Inverness to John O’Groats, Dornoch will certainly fall into hibernation from tourists quickly, thereafter!

Nevertheless, I made preparations for a Burns Federation presence at the Games of 1999. Chief Executive, Shirley Bell, of Robert Burns World Federation Limited, sent five large posters of Robert Burns, as featured on the Burns Chronicle for 2000. These were suspended in the open arches of the elevated gazebo of our Living History venue, under a large banner, alternatively with the poster-sized colour photographs of the new
Museum of Scotland, in Edinburgh. For the few who saw our Games Program, we also featured that Museum, that provided the copyrighted photos. Also, I had as our Special Guest, Beth Gay, the editor of the Family Tree Magazine, published by the foremost genealogical repository of family records of Scottish Clans in America, The Ellen Payne Odom Genealogy Library, of Moultrie, Georgia. Beth had published one of my articles about our great American writer and his family connections to Scotland, as well as invited me to speak at their Annual Scottish Weekend, so I returned the honor!

Everyone who came to visit our hundreds of Queen Mary-era re-enactment personalities and sites, as well as Military encampments, would see Robert Burns’ face featured at our headquarters. For instance, after the several grandstand show produced by The Highland Renaissance Re-Enactors’ Guild, children and adults alike were eager to see actors such as Brian Henry Plummer, of Herald, California, who is a member of Mary Queen of Scots’ Royal Guard during the Games. Like the hundreds of his other re-enactment colleagues, Brian pays for, and makes, his own costumes and equipment. Grace was going to make a Robert Burns costume for me to wear about the Games, but getting the materials and having the time to complete it became an impossibility. I got the idea from our attending the Grand Ceilidh for the opening of the Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, where actors in period costume mixed with the guests, and then our visit to the Tass Pub on the High Street, where the owner, Cyrus Laurie, features a statue of Robert Burns in his Pub. These re-enactors and their group rival the attraction of the Scottish Games activities themselves, and which are more often featured in newspapers for a hundred mile radius. We Californians simply like historical reenactments and theatre! After all, isn’t Disneyland a product of this interest. However, I had been admonished by one of the Cheiftains not to try and turn our Games into a Renaissance Fair!

A notable visitor to the Living History venue included the President of the San Diego Highland Games. He has since invited both The Robert Burns World Federation to hold their Annual Conference at those Games at some time in the future, as well as Family Tree Magazine editor, Beth Gay. The dreadful error of all of our efforts is that we have absolutely no evidence of what we did. The hours of photograph and video film that Grace used were either destroyed by her camera, or lost! Of that, the only photograph that Grace took in which the gazebo and Burns posters can be seen, and in which I was welcoming the Brown Sisters’ singing trio to our huge venue, had been lost in the scholarly debris of Robert Burns World Federation Limited and Burns Chronicle readers that I delayed writing this report of our activities until Grace could get the video duplicated, and snaps from it for an article. In the intervening three years, only my memories of the event remain.

On reflection, there was much more that I could have done for Robert Burns. Past Chief Jimmy Hamilton wanted me to conduct a Games-wide raffle for some prime bottles of wines and spirits, with proceeds going to refurbish the Burns statue in Golden Gate Park. This statue had been erected by patrons of local Scottish clubs and groups in 1908, and has become worn by local environmental effects of the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay. Like the cemetery headstones of those we found at the museum in Saltcoats, stone wears smooth by the year. However, I declined to administer the raffle, as I was unable to fully orchestrate and contain the multiple re-enactment groups and activities at our venue, and at the grandstand. It was going to be more than practicable...
for me to do “all the ideas that were swirling about my head.” I had committed myself to a job that had long since become almost full-time, as a volunteer, for love of my Scots’ heritage and things Scottish, which all members do. The same dedication and giving exists in the Robert Burns World Federation Limited, The National Trust for Scotland, and the Museum of Scotland among the other organizations with connection to “Mother” Scotland to which we belong.

Even so, our efforts on behalf of Robert Burns were announced by the grandstand public relations announcer, appeared in our Games Program, and was available in some limited literature at our headquarters table. We kept a list of those who wanted either information or membership forms in Burns Federation, which we sent on to Shirley Bell, after our Games had concluded. I brought along my collection of publications about Burns and his works, including the copies from the Burns Federation. These were displayed along side materials from another Scots’ writer, Robert Louis Stevenson. Unknown by few outside of the Stevenson’s Museum at Silverado, in Napa Valley Wine Country, it is the largest collection of his memorabilia in the world. His story, “The Bottle Imp,” written during his visit to Hawaii, and a subsequent liaison with one of their princesses, is one of but three works of fiction in which the writer has used the word “Imp.” Do you know who are the other two writers to use this Scots’ word? The first was Burns, “The Ordination”, where he speaks of, “‘common sense’, that Imp o’ hell.”

The reader cannot imagine how the air at our Games fills with so many of the Celtic and Scots’ musical groups and soloists singing and playing Burns’ works. Already mentioned were The Brown Sisters, who play every year to standing-room only fans. On the copy of the CD that they autographed and gave to Grace and I are Burns’ adaptations “Will Ye Gang, Love,” and “The Bonnie Blue.” Pipe Bands in competition, and The Mass Bands, of over eight hundred, that feature the Third Marine Aircraft Wing Band of Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, San Diego, California, as well as the Special Guest Pipe band – in 1999 was the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders of Canada – and the winning Grade One Pipe Band, all play at the end of the Games with “Auld Lang Syne.” Other musicians popular with Scottish Americans and ex-patriots alike is Alex Beaton. Scots Wha Hae is especially one of our favorite Beaton-sung songs by Burns, included in the CD that he autographed for Grace that year for her work as VIP driver! Seven Nations, Tempest, Ed Miller and John Taylor, as well as Carl Peterson, of Greenock, are just some of the other entertainers at the Games’ grounds who are invited by Entertainment Committee Chairman, Past Chief Tommy Fraser, to play because they are well known around the United States’ Celtic and Scots communities.

Robert Burns may not have held old Scottish Highland Games in very high esteem, if indeed he had known of their history. However, the Caledonia Club of San Francisco’s Scottish Gathering and Games would not be a Games if it was not about Scottish Games! The Pleasanton Games are the World Championship of Heavy Events. Every year, Scottish athletes from around the world make their pilgrimage to the Games in Pleasanton to establish the ranking for the coming years, as well as honor those who have given life careers in Scottish sport. Soccer, golf, sheep dog trials, birds of prey, and every conceivable activity of the Highlands’ ancient traditions, captured in Burns’ songs and poems are the inventory of what everyone finds who visit the Games in Pleasanton.
Although those who came to our Living History venue in search of information about the National Bard of Scotland were few, Robert Burns was in fine company. In the tradition of the office, the Chief of the Club decides who will be Honoured Guests. Chief Johnstone selected Carmichael of Carmichael, 30th Chief, and 26th Baron; Mistress Pauline Hunter of Hunterston, Chief of Clan Hunter, 30th Laid of Hunterston; Lorne Gillean Lain Maclaine of Lochbuie, 26th Chief of Clan Gillean of Lochbuie and Feudal Baron of Moy; Edward Stewart Dugald MacTavish, 26th hereditary Chief, Clan McTamhais; The Right Honorable Malcolm Sinclair, Earl of Caithness. As Chairman of Living History, I was asked to dine with Lord Sinclair and Her Majesty, Mary, Queen of Scots, at a memorable sitting of cooking and delicacies of the Stewart Period. Quiet were their manners, alien was their food, and genteel was their conversation. Memorable! Of course, all centuries before Robbie was born in Alloway.

Of course, there were the entourage of local politicians. The Scottish Highland Dancers, the Scottish Country Dancers, advertisers and attendees, all would see Robert Burns as a “Featured Guest” of Living History for the 134th Games. Not “a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation,” here. For such time as I had anything to with it, Burns was featured in our Caledonian Club Games’ Program, web pages, Press Releases, and any other medium of communication to get the word out that Robert Burns was represented at a Scottish Highland Gathering and Games for the first time in America. It was the first of its kind, but that presence should become a tradition through the world, wherever Highland Games are presented. In spite of the fact that there is a great love of Burns in the San Francisco Bay Area, with its hundreds of thousands of Games’ patrons, and where a dozen Burns Suppers occur every January, the tragedy is that there is not presently a Burns Club where non-Caledonian Club nor St. Andrew’s Society members might attend to learn more of this great human being, our Bard of Caledonia.

Note: any subject discussed in this article may be pursued by writing the webmaster of the Caledonian Club of San Francisco’s web pages. Copies of some past Games programs may be obtained by writing to the Program Chairman, Art Ball, at the same web site. We share with the reader the regrettable news that present Chief, Ralph Black, passed away just two weeks after the greatest Games we have ever seen, September 18, 2001. The author of this article is solely responsible for the accuracy of its contents.
ALAN LEES, SCULPTOR IN WOOD

Alan and his wife, award winning playwright Catherine Czerkawska, live and work in a 200 year old cottage in Scotland’s beautiful “Guitar Village”, Kirkmichael in Ayrshire. Widely acknowledged as one of Scotland’s foremost woodcarvers, Alan is noted for his outdoor carvings, often made in situ, and sometimes from wood that is still rooted in the ground, like the spectacular Time Man carved for Kelburn Country Park from a fallen oak. These pieces which are not “chain saw” carvings, but real detailed woodcarvings, birds, animals, human figures, waymarkers, even sculptured seats, can be simple or intricate, figurative or abstract and certainly lend fascination and originality to private garden, woodland or park.

Alan uses all types of native hardwoods from lime to British oak, and explores a variety of themes. One of his best known works was a commission for the Tam O’ Shanter Experience in Alloway, Ayrshire:- “Tam and Meg” – an idiosyncratic life size carving of the subjects of Robert Burns’ most famous poem. During 1999 Alan also undertook a major carving project in Newton Stewart, interpreting the poetry of Dumfries and Galloway’s Writer in Residence Liz Niven, in local beech, for a scheme supported by an appreciative Magnus Magnussen. Visit the new website at www.woodarts.co.uk to see a fascinating cross section of Alan’s recent work.

“I like to talk to each client” he says, “and get a real feel for what they want. Then I will sketch out my own interpretation of those ideas for final approval and hope that the result will please all concerned.”

Alan works only to commission. He is happy to travel, and work in collaboration with client and designer, as requested. Alan can be contacted at 38 Patna Road, Kirkmichael, Ayrshire KA19 7PJ, Scotland. Tel: 01655 750386 www.woodwarts.co.uk
This is a story of a letter written by Robert Burns to Robert Ainslie on June 14, 1788, on the third day of Burn’s stay on his newly rented farm of Ellisland. Although the letter is of little consequence in studies of Burns’s poems and songs, and of limited importance to investigations of his life in general, it throws light on the friendship between Burns and Robert Ainslie, and on the poet’s state of mind in the first few days on the Ellisland farm. Apart from that the history of the letter also shows how prefunctory and slipshod were the editors and publishers of Burns’s letters in the nineteenth century and in the first three decades of the twentieth century. In what follows the letter will be denoted by [Letters, 248] and referred to as “the letter.” A list of references and abbreviations can be found at the end of this paper.

Fig. 1. Robert Ainslie (1766-1838)
I. HISTORY OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Our knowledge of the history of the original manuscript is fragmentary. It is likely that the letter was in Ainslie’s possession from the day he received it until after Burns’s death. He probably sent it then, together with other letters he received from the poet, to Dr. James Currie who became the editor elect of collected works of Burns. However, Currie did not include the letter in any of his collected editions of Burns, and he may have returned it to Ainslie. If he did not then it would have been left in the hands of the Currie family, like numerous other manuscripts of Burns. Whichever was the case, the letter was in dormancy until 1808 when it was resurrected by Robert Hatley Cromek in his *Reliques*. As we shall see in Section IV, Cromek’s version of the letter is an amalgam of the actual text of Burns’s letter of June 14 and parts of another of his letters. We shall refer to this combined text in *Reliques* as “Cromek’s version.” In his version Cromek reproduced accurately the original letter, minus two closing lines, and there cannot be much doubt that he had access to the original. It seems therefore that in 1808 the original manuscript was still either in Scotland or in England.

Fig. 2. The facsimile of Burns’s letter reproduced from Pearson.
Prior to 1832 Cromek’s version appeared only in re-issues of *Reliques* and in Currie’s posthumous four-volume editions to which *Reliques* were added as their fifth volume. After 1832 Cromek’s version seems to have caught editors’ fancy and was included in most editions that contained Burns’s correspondence. The year 1832 was the pivotal date in the history of the letter for a very definite reason. It was in 1832 that William Pearson published in New York an edition of works of Robert Burns “forming, in one work, the truest exhibition of the man and the poet, and the fullest edition of his poetry and prose writings hitherto published.” The volume contained an insert with a facsimile of the entire letter of 14 June 1788 (Fig. 2). The facsimile was reprinted later in three other American editions. Otherwise it was completely ignored until 1931 by all publishers of Burns in England, Scotland and, with two exceptions, in America. For a history of Pearson’s facsimile see Section V.

Not much is known of the subsequent history of the original manuscript. Pearson probably borrowed it from Ainslie, or whoever owned it in 1832, to reproduce it in facsimile. This is a strong indication that by that time the manuscript was located in America. That may be also the reasons why the appearance of the facsimile in American editions escaped the notice of British editors and publishers for a whole century prior to the publication of Ferguson in 1931. In that work J. De Lancey Ferguson determined that Cromek’s version is really a blend of two letters from Burns to Ainslie. (*Ferguson* Vol I, page 228-229.) Ferguson also reported (*ibid.*) that the portion of the manuscript beginning with “My Farm” (see Figs. 2 and 3) was owned at the time by Dr. L. C. Lord, Eastern Illinois State Normal School, Charleston, Illinois. Lastly, Ferguson claimed (*ibid.*) that in 1886 the text of the letter was reprinted from the original manuscript by Gebbie and Hunter. However, as G. Ross Roy pointed out on page 287 of *Letters*, this observation

Fig. 3. The original manuscript of Burns’s letter to Ainslie, of June 14, 1788.
was incorrect. As a matter of fact, Gebbie and Hunter just copied Cromek’s version in extenso, without any comments. Roy also noted (ibid.) that at the time of his writing the whereabouts of the manuscript were not known. Sixteen years later, however, on June 28, 2001, the extant portion of the manuscript resurfaced at an auction in San Francisco, as a part of the estate of James C. Blanchard III. That was the dénouement of a long albeit incomplete and somewhat obscure history of the letter that Burns wrote to Ainslie on 14 June 1788. At present the manuscript (Fig. 3) forms a part of the Minc Collection.

II. ROBERT AINSLIE (1766-1838).

It may appear that Robert Ainslie was not a type of man with whom Burns would form a close friendship. He was much younger than the poet, and in spite of his middle class background his talents and accomplishments were quite limited. Nevertheless Burns always seemed to need and to take pleasure in Ainslie’s type of companions with a marked sense of humour and a devil-may-care attitude to life (see Letters, 122).

Robert Ainslie was born on 13th January 1766 at Berrywell, near Duns. He met Burns in the spring of 1787 when he was just twenty-one. Ainslie was then serving his law apprenticeship with Samuel Mitchelson at Carrubber’s Close in Edinburgh. In May of the same year Ainslie accompanied Burns on the Border tour. Ainslie became Burns’s confidant and correspondent. He also acted as an intermediary in the poet’s relations with Agnes M’Lehose, May Cameron and Jenny Claw.

Most biographers of Burns deemed Ainslie a close and most loyal friend of the poet. Certainly Burns valued Ainslie’s friendship and regarded him as an “invaluable treasure.” It is difficult, however, to reach a conclusion about Ainslie’s relationship with the poet since Ainslie made it certain after the poet’s death that none of his own letters to Burns would be made public. Anyhow, it is probably fair to say that Ainslie’s devotion to the poet somewhat lessened after 1789 when he qualified as a Writer to the Signet and became more conscious of his social rank and importance. His loyalty to Burns during the poet’s life and to his memory after his death is certainly open to question.

In 1787-1788, when Ainslie was just twenty-one or twenty-two, his friendship with the famous poet must have gratified the younger man. In fact his association with Burns probably opened for Ainslie many doors to literary salons in Edinburgh. In May of 1787 Ainslie was proud to present Burns to his family. By 1789 he became a man about town with many connections. He was on very friendly terms with Agnes M’Lehose, and he probably considered himself to be socially superior to Burns. On 15 October 1790 he visited Burns in Ellisland and found there Burns’s sister and sister-in-law, three of his cousins and a few homely neighbours. Ainslie obviously did not approve of Burns’s wife, his relatives and friends, and even of the poet himself. “Our friend,” Ainslie duly reported to Mrs. M’Lehose, “is as ingenious as ever, and Seems very happy with the Situation I have described – His Mind however now appears to me to be a great Mixture of the poet and the Excise Man – One day he sits down and Writes a Beautiful poem – and the Next he Seizes a cargo of Tobacco – or Roups out some poor Wretch for Selling liquors without a License. From his conversation he Seems to be frequently among the Great – but No Attention is paid by people of any rank to his wife.” After such letter, comments Ferguson, it is plain enough why the friendship went into a swift decline (Ferguson 39, page 115).
III. LETTERS TO AINSLIE

Burns wrote at least twenty letters to Ainslie. The original manuscripts of thirteen of them are extant. Nine of the letters were published originally in Reliques. Only two were printed initially in Currie. We list the twenty extant letters with a short abstract of each.

1. [Letters, 110]. Newcastle, 29th May, 1787. The letter is addressed to “Mon cher Compagnon de voyage.” Burns reports on the people he met in his travels after Ainslie had to leave him, and complains that he has not had “one hearty mouthful of laughter” since they parted.

2. [Letters, 116]. Arrochar, June 25th, 1787. A short report on Burns’s tour “through a country where savage streams tumble over savage mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, which starvlingly support as savage inhabitants.”

3. [Letters, 122]. Mauchline, 23rd July, 1787. A fervent declaration of friendship: “There is one thing for which I set great store by you as a friend, and it is this, that I have not a friend upon earth, besides yourself, to whom I can talk nonsense without forfeiting some degree of his esteem. Now, to one like me, who never cares for speaking any thing else but nonsense, such a friend as you is an invaluable treasure.”

4. [Letters, 122A]. Mauchline, 29th July, 1787. This letter is in response to an announcement of the birth of Ainslie’s illegitimate son. “Give you joy, give you joy, My dear brother! may your child be as strong a man as Samson, as wise a man as Solomon, & as honest man as his father. – I have double health & spirits at the news.–Welcome, Sir, to the society, the venerable Society, of FATHERS!!!”

5. [Letters, 130]. Edinburgh, 23rd August 1787.

   “As I gaed up to Dunse
   “To warp a pickle yarn,
   Robin, silly body,
   “He gat me wi’ bairn.”–

   “Call your boy what you think proper, only interject Burns. – What do you [say] to a scripture name; for instance – Zimri Burns Ainslie or Achithophel, &c., &c.–”

6. [Letters, 153]. 25 November, 1787. Burns asks Ainslie not to make any appointment to take them to Ainslie’s father that night. He adds: “You will think it romantic when I tell you that I find the idea of your friendship almost necessary to my existance. –… I don’t know upon the whole if you are one of the first fellows in God’s world, but you are so to me.”

7. [Letters, 215]. Mauchline, 3rd March, 1788. This is the infamous Burns’s “horse-litter” letter that makes many Burnsians cringe. The letter opens innocuously with a paragraph about the possibility of renting Ellisland farm from Patrick Miller of Dalswinton. It then continues: “Jean I found banished,… forlorn destitute and friendless… I have reconciled her to her mother.” What follows is a distasteful bragadocio about Burns’s sexual episode with Jean Armour who was then in last stages of pregnancy. Of course, the letter may have been just a crude fanfaronade.
aborted a supposed “thundering scalade”. It certainly was not intended for publication. Ferguson commented (*Ferguson*, vol. II, p.336) that although Ainslie turned pious as he grew older, his piety did not prevent his preserving, and allowing to be published, the most damaging of his former friend’s letters. The same Ainslie made sure that his own letters to the poet would not be made public. After Burns’s death Ainslie managed to retrieve his letters to Burns. He apparently destroyed them.

8. [*Letters*, 243]. Mauchline, 26th May, 1788. In this letter Burns announces his marriage to Jean Armour. “I have the pleasure to tell you that I have been extremely fortunate in all my buyings and bargainings hitherto; Mrs. Burns not excepted, which title I now avow to the World.”

9. [*Letters*, 246]. Dumfries, about 1 June, 1788. “Please call at the Ja’ Hog mentioned, and send for the wench [May Cameron?] and give her ten or twelve shillings… Ask her for a letter I wrote her just now, by way of token.–it is unsigned.–”

10. [*Letters*, 248]. Ellesland, 14th June, 1788. This letter and all its reincarnations (see Sections IV, V and VI below) are the main topic of this paper.

11. [*Letters*, 249]. [June? 1788]. This letter in combination with the preceding letter forms Cromek’s version in *Reliques* (see below). Burns writes about his wife and children. The tone is more serious than that of most letters to Ainslie. “Were it not for the terrors of my ticklish situation respecting provision for a family of children, I am decidedly of opinion that the step I have taken is vastly for my happiness. As it is, I look to the excise scheme as a certainty of maintenance; a maintenance, luxury to what either Mrs. Burns or I were born to.”

12. [*Letters*, 250]. Mauchline, 23rd June, 1788. “This letter, my dear Sir, is only a business scrap. – Mr. Miers, Profile painter in your town, has executed a profile of Dr. Blacklock for me; do me the favor to call for it, and sit to him yourself for me – You must not, my friend, refuse to sit. – The time is short: when I sat to Mr. Miers, I am sure he did not exceed two minutes. – I propose hanging Lord Glencairn, the Dr & you, in trio, over my new chimney-piece that is to be. – Adieu!”

13. [*Letters*, 252]. Ellisland 30th June, 1788. “I am vexed” - writes Burns - “at that affair of the girl, but dare not enlarge on the subject until you send me your direction [i.e., address] as I suppose that will be altered on your late Master and Friend’s [i.e., Samuel Mitchelson’s] death.” Burns also writes about some mix-up with Miers’s profiles, and complains about one of his new neighbours, “who has made himself absolutely contemptible… by his silly, garrulous pruriency.”

14. [*Letters*, 266]. Mauchline, 23rd August, 1788. Burns mentions some “very bad reports” that Mrs M’Lehose once told him of Mr. Nicol. Burns is now in a bit of trouble because he refuses to divulge the lady’s name. He asks Ainslie for help in the matter. He also asks Ainslie for assistance in finding a suitable position for his younger brother William.

15. [*Letters*, 279]. Dumfries, 16 Oct’ 1788. “I am not entirely sure of my farm’s doing well. – I hope for the best: but I have my Excise Commission in my pocket; I do n’t care three skips of a Cur-dog for the up-and-down gambols of Fortune.–”

16. [*Letters*, 295]. Ellisland, January 6th, 1789. The writer comments on Ainslie becoming a Writer to the Signet. Burns mentions that he is still catering for Johnson’s publication. At the end he
writes: “I must again trouble you to find & secure for me a direction where to find Jenny Clow, for a main part of my business in Edin’ is to settle that matter with her, & free her hand of the process.–”

17. [Letters, 347]. Ellisland, June 8, 1789. Burns apologises for not writing sooner, comments that Life is a serious matter, and adds: “…a wife and family of children, whenever you have the honor to be a husband and a father, will shew you that your present most anxious hours of solitude are spent on trifles. The welfare of those who are very dear to us… is more important object of care than any concerns whatever which center merely in the individual.”

18. [Letters, 367]. Ellisland, 1st November, 1789. Burns informs Ainslie that he has been appointed to an Excise Division, and explains some unpleasant and disagreeable circumstances in his business. He notes, however, that fifty pounds a year for life, & a provision for widows & orphans is no bad settlement for a Poet.

19. [Letters, 482]. Dumfries, Nov.? 1791? “Miserable perdu that I am!… My wife scolds me! my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow.–” Burns asks Ainslie not to address him as supervisor, and adds: “I am a simple gauger, tho’ t’ other day I got an appointment to an excise division of 25£ per ann. better than the rest. My present income, down money, is 70£ per ann.”

20. [Letters, 561]. 26th April 1793. “I am d-mnably out of humour, my dear Ainslie, & that is the reason why I take up the pen to you: ‘tis the nearest way, (probatum est) to recover my spirits again.–… I have written many a letter in return for letters I have received; as if the Devil that… rode on SPUNKIE [i.e., Will-o’-wisp] were looking over my elbow. – A happy thought that idea has ingendered in my head! SPUNKIE - thou shalt henceforth be my Symbol, Signature, & Tutelary Genius!” The letter is signed “SPUNKIE”.

Of the twenty letters to Ainslie six were written between May 29 and November 25 of 1787, nine letters were written in 1788, three letters in 1789, one letter in 1791, and one letter in 1793. This is a clear indication that the friendship between the two men cooled off after 1788. Indeed Burns did not even answer Ainslie’s last letter written early in 1794.

But to our main topic, the letter of 14th June 1788. There are three versions of the letter each of which was regarded, at one time or another, as the “original” letter: Cromek’s version in the Reliques (see Section IV below), the facsimile in Pearson (Fig. 2), and the extant portion of Burns’s signed autograph letter (Fig. 3).

IV. THE LETTER ACCORDING TO CROMEK.

Burns’s letter of 14 June to Ainslie [Letters, 248] appeared in print for the first time in 1808, on pages 61-63 of Reliques. Cromek added substantially to the letter by combining it with another letter of the same period [Letters, 249], and prefixed the combined text with the name of the addressee. It is known that Cromek had a habit of making portmanteau versions of Burns’s letters (see Ferguson, p. 228, and Encyclopedia, p. 87). Cromek’s version of the letter extends to fifty-five lines, only a third of which appear in the facsimile in Pearson. Here is the entire Cromek’s version as it appears in Cromek. The parts that do not appear in Pearson’s facsimile are printed in smaller type, in brackets.
THIS is now the third day, my dearest Sir, that I have sojourned in these regions; and during these three days you have occupied more of my thoughts than in three weeks preceding: In Ayrshire I have several variations of friendship’s compass, here it points invariably to the pole.—My farm gives me a good many uncouth cares and anxieties, but I hate the language of complaint. Job, or some one of his friends, says well – “Why should a living man complain?”

[I have lately been much mortified with con-
templating an unlucky imperfection in the very framing and construction of my soul; namely, a blundering inaccuracy of her olfactory organs in hitting the scent of craft or design in my fellow creatures. I do not mean any compliment to my ingenuousness, or to hint that the defect is in consequence of the unsuspicious simplicity of conscious truth and honor: I take it to be, in some way or other, an imperfection in the mental sight; or, metaphor apart, some modification of dulness. In two or three small instances lately, I have been most shamefully out.

I have all along, hitherto, in the warfare of life, been bread to arms the light-horse – the picket-guards of fancy; a kind of Hussars and Highlanders of the Brain; but I am firmly resolved to sell out of these giddy battalions, who have no ideas of a battle but fighting the foe, or of a siege but storming the town. Cost what it will, I am determined to buy in among the grave squadrons of heavy-armed thought, or the artillery corps of plodding contrivance.]

What books are you reading, or what is the subject of your thoughts, besides the great studies of your profession? You said something about Religion in your last. I don’t exactly remember what it was, as the letter is in Ayrshire; but I thought it not only prettily said, but nobly thought. [You will make a noble fellow if once you were married. I make no reservation of your being well-married: You have so much sense, and knowledge of human nature, that though you may not realize perhaps the ideas of romance, yet you will never be ill-married.

Were it not for the terrors of my ticklish situation respecting provision for a family of children, I am decidedly of opinion that the step I have taken is vastly for my happiness. As it is, I look to the excise scheme as a certainty of maintenance; a maintenance, luxury to what either Mrs. Burns or I were born to.] Adieu.
V. FACSIMILE OF BURNS’S LETTER TO AINSLIE.

In 1832 William Pearson published “The Works of Robert Burns.” In the prefatory Notice, he announces that “there is also here presented, (an entire novelty), a fac-simile of the poet’s handwriting.” The facsimile (Fig. 2) is of Burns’s letter to Ainslie of 14th June 1788. It is inserted between pages 308 and 309, facing page 309.

Comparing Fig. 2 with Cromek’s version in Reliques we note that the facsimile consists of lines 1 - 11, 36 - 41, and a part of line 42 in Cromek’s version, and the following closing two lines, not in Cromek’s version:

Keep my old Direction, “at Mauchline,” till I inform my self of another.—Adieu! Robt. Burns
The facsimile is presented in *Pearson* merely as an example of the poet’s handwriting. On page 309, facing the facsimile, the letter from Cromek’s *Reliques* is reprinted *in toto*. Curiously enough, by an extraordinary oversight, neither the editor nor the publisher nor the printer of *Pearson* nor, for that matter, any of the editors and publishers of numerous post-1832 editions of Burns that contained Cromek’s version, noticed that lines 12-35 and 42-55 of Cromek’s version cannot belong to Burns’s letter to Ainslie of June 14th 1788 since they do not appear in the facsimile of the original letter. Thus the original version of the letter and its facsimile remained virtually undiscovered until 1931, while a copy of Cromek’s version was included in most editions containing Burns’s correspondence, including *Allen* and *Mackenna* which are the latest such editions in the Minc Collection published prior to 1931.

Pearson’s 1832 edition of Burns was reissued in 1835 by the same publisher. The 1835 edition contains both the facsimile and the reprinted Cromek’s version. The same edition was reissued in 1836 and in 1837 by Judd, Loomis & Co., with the same facsimile and a copy of Cromek’s version in each. In 1849 Leavitt, Trow & Co. of New York reissued Pearson’s edition of 1832 with Cromek’s version on page 309, but without the facsimile of Burns’s letter to Ainslie. The same edition, without the facsimile, was reissued by Leavitt and Allen, New York, in 1852, 1853, 1856, 1857 and *ca.* 1858 (undated.) It appears that the facsimile was not included in any editions of Burns other than the four American editions: *Pearson, Pearson*35, *Judd-Loomis*36 and *Judd-Loomis*37. The affirmative part of this statement is supported by the fact that each of two copies of *Pearson* and a copy of *Judd-Loomis*37 in the Minc Collection contain a copy of the facsimile, and that the copies of *Pearson*35 and of *Judd-Loomis*36 listed on pages 49 and 50 of *Gibson* contained the facsimile. Unfortunately, the facsimile leaves have been stolen from some copies of *Pearson* in major Burns collections. Indeed I was informed that the facsimiles of Burns’s letter to Ainslie have been cut out of copies of *Pearson* in the Robert Burns Collection in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, in the Hornel Collection in Broughton House, and in the Dumfries Burns Club Collection. However, this was not the case with Leavitt & Allen’s editions of “The Works of Robert Burns.” A careful examination of copies of *Leavitt-Allen* in the Minc Collection shows that they never contained the insert.

VI. THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT.

Burns settled at Ellisland on 11 June 1788. The first letter he wrote from his new farm was to Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop. In it Burns announces two major events in his life. After a quotation he opens the letter with “This is the second day, my honored Friend, I have been on my farm.” Then after another quotation he adds: “I must inform you, Madam, that your surmise is just; I am indeed ‘A HUSBAND’. His letter to Ainslie, [*Letters*, 248], Burns wrote on the following day.

The letter as shown in Fig. 2 consists of 18 lines. The opening line reads: “Ellesland 14th June 1788.” This is followed, in lines 2-10 by the first paragraph, opening with: “This is now the third day, My dearest Sir…” . The second paragraph, in lines 11-16, begins with: “What books are you reading…”. The last paragraph, in lines 17-18 contains a note about Burns’s address, similar to the note in his letter to Mrs. Dunlop, a salutation “Adieu!” and the signature, “Rob’ Burns.”
The extant portion of the original manuscript, shown in Fig. 3, consists of a part of line 7, including most of the words “My Farm,” and complete lines 8-18. It is not known what happened to the missing portion of the manuscript containing the first six lines and most of the seventh line. It is not impossible that an earlier owner of the original manuscript cut off the top portion of the letter to present it to someone, or even to sell it, although it is perhaps more likely that the top portion of the manuscript was destroyed because of negligence or careless handling. The bottom margin is also missing, including small parts of the stems of both f’s in “self of” and a part of the line under the poet’s signature. The remaining portion of the original manuscript is 8½ ins. wide. The written lines are 6½ ins. long on the average. The (vertical) length varies from 4¾ ins. on the left, to 5 ins. at “My Farm”, and from 6½ ins. to 5¼ ins. on the right. We know that the original width of the letter was 8½ ins. but we do not what know the original length was. The facsimile insert in Pearson measures 8½ x 11 ins. The written lines are 6½ ins. long on the average, and the height of the text written in Burns’s hand is 7½ ins. The exact length of the manuscript cannot be deduced from the dimensions of the facsimile since the widths of the upper and the lower margins in the original letter may have be different from those in the facsimile. The vertical margins in the manuscript were about an inch wide. If the writer wanted to give his letter a bonnie appearance he may have made the horizontal margins somewhat wider than the vertical: the upper margin perhaps about 2 inches wide, and the lower margin a wee bit narrower. It may well be that the dimensions of the letter were the same as those of its facsimile; namely, 8½ x 11 ins.

In conclusion we quote the last two sentences in the “Notice to the Present Edition” in Pearson, written as an observation on the poet’s handwriting: “It was at one time matter of surprise that the Ploughman should have been a man of genius and a poet. If any such curious persons still exist, they will of course be likewise surprised to find that he was so good a penman.” Perhaps. Burns himself wrote to Mrs. Dunlop (Letters, 362): “The fact is, I know not well how to write to her: I should sit down to a sheet of paper that I knew not how to stain. I am no dab at fine-drawn letter-writing…”.

REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Allen
THE LETTERS OF ROBERT BURNS.
Edited by Francis H. Allen. In four volumes.

Currie
THE WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS.
Edited James Currie. In four volumes.
Liverpool: Printed by J. McCreery, 1800.

Encyclopedia
Maurice Lindsay, THE BURNS ENCYCLOPEDIA.
Ferguson
THE LETTERS OF ROBERT BURNS.
Edited J. De Lancey Ferguson. In two volumes.

Ferguson39
De Lancey Ferguson, PRIDE AND PASSION. Robert Burns 1759-1796.

Gibson
James Gibson, THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT BURNS.
With Biographical and Bibliographical Notes.
Kilmarnock: Printed by James M’Kie, 1881.

Judd-Loomis36
THE WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS.
Poetry and Correspondence of Dr. Currie’s Edition.
Hartford: Judd, Loomis and Co., 1836.

Judd-Loomis37

Leavitt-Allen
THE WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS.
New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1852.

Letters
J. De Lancey Ferguson, THE LETTERS OF ROBERT BURNS.

“[Letters, xyz]” designates letter No. xyz in Letters;
“the letter” refers to [Letters, 248].

Mackay
THE COMPLETE LETTERS OF ROBERT BURNS.
Edited by James A. Mackay. Authorised by The Burns Federation.

Mackenna
ROBERT BURNS, THE LETTERS OF THE POET.
Introduction by R. W. Mackenna.
London: Collins Clear-type Press, [1928].

Pearson
WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS.
The Poetry and Correspondence of Dr. Currie’s Edition.
New York: Printed by William Pearson., 1832.

(“Pearson’s facsimile” designates the facsimile inserted between pages 308 and 309 of Pearson; “the facsimile” = Pearson’s facsimile.)

Pearson35

Reliques
RELIQUES OF ROBERT BURNS.
Collected and published by R. H. Cromek.

(Cromek’s version = Burns’s letter to Ainslie as printed on pp. 61-63 of Reliques.)
AFGHANISTAN 1801 ~ 2001

The horrors of the 11th September, 2001 in the United States of America and the resulting war in Afghanistan leading to much publicity and in particular to Kabul the capital of Afghanistan, reminds us of the tragic event which took place in that city on 2nd November 1841 affecting close relations of Robert Burns. The 2nd November, 2001 marks the 160th Anniversary of the assassinations of Sir Alexander BURNES and his brother, Lieut. Charles BURNES, at the British Residency in Kabul. Sir Alexander was British Political Agent in Afghanistan at the time. Sir Alexander’s grandfather, James BURNES, was a cousin of Robert Burns.

[Chart showing the family connection]

From Cabool, (Kabul) on 16th May, 1841 Sir Alexander wrote the following in his book *Cabool: being a Personal Narrative of a Journey to and residence in that City* (Published in 1841) “To James Burns, Esq., Montrose the volume is inscribed: As a proof of my affection to a father to whom I am indebted for all I enjoy in the world: who, besides cherishing me in youth, early associated me with himself, and taught me to think and to act as a man when most of my companions had not even acquired the rudiments of their education.”
The best-laid schemes o’ mice and Grant really went agley in 2001, for I was unable to come to Scotland as usual; foot and mouth disease, the tragic events of September 11th and my wife’s ill health conspired to keep me in North America and out of touch with friends and fellow-Burnsians. But as I write I am looking forward to a trip to Washington to deliver a paper on Burns at the conference of the North-West Society for 18th Century Studies which bears the unfortunate acronym “NWSECS” but which may thereby prove a suitable locale for discussion of Burns and his amours. The theme of the conference at the University of the Puget Sound is “Charting Spaces and Places” and my paper is entitled “The Pilgrim’s Progress: Robert Burns’s Tours in 18th Century Scotland.” I hope the editor will find it of sufficient interest for inclusion in the *Chronicle* when space permits. (See page 166)

In Edmonton, 2001 will stand out in the memory because for once Edmonton Burns Club had an actual lassie to reply to the “Toast to the Lassies,” that wonderful lady, our Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta, the Burns Club’s honorary patron, the Honourable Lois E. Hole, C.M. We knew that if any lassie could handle being the sole female among 500 men it would be Lois, and she carried it off with wit, grace, and a warmth that immediately endeared her to all present. Our speaker was an old friend of the Edmonton Club, the Rev. John Weir Cook of St Philip’s Church, Joppa. His church burnt down in 1998, unfortunately, and not just because its address was in Brunstane Road; but the flame of faith burns brightly in Joppa yet, as witness the fine Church of Scotland sermon John preached in First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton. His “Immortal Memory” was a tour de force of wit, eloquence, elegance, erudition and elocution.

I spent some leisure time on Vancouver Island during the summer, and took the opportunity while in Victoria to visit and photograph the Burns Statue in Beaconshill Park. I wanted to compare it with the new Edmonton one erected in January, 2000 and found it to be rather fine, albeit cast in a more conventional mode than the Weaver one of which we in the Edmonton Burns Club are so proud.

“Scotland on Sundy,” June 17, 2001 alerted readers to the discovery of ten politically-explosive poems penned anonymously more than 200 years ago which have been pronounced the work of Scotland’s national poet Robert Burns, poems “so radical he could have been hanged for treason had he put his name to them.” Burnsians can now read and judge for themselves in the recently published book *The Canongate Burns*, edited by Dr Andrew Noble of Strathclyde University and researcher Patrick Scott Hogg. The general editor of the Canongate series, Professor Roderick Watson, director of the Centre for Scottish Studies at the University of Stirling, is quoted as saying, “This is a complex and detailed book and there is good evidence to suggest that these are the work of Burns. I think it will cause a bit of a stir.” The article continues:
For the first time, all Burns’s songs, poems and other controversial work, such as the “Merry Muses of Caledonia” classified as pornography until the mid-1960s will be printed in the order that they were first published. Extensive footnotes will also place Burns in a much more radical light. One of the researchers’ most significant finds was a note indicating that Burns had reworked a poem about revolution in America to give support to the cause of an independent Ireland. In the new version, the poem, “Ode for Hibernia’s Sons,” openly criticises the British government and the royal family for their oppression of the Irish. Hogg, who unearthed the new information, said: “This is explosively treasonable stuff. As an Exciseman he could well have been tried for treason which could have led to a noose around his neck.”

Ode (For Hibernia’s Sons)

No Spartan Tube, no attic shell,
No lyre Aeolian I awake,
A broken chain, exulting, bring
And dash it in a tyrant’s face,
‘Tis liberty’s bold note I swell: And dare him to his very beard,  
Thy Harp, Hibernia, let me take! And tell him he is no more fear’d.  
See gathering thousands while I sing, No more the despot of Hibernia’s race!

The Canongate Burns was printed as a paperback and as a boxed-set hardback edition in two volumes on November 14th, and will contain some 1,100 or more pages. Further information may be obtained by calling 00 44 131 557 511 or by visiting www.canongate.net. The web-site offers an example of a poem long considered a forgery but now restored to the canon, “The Tree of Liberty,” first printed in Dr Chambers’ edition in 1838.

The same issue of “Scotland on Sunday” carried an alarming article by Gina Davidson and Jason Allardyce entitled “Burns celebrations to match St Patrick’s Day”:

HE may have dubbed politicians a parcel o’ rogues but even Robert Burns would have to raise a glass to the latest idea from Holyrood. Plans are being drawn up for a weekend of celebrations for Scotland’s national bard to rival those for St Patrick’s Day, which sees Ireland awash in green and Guinness. While the Scottish Executive is still working on the details of the celebrations which are expected to cost up to £1m, Burns aficionados hope the national toast to the bard will see the Clyde dyed blue in the same way the Chicago River in the United States turns green. It could see Saltire crosses trailing across the sky from aeroplane exhausts, giant haggis-eating competitions and perhaps even the restaging of Tam O’Shanter flight from warlocks and witches in Burns’s home town of Alloway.

A source close to culture minister Allan Wilson confirmed that he intends to stage a glittering Burns Supper at Edinburgh Castle, with invitations being sent to international celebrities and politicians as senior as President George Bush. He also plans to make major cultural venues across the country free for the weekend to draw in visitors in and raise awareness of Scottish culture and is considering a parade of pipers down the capital’s Royal Mile. Wilson added: “We need not be bound by the traditional date of January 25. I recently visited Dublin and was struck by the success of the Irish in moving St Patrick’s Day from March to May to combat foot and mouth disease. Dublin was bursting at the seams with foreign tourists, many from North America. I believe that a Burns Day, if engaged in on the proper scale and with enough imagination, offers an excellent opportunity for the same kind of success in Scotland.”

While all true admirers of the Bard must shudder at these hideous commercial prospects, they are no worse (except perhaps in degree) than the Burns souvenir industry with which we are all, alas, acquainted. I was recently given a copy of a poem taken from a magazine called Tavistock Wharf in which Muriel Cutler utters this poignant lament:
Oh, Rab! I don’t know what ye’d say
could ye but see yer hame today
Nae reekin’ lum, nae byre, nae plough
the biggin’s fu o’ tourists now

Sic tea towels gay wi’ tartan edge
recall yer love life in the sedge
Whilst tablemats depict the murk
roun’ Alloway’s auld haunted kirk

Yon auld cob walls are smooth and white
the windows sma’ sae clean and bright
E’en paint upon the stable door
nae stour upon the cauld stane floor

Puir Tam has had the treatment too
“For Shanter Experience” join the queue
Video witches - what’s absurd
is - many folks don’t ken a word

Yer sonsie mien’s on mony a mug
yer poems and songs on plate and jug
Yer dark eyes of ‘begetting’ sin
gaze oot frae every shortbread tin

Oh, Rab! I’m glad ye canna see it
all’s tinsel here, how could ye drae it?
Yon Tourist Board has turned ye over
and it’s the one now I’ the clover

Reviewer Chris Burchell says, “Muriel captures so well the shame o’ it a’ - the commercialism of fake tartanry invented by the Victorians which must make many a Scot shudder.”

Burns himself would shudder at the horrendous events in the United States on September 11th, further evidence, if any be needed, of man’s inhumanity to man (see page 6). The poems to be printed in *The Canongate Burns* may well prove to be to the point; here [again from “Scotland on Sunday”] is a part of “Humanity: an Ode”:

Blow, blow, ye winds! with heavier gust!
And freeze, thou bitter-biting frost!
Descend, ye chilly, smothering snows!
Not all your rage, united, shews
More hard unkindness, unrelenting,
Vengeful malice, unrepenting,
Than heav’n-illumin’d Man on brother Man bestows!

To paraphrase Wordsworth, “Burns! thou should’st be living at this hour — the world hath need of thee.” At times of distress and grief, when all around seems bleak and dead, we turn to Burns for consolation and hope of change, for optimism that the human condition is not entirely wretched, for the laughter of love which alone can mend the broken heart.

In his new book *Berlioz Remembered* [reviewed by David Cairns in *Gramophone*, September 2001, p. 107], Michael Rose quotes Gounod as saying of Berlioz: “The great geniuses suffer, and must suffer, but they are not to be pitied; they have experienced states of intoxication unknown to the rest of men, and, if they have wept from grief, they have shed tears of ineffable joy. That alone is a heaven beyond price.” How well those words could apply to Robert Burns!

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NEW FRIENDS SCHEME LAUNCHED FOR BURNS NATIONAL HERITAGE PARK

Burns National Heritage Park, which encompasses Burns Cottage and Museum, the Burns Monument, Auld Kirk Alloway, Brig o’Doon and the Tam o’Shanter Experience, is launching a new Friends scheme to generate volunteers and funds to improve the condition and display of the heritage managed by the Park.

The Park is looking for Friends who can help create better access to this veritable jewel in the Burns crown. By giving their time or their money, Friends can help deliver projects to preserve and display Burns heritage and to promote greater public appreciation of Burns’ legacy, particularly among younger generations. The first priority for the Friends will be to help realise the restoration and renewal of the Burns Cottage Museum. The Museum, housing one of the world’s most important collections of Burns manuscripts as well as a rich collection of Burnsiana, is in dire need of repair and restoration.

The scheme will have several categories of membership. Benefits of membership include free entry to all of the Park’s attractions, special discounts and promotions and access to special events throughout the year. In addition, individuals or organisations who make a significant donation as Founders will be recognised by a special display in the restored museum. A limited number of inaugural founders will receive a very special gift indeed; a beautifully engraved framed original ticket from the 1844 Burns Festival.

For details of how you can join the Friends of Burns National Heritage Park, contact Elinor Clark on 10292 445677 or e-mail ercburnscottage@netscapeonline.co.uk
The Robert Burns Song Book
Volumes I and II
By Serge Hovey. Published in the UK by:
KEVIN MAYHEW, LTD.
Buxhall • Stowmarket • Suffolk • IP14
3BW • England • UK
Website: www.kevinmayhewltd.com • Email: sales@kevinmayhewltd.com
Phone: 01449 737978 • Fax: 01449 737834

The Robert Burns Song Book is a collection of all the songs of Burns, as researched and arranged for voice with piano accompaniments by the American composer Serge Hovey (1920-1989). The 324 songs are presented in six thematic chapters, each encompassing a different aspect of Burns’s song output. Mel Bay Publications, Inc. is pleased to offer Volumes I and II of this four-volume edition while the remaining manuscripts are being edited and prepared for publication by the composer’s widow Esther Hovey and son Daniel. Volume I contains the first chapter, Country Life, which has 85 songs portraying a variety of country folk including farmers, millers, shepherds, weavers, cooperers, shoemakers, tailors, tinkers and other colorful figures, all reflecting Burns’s love of the Scottish countyside and the music of its people. Volume II presents the second chapter entitled The Lasses. It includes 70 songs expressing the poet’s passion for his wife Jean and for “that other species.” The songs range from well-known titles such as Auld Lang Syne to long-lost or forgotten ones, e.g., There Grows a Bonny Brier-bush.

Each volume is illustrated with reproductions of paintings, drawings and prints and contains a glossary of frequently appearing Scots words and insightful historical notes for each song.

The Robert Burns Song Book, Volume I
(MB96839) $25.00
The Robert Burns Song Book, Volume II
(MB96840) $29.95

The Speaking Eye
Byron’s Aberdeen - People, Places and a Poem
By William J. P. Neish

“...could we forget his placid air,
His steady brow, and speaking eye,
His gentle, kind, assiduous care,
His firm but mild authority”

Inspired by the chance find of an old manuscript poem among papers belonging to his grandparents, William Neish developed the intriguing idea that the anonymous elegy to an 18th century Aberdeen schoolmaster could in fact be an unattributed work by his most illustrious former pupil – Lord Byron.
Further spurred on by the discovery that the poem contained the distinctive phrase “his speaking eye”, used by Byron in his work *Parisina* that was written almost simultaneously, Neish set to work to examine all the available evidence of the poem’s authorship.

With the help of computer analysis, the author has rigorously examined the poetic style of Byron and contemporary poets, including several lesser-known, amateur and Aberdonian contenders, in an attempt to narrow the field. Neish’s book presents us with his findings, supporting his conclusion that the poem could well be the work of Lord Byron. In the course of his investigations he has also uncovered a mine of rare information about late-eighteenth century Aberdeen, the old Grammar School that Byron attended until he was ten, his schoolfellows and teachers, and the neighbourhood in which he and his mother lived.

The author provides numerous delightful contemporary illustrations (including prints of old Aberdeen, portraits of Byron’s former schoolfellows and documents relating to his early life), in an extraordinary evocation of the place and time that form the background to this fascinating work of literary detection.

*Scottish born and educated William Neish trained as a chemist and has spent his professional life in cancer research. He has worked in this field in the USA, Scotland and England, and published numerous papers on the subject. Now retired, he has been able to pursue a lifelong interest in his family history, including that of the Aberdonian Pirie family. This sparked an interest in 18th and 19th century Aberdeen, and in particular the schooldays of the poet Byron and his contemporaries in that city which form the subject of his first book.*

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Tel: 01273 472534 Fax: 01273 476472
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Robert Burns’ “The Rights of Woman”, is a complex work, running the gamut from gentle humor to political bombast. It is a master-piece of drama and timing, meant to be spoken on the stage, not read in a book. It also marks a turning point in Burns’ life, when he learned that political actions have consequences, and in the future, he would find other ways to “speak his mind” yet still be safe. The woman for whom it was written, Louisa Fontenelle, was an accomplished soprano and versatile comic actress. She was an international (England, Scotland, Germany and America) superstar of her day, whose appealing personality attracted many “groupies”, including Robert Burns. He wrote three poems to or for her, one of which, “The Rights of Woman” is a masterpiece. It has been critiqued from feminist, political, and other perspectives, but its stage value has been largely ignored. From his letters, we know that Burns’ passion for the theatre included socializing with its personnel. (Louisa Fontenelle is not mentioned, however. She seems to have been an inspiration rather than a friend and confidant). Yet, as far as we know, he was never tempted to act, even in minor roles, or to write a play himself. What a pity! As this poem shows, he would have been a terrific success. Perhaps the theatre was his area of relaxation, where he was not pressured to perform or be the centre of attention. He was also a person who enjoyed other people’s talents and artistic achievements. He had a healthy self-esteem but not an ego run rampant.

2 The Burns Encyclopedia.
Louisa Fontenelle was born either on August 31, 1769\(^1\) or 1773\(^2\) in London. All sources agree that her stage debut was November 6, 1788 at the age of either fifteen or nineteen (depending on which birthdate is accepted) in John O’Keefe’s *The Highland Reel: A Comic Opera in Three Acts*\(^3\). It was at Covent Garden in London and she was later to play this role in Scotland. She played the minor female role of Moggy M’Gilpin, “a rare romping hoyden… funny and good-natured, a sweet temper, and a merry heart”\(^4\). She plays a triple role—the madcap Moggy, disguised as a parson, and disguised as a “Highland boy” who enlists in the British army. Her four songs are somewhat limited - a short duet, lead in a chorus with the first line, an air with silly lyrics, including a whole line of “bow wow, bow wow”, and a fairly decent air, “Tho’ I’m a very little lad”. However, the part gave her a chance to display her promising talents. The performance was reviewed by *The European Magazine and London Review* (1788, Vol. XIV, p. 373):

“Miss Fontenelle, who appeared for the first time on the stage, performed with great spirit, vivacity, and comic effect. She is said to be under nineteen years of age. Her person is of the middle size; her countenance well calculated for state effect; her features possessing symmetry, and her eye being peculiarly expressive. Her voice is a good one, but on the whole, she performed with rather too much spirits than too little…”

However, as she honed her talent, that very energy became her trademark. The role that made her famous and vice versa was that of “Little Pickle in Isaac Bickerstaff’s afterpiece, *The Spoiled Child: A Farce in Two Acts*\(^5\). Again, she plays three roles - Charles (Little Pickle), the spoiled prankish child, who also impersonates his saucy sailor lad cousin Tommy, and who disguises himself as Mr. Tag, the playwright and elopes with his aunt. It’s important to remember that in the eighteenth century, the actress was emerging as a serious professional, no longer the young girl searching for a “protector” in the audience so she could retire from the theatre as soon as possible. Upon his Restoration to the British throne, Charles II brought the French custom of women playing women’s roles on the stage instead of young boys taking the parts. In the beginning, actresses only played flattering, appealing roles; old women were still played by men. But soon the actress saw herself as a professional artist, but playwrights were not up to the challenge. The result was that they also took on men’s parts (including Hamlet). These “breeches roles” delighted audiences, who saw more of the female anatomy than that allowed by conventional dresses. It was a classic case of “the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith” (Coleridge).

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3 The copy I used is from the microform of the 1813 edition (“first published in Boston, 1797, and in London, 1798”) by D. Longworth in New York. I was unable to find a printed version that listed Louisa Fontenelle in the credits. One wonders if Robert Burns ever saw the play in Scotland and how he reacted to such lines as, “O, had I Allan Ramsey’s art, To sing my passion tender” and “But why disgrace yourself and family, by turning ploughboy yourself, lad?”!


5 I used the microopaque copy of the 1799 edition by The Booksellers, Dublin, “as performed at the Theatre-Royal, Smoke-alley”. Again, I was unable to find a printed edition of one with Louisa Fontenelle listed in the credits.
Louisa Fontenelle was born at the right time. She thrived on challenges, performing in London (1793 in the Haymarket), Scotland (1789 in Edinburgh and Dumfries “in the winters of 1792 and 1793”), and toured Germany with an English company, where she married the manager, John Brown Williamson. It was one of those wonderful artistic marriages of the time. Although exceedingly handsome, he was an average actor but an excellent manager. They emigrated to America, performing in the Federal Street Theatre in Boston, and his talents were ideal for the new created position of “Master of Ceremonies”, sort of a “bouncer” who kept rowdy patrons under control.

Louisa was an instant success in America:

Williamson made his first American appearance as Othello, January 25, 1796, and was moderately praised for the propriety of his elocution. But the critics were extravagant in their admiration of his wife as Little Pickle in the afterpiece of the evening, Bickerstaffe’s *Spoiled Child*. This was one of the very popular pieces of the time because of the character of Little Pickle, a romp and tomboy, who gave the singing ingénues a splendid opportunity to display their sprightly charms. Mrs. Williamson, formerly Miss Fontenelle, had already delighted London audiences at Covent Garden and the Haymarket by her amazingly nimble and high-spirited impersonations of similar characters; and the American critics did not hesitate to pronounce her Little Pickle the most astonishing and brilliant display of theatrical genius ever witnessed in this country.6

Another critic raved:

That most buoyant and charming of all reckless romps, Miss Fontenelle, the heroine in London of many of O’Keefe’s farces, and a sort of miniature Mrs. Jordan, compressed in one act. A girl whose animal spirits led Merry to compare her to brandy above proof! “She takes away my breath,” said he… the charming Mrs. Williamson, *alias* Miss Fontenelle, reigned supreme over all transatlantic soubrettes.7

She and her husband joined a theatrical company in Charleston, South Carolina, where she died unexpectedly of yellow fever on October 30, 1799, aged 26 (*The Burns Encyclopedia* and Coad’s *The Pageant of America*) or September 18008, upon which the theatres closed for a week (New Grove Dictionary of Opera). Robert Burns, having died three years earlier, was spared the news of her sad and tragic end. Robert Burns must have found Louisa Fontenelle’s life fascinating. She had all the travel and adventure he could only experience vicariously in books and plays. She was talented as an actress but as a person, she was “real”, without artifice. He wrote a charming little poem to this effect:

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8 John D. Ross, *Who’s Who in Burns* (Stirling, Eneas MacKay, 1973), p. 120.
Epigram On Seeing Miss Fontenelle
In A Favourite Character
1792

Sweet naivete of feature,
Simple, wild, enchanting elf,
Not to thee, but thanks to Nature,
Thou art acting but thyself.

Wert thou awkward, stiff, affected,
Spurning Nature, torturing art;
Loves and Graces all rejected,
Then indeed thou’dst act a part.

It’s a pleasant enough ditty that he might dash off for anyone on a moment’s notice (such as the poem to the dog, Echo). However, in “The Rights of Woman”, there is an inspiration at work, a tribute to the recipient as well as the giver. Even for a successful star like Louisa Fontenelle, an original poem (and in her case two!) by Robert Burns was an added attraction. And she was a star in every sense of the word – a brilliant flash and then gone, but having left its mark in memory of the spectator. Like Burns, she overachieved and died young, her full potential unrealized.

“The Rights of Woman” was written for her “benefit night”, which could be very profitable for an actress, both in terms of box office receipts and in “playing the audience” to insure successful future benefit nights and increased attendance at other performances.

The title of the poem, “The Rights of Woman” would immediately have reminded the audience of Thomas Paine’s The Right of Man (a political rebuttal to Edmund Burke’s anti-democratic Reflections on the Revolution in France). (Burke rebutted that and Paine responded with The Rights of Man II.) The first lines

While Europe’s eye is fix’d on mighty things,
The fate of empires and the fall of kings,
While quacks of State must each produce his plan,
And even children lisp the Rights of Man;

would have shocked the theatre into a fearful but exciting silence.

A little background is necessary. Robert Burns lived in tumultous, exciting times. The American Revolution was generally considered a success. Granted, there was a violent war for independence, but afterward, the fledgling country supported a democratic government and was emerging as a stable political power. It was an especially brave and ambitious undertaking, considering that democracy was a fairly new and untested idea. There were stories of ancient Greece but no working model upon which to draw. The Americans proceeded by trial and error. The Articles of Confederation were replaced by the Constitution and the country evolved. Most people, including Thomas Paine and Robert Burns, expected the French Revolution to follow the same pattern. As the drama
unfolded, disillusion set in, as the bloodbath of mob rule was progressing toward the regicide of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. This led the English government to worry about anti-monarchical sympathies in places like Scotland and made even reading *The Rights of Man* a treasonous, dangerous activity. People with governement jobs (like Burns) had to be very careful in their public behaviour. Even the accusation of Singing “Ca Ira” (“It Will Come”, the song of the French Revolution) in a public theatre could have serious consequences.

Intellecutally, the “world of the mind” was an exciting place in Robert Burns’ time, when in-depth political analyses of four hundred pages were referred to as “pamphlets”. These writing contained superb prose (or rabble rousing rhetoric, depending upon your viewpoint) and passionately discussed complex issues. There are many parallels between Robert Burns and Thomas Paine, both excisemen, but where Burns knew when to grovel and back down, Paine served prison terms. In Burns’ second prologue for Louisa Fontenelle, one year later in December of 1793, the style is obviously more traditional; it could have been written by anyone. It is safe, inoffensive, and a much lesser quality. That this is deliberate is shown by the ending couplet—

_To sum up all: be merry, I advise;_  
_And as we’re merry, may we still be wise!_

Robert Burns had every reason to be afraid. The first prologue is performed in November of 1792. By mid-1793, Scottish courts were giving severe sentences, including deportation whose harsh conditions destroyed a person’s health and led to an early death in less than a decade, for simply reading or distributing *The Rights of Man*. In August of 1793, Thomas Muir was tried and sentenced to 14 years in Botany Bay; the next month, Thomas Palmer received a seven year sentence for writing against the war.9 By December of 1793, he had to fear for his job, family, and life. But although he may have backed down, he did not recant. Instead, he went “underground”.10 He published poems anonymously. He became involved in local and church, not national, politics. He collected songs and wrote patriotic poems for “past events”, not present. He used humor, dream sequences, and put social commentary in the mouths of animals, not people. The passion was still there but it had to be disguised.

Once the audience has been shocked with the dangerous political references to *The Rights of Man*, Louisa Fontenelle has their attention. She then shifts to a more comfortable intellectual plane and introduces a plea for the rights of Woman (capital “w”, meant in the universal sense of Womankind). Now she delves into the _real_ purpose of her prologue - to charm the audience and show her versatility. It’s a delicate balance. She has to be interesting yet “safe” and uncontroversial. She is also dealing with two types of audience. The first, including Robert Burns, enjoy the theatre and are living vicariously through

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9 For more detail on the defendants and their trials, see Jock Morris’ article, “Robert Burns, the Patriot-bard” in _Scotland, Class and Nation_, edited by Chris Bambery (London: Bookmarks, 1999), pp. 149-176.  
10 For the following summary, I am greatly indebted to Marilyn Butler’s superb chapter, “Burns in Politics” in _Robert Burns and Cultural Authority_, edited by Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 86-112. This short summary is no substitute for reading the entire article.
the experiences of others. The second, the monied and noble, have pretty much seen it all, and it will take more to hold their interest.

On the surface, the three “rights” of Woman could seem like sexist drivel. Until you realize that Robert Burns is speaking about *human* rights, just in a sugar-coated form.

The first right, Protection, is “freedom from fear”, a right which Robert Burns espouses for men, women, *and* animals. Because rights bring corresponding responsibilities, those with more power and privilege, such as men, have a duty to protected the lesser fortunate, in this case women. Burns always had compassion for the downtrodden and this extended to the duty of humans to respect animals. Oppressors must show mercy to the disenfranchised. When his friend Robert Riddell chained a fox on his property, Burns saw the taming of a wild spirit as a microcosm of the human condition, an outrage against “the rights of men, the power of women”. Louisa endearingly throws herself upon the mercy of the audience.

The second right, Decorum, is human respect. The kind of respect Burns failed to receive from the upper social classes. And then Louisa shows a variety of emotions on the past “Man’s Inhumanity to Woman” but is quick to assert-present company excepted. She praises the modern men who treat women in a civilized manner.

The third right, Admiration, has to do with self-esteem. Even kings, who have everything, still want to be liked. It is a normal, human need, for both men and women. But again, Fontenelle has a chance to emote “smiles, glances, sighs, tears, fits, flirtations, airs” and show the scope of her acting.

Then a seemingly innocuous end brings another shock - the dreaded words “Ah! Ca Ira” (“It will come”, which is “It’s comin yet for a’ that”). In Thomas Muir’s trial, a few months before, the fact that he owned a seal with “Ca Ira” on it was damning evidence. Robert Burns had been in trouble at work because it was thought he joined in a chorus of the song during a theatre evening when he was off duty. Music has always been a powerful form of protest and social change for the poor and oppressed. One does not need money to hear and learn a song. The sheet music can be suppressed but the tune can not. One does not have to be literate to read words or music in order to learn a song. And verses can be added and spread beyond the scope of the government’s power. Music can stir the blood in primal shorthand; thus, national anthems promote patriotism. And bagpipes can be banned because they foment revolution.

However, no sooner are the treasonous words rung through the audience than it is followed with the “true message” of the evening - “The Majesty of Woman!” Not the majesty of political rulers but the majesty of those who rule by beauty, grace and charm. How could anyone object to that? Then the curtain falls, is raised, and the plays begins before the audience has a chance to digest what was heard. The timing has created the right amount of excitement and pleasure. For the time being, Burns “got away with it.”

It’s sad that one year later, Robert Burns had to play it safer and write a more acceptable (and boring) prologue for Louisa’s second benefit night in Scotland. However, the situation did force him to become more creative and write superb, passionate poems that still survive today. Three years later “The Rights of Woman”, Burns was dead. Three years later, Louisa Fontenelle was dead. The French Revolution has come and gone. But Robert Burns poetry is still alive in countries all over the world two hundred years later. In spite of government oppression, the spirit never dies.
In the *Burns Chronicle* of 1924 there was published an article on the connection between the club and Alexander Findlater who was the customs supervisor at Dumfries when Robert Burns was employed as an exciseman. Findlater ended his career in Government service in Glasgow where he died in 1839. He was interred in the burial ground in the Anderston area of the city. The club recognised that here was an important link between Scotland’s National Bard and the City and as a club we erected a headstone over the grave as described in the previous article in which it is confirmed that the stone was unveiled in 1923 by a Mr. Bain. The handsome stone was a replacement for the original erected by Findlater to mark the grave of his three sisters.

When the new M8 motorway was constructed the Anderston graveyard was in the way of modern progress and Findlaters grave was moved to the modern part of the Linn Cemetery. Colin Hunter McQueen noted the stone was slightly out of sort and carried out some remedial work whereby this magnificent stone was restored to its former glory. Fortunately it sits in a part of the Linn where as yet it has not suffered the humiliation inflicted upon the stones in the old Cathcart cemetery which is relatively close by the Linn.

I mentioned the link to Glasgow. Surprisingly apart from the few known facts there is not really a great linkage between Glasgow and Burns. However the origin of the name “Sandyford” prompts reveal another link.

Most people think that the Sandyford Club derives its name from the Sandyford district in Glasgow. Perhaps it does but not directly. The club originated when members of the Saint Vincent Sandyford Masonic Lodge decided to form a Burns Club. In the deliberations concerning the name it was decided to drop the “St Vincent” part of the title. This was done so that new members would not be averse to joining by removing any masonic connection from the title.

The Masonic connection with Glasgow in the origin of the club brings to mind the correspondence Burns had with Dr. Moore who was the father of Sir John Moore of Corunna. In one of his letters to Dr. Moore the Poet wrote what was really an autobiography in that the latter contains a fairly detailed information concerning the difficulties of his early life. The phrase “butcher meat---” come to mind from this correspondence. Dr. Moore was a Freemason. His mother Lodge was Johnstone Kilwinning with the clear implication that his lodge had received a charter from Mother Kilwinning. Johnstone Kilwinning lodge amalgamated with Glasgow Kilwinning lodge on 16.1.1753 which is at the time the two lodges united. The Glasgow Masonic connection is not well known but the history of Glasgow Kilwinning Lodge No. 4 reveals that many of its members names correspond to names of the subscribers of the first edition i.e. Kilmarnock edition of Burns poems. Included in the list are the names of some famous Glasgow dignitaries of the time such as the Buchanans who were involved as Lord Provosts and as Tobacco Lords. Dr. Moore obviously was a subscriber as was John Thomson, John Wilson,
Robert Scott, James Dunlop, William Bogle, Archibald Bogle, William Craig, William Ingram, George Anderson, James Caldwell. All were listed as being members of Glasgow Kilwinning Lodge. Many of these names are found on the boards showing former Lord Deans of Guild or benefactors of the Merchants House of Glasgow. In other words the merchants of the day – the Tobacco Lords who were freemasons in Glasgow were prominent subscribers of the first Kilmarnock edition of Burns poems. It is possible that Dr. Moore was the link to this group of men through his Glasgow Masonic connection. The list of names was supplied by Freddie Anderson who is very knowledgeable about the connection between Burns and Glasgow. The list of important subscribers-important in the city life of Glasgow via a masonic lodge would suggest that there is probably a greater connection between the city and the poet. It is interesting that among the earliest visitors to the lodge was the Earl of Kilmarnock who subsequently paid the price for his sympathies for Bonnie Prince Charlie!!

The Sandyford Burns Club of course is a much later institution having been founded in 1893 and uniquely at its foundation had 93 members!!! From the outset it had two aims firstly to celebrate Robert Burns at the annual dinner and secondly to hold several meetings to celebrate and promote Scottish Song. In this latter context the club awarded a trophy to the schools in Ayrshire in the late 1940’s, and this trophy is still competed for annually by Ayrshire Schools. The Sandyford connection although remote raises the possibility that the connections between Robert Burns and the City were probably greater than has formerly been realized and perhaps examination of the history of the older lodges might just throw up some other interesting facets in a story which is not completed by a long way!!!

Roy Scott
(Past President)
PRESENTATION IN MEMORY OF JOHN REID

Ian Reid of Ayr, pictured below with Federation President Jim Gibson recently donated several sets of books to the Robert Burns World Federation in lasting memory of his father John Reid (1904-1973).

John was an eminent and active Burnsian of his day died in February 1973 and his collection of books and memorabilia lay relatively untouched with his family for many years, and his collection is a testament to one man’s love and passion for the Bard.

He was born in Whitehill House, Tintock near Kirkintilloch on 1st October 1904, one of nine brothers and sisters and became an ironmoulder before moving on to British Rail in Springburn.

He was an unlettered man who was self taught dedicating his interest and intellect to the study of the life and works of Burns. An ardent Freemason of Torrance Masonic he became a member of the Glasgow and District Burns Association and as their Federation representative he attended several Burns Federation Annual Conferences in the Fifties as an enthusiastic and active member of the Burns movement.

His love and passion for the poet was reflected in his prowess as an after dinner speaker and as a performer of Burns poetry. Such was his talent that he was in demand all over the country for his lively and effective performance. He was described as a one man Burns Supper.
John was a devoted Burns enthusiast who played a significant role in the promotion of Burns and it is in his memory that the Robert World Federation of Burns Clubs has great pleasure in accepting his collection of books. The books will be held in the Federation’s library and made available for students and lovers of Burns. The books on the subject of the Bard include – Poems chiefly in the Scottish dialect, London 1787. Poems chiefly in the Scottish dialect, Edinburgh 1794. Currie’s Works of Burns, 4 volumes, 1818. The Works of Robert Burns, 2 volumes, 1835.

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**BURNS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2002**

**UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE ~ 18-19 JANUARY**

**FRIDAY 18 JANUARY ~ McCANCE BUILDING**

8.45 - 9.30 REGISTRATION, McCance Conservatory, Level 3
9.30 - 10.00 **McCance 1** - Steven McKenna (Keynote) – 10.00 - 10.30 Andrew Noble
10.30 - 10.45 Tea/Coffee **McCance Conservatory**

**McCance 1**
10.45 - 11.15 Katherine Campbell
11.15 - 11.45 Stuart McHardy
11.45 - 12.15 Sheila Douglas
12.15 - 12.45 Maurice Lindsay
12.45 - 1.30 Buffet Lunch
1.30 - 2.00 **McCance 1**

**McCance 2**
10.45 - 11.15 Hazel Hynd
11.15 - 11.45 J. Derrick McClure
11.45 - 12.15 Shirley Darling
12.15 - 12.45 Patrick Scott Hogg

1.30 - 2.00 Tea/Coffee **McCance Conservatory**

**McCance 3**
2.00 - 2.30 Tom Wright
2.30 - 3.00 J. Walter McGinty
3.00 - 3.30 Alexander Broadie
3.30 - 3.45 Tea/Coffee **McCance Conservatory**

**McCance 1**
3.45 - 4.15 Gerard Carruthers
4.15 - 4.45 George Philp
5.00 - 6.15 A Burns Celebration: Readings by Scottish Writers including Liz Lochhead, David Kinloch, Maurice Lindsay, Carl McDougall, William McIvanney, and Christopher Whyte; and a song from Sheila Douglas.

7.00 Dinner - Babbity Bowster, 16 Blackfriars Street. (Optional).

**SATURDAY 19 JANUARY - JOHN ANDERSON BUILDING**

9.30 - 10.00 Michael Fry
10.00 - 10.30 John Gray
10.30 - 11.00 Helena Anderson - Wright & Sheena Blackhall
11.00 - 11.15 Tea/Coffee
11.15-11.45 Murdo Morrison
11.45 - 12.30 R.D.S. Jack & Peter France
12.30 - 1.15 Lunch **John Anderson Building**
2.00 - 2.30 Richard Finlay
2.30 - 2.55 Michael Sked
2.55 - 3.10 Tea/Coffee

3.10 - 3.40 Manfred Malzahan
3.40 - 4.20 Tom Sutherland
4.20 - 4.55 Jo Miller & Students (RSAMD)
4.55 - 5.00 Short Intermission
5.00 - 6.15 G. Ross Roy introduces feature film ‘Auld Lang Syne’ (1937) starring Andrew Cruikshank

**Accommodation:** Single and double rooms are available in the Strathclyde Business School.

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Programme: The full programme will be issued on receipt of booking-forms, and on request.

Further Information: Dr. Ken Simpson, Conference Director/Cath Wales, Secretary, Centre for Scottish Cultural Studies, Strathclyde University, Livingstone Tower, Richmond Street, Glasgow. G1 1XH, Scotland.

Tel: 0141 548 3516 Fax: 0141 552 3493 e-mail: c.wales@strath.ac.uk
JANET MUIR LAYHE

It is with deepest regret that we report the death of Janet Layhe, a loyal member of the St. Andrew Society of York who died on 17th August, 2001.

Despite leaving Scotland in her early twenties, Janet was fiercely proud of her Scottish roots. Her death is a sad loss not only to Alick her husband, a Past President of both The Yorkshire District and the St. Andrew Society of York and her family but also to her friends in Yorkshire.

MARJORIE ("Marge") A. GARLOCK CATHER

It is with great sadness that the Robert Burns Club of Milwaukee (Number 1070) notes the unexpected death of Marjorie ("Marge") A. Garlock Cather, a charter member of the club and a subscriber and contributor to the club’s book, Mither Wit and Native Fire: The Genius of Robert Burns (1992). She was 78 years old when she passed away on July 24, 2001. She is buried in Delafield, Wisconsin, USA.

She and her husband Clarence were active Burnsians and Scots, holding offices in various organizations. The most striking thing about Marge was her smile. There was a formal portrait in her house and people didn’t recognize her at first because they had never seen her without a smile. Her friendliness and her innate poise and grace always lit up the room when she entered it. And her incredible home baked cookies (she was never allowed to take the leftovers home after a meeting) were always exceptionally popular.

For the club’s book, she wrote “A Thumbnail Sketch of Jean Armour” (pp. 68-70), noting the married happiness Jean brought to Robert Burns.

Mrs. MARY MORRISON

It is with much sadness that we report the passing of “Mary Morrison” beloved wife of John Morrison. Mary and John retired to Fairlie in Ayrshire, Mary having worked at the Esso Research Development in Stevenston for twenty years. They were regulars at the Burns events in Oxford – Caithness – West Kilbride and Dumfries. The happiness and fun was always there with all the friends from Scotland – America – Canada – Italy – Russia – England – and all about Robert Burns.

“Had we never lov’d sae kindly
Had we never lov’ sae blindly
Never met – or never parted
We had ne’er been broken hearted.”

JIMMY MASON

Jimmy Mason, a much loved and respected Honorary President of the Federation, died on 21st July at the age of 96. It seems fitting that such a great Burnsian died on the same date as the poet he admired so much.

Jimmy was born in Glasgow on 15 September 1904 and he was always ready to extol the virtues of his native city and Glasgow Rangers. At primary school he met a charming wee girl called Alice, with whom he had a lifelong romance. They were married in 1933 and that marriage was blessed with two children, Shirley and Guthrie.
In May 1945 Jimmy’s job as Public Relations Officer with The Shipbuilders’ Conference brought him to London and the family set up house in Kenton. They soon became active and popular members of the local church and of Harrow and District Caledonian Society. Jimmy rose to prominence in both of these organisations. He became an elder of the church and was its magazine editor for 17 years. The Harrow Caledonians elected him as their President for 1956-57 and again for the Society’s Golden Jubilee year in 1978-79. More recently he was elected Chieftain of the Society.

For a great many years there have been strong links between Harrow & District Caledonian Society and The Burns Club of London and Jimmy used to tell of the day he was invited to have lunch in town with Alastair Fisher, a friend from Harrow, and John Brooks. Both gentlemen were prominent members of The Burns Club of London and during the lunch it transpired that the Burns Club was in great need of an able and dynamic Secretary and his hosts thought Jimmy was the very man they were looking for. With his usual twinkle he said that by the end of the meal he was Secretary of The Burns Club of London, without yet having gone through the formality of joining! He also said that he enjoyed the meal but, over the years, he worked harder to earn that lunch than any other in his life.

His service to that Club as Secretary and later Joint Secretary spanned many years and when the Club was looking for someone extra special to be President for its Centenary year in 1968-69 it was he who was chosen. The duration and quality of the contribution he made to the Club’s well being was recognised when he was given the title of Honorary Life President.

At the Federation’s London Conference in 1985 Jimmy was made an Honorary President of The Robert Burns World Federation in recognition to the contribution he had made to promoting appreciation of the life and works of Robert Burns.

Jimmy was a man of many talents. He was a calligrapher and a very able painter in oils and watercolours. However, it was as a master of the written and spoken word that he achieved his greatest fame. His recitations and witty and eloquent speeches are remembered by many and he travelled far and wide with Alice at his side to propose The Immortal Memory at countless Burns Suppers.

There can hardly ever have been a prouder father, grandfather and great-grandfather than Jimmy. We send our condolences and love to his family.

SUSAN BAILLIE

From Benalla, Victoria, Australia we regret to record the passing of Susan, Honorary President of The Burns Federation, on 4th August, 2001 in her 93rd year.

“To see her was to love her, And love but her forever. For nature made her what she was, And never made anither”.
After a long illness Donald died peacefully on 15th November 2001. A lecturer at Stirling University in all ‘core’ courses taught in the Department of English Studies. These courses covered a large range of literary studies including The Poetic Tradition. He was responsible for post graduate seminars. He taught postgraduate M.Litt in Scottish Studies course at Stirling and supervised PhD and MLit candidates research. His chief research interests were in Scottish Literature, especially the poetry of Robert Burns.


He also contributed to many other publications including Scott Bicentenary Essays and The Companion to Gaelic Scotland. Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns and Religion, Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology, etc., etc.

Other publications to which he contributed are A Companion to Scottish Culture, A Register of Scottish Literary Studies, Burns’s Letters. Was Carlyle Right?. The Burns Chronicle, Studies in Scottish Literature, The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday.

As Chairman of Stirling University Press Editorial Board, 1985-1987, he was responsible for planning and commissioning first list of books. He was also involved in planning interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of Scottish Literature and Culture.

A founder-member and first treasurer of the Universities Committee on Scottish Literature and of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies; and from 1984-87 represented Stirling University on the Scottish Universities Entrance Panel sub-committee for English.

At the Federation’s York Conference in 1989 he was made an Honorary President. Earlier in 1984 he gave the oration to the late Toshio Namba of Japan who received his doctorate at Stirling University. Our thoughts at this time go out to his wife Sheona, his son and daughter.

C. Kennedy
Motto — “A man’s a man for a’ that”

THE ROBERT BURNS WORLD FEDERATION

COMPANY REGISTRATION NO. 196895. SCOTTISH CHARITY NO. SCO29099

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THE VISION by ROBERT BURNS

A SHORT EXTRACT TO COMPLEMENT THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE OIL PAINTING ON THE COVER OF THIS ISSUE BY THE ARTIST JAMES ELDER CHRISTIE.

‘Then never murmur nor repine;
Stirve in thy humble sphere to shine;
And trust me, not Potosi’s mine,
Nor king’s regard,
Can give a bliss o’ermatching thine,
A rustic Bard.

‘To give my counsels all in one,
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan;
Preserve the dignity of Man,
With soul erect:
And trust the Universal Plan
Will all protect.

And wear thou
–She solemn said,
And bound the holly round my head:
The polish’d leaves and berries red
Did rustling play;
And, like a passing thought, she fled
In light away.

IRVINE CLUB’S STAINED GLASS WINDOW

The window pictured overleaf is a montage of items directly related to Burns and his contemporaries. At the top of the window is the scroll and art work taken from David Sillar’s Burgess Ticket together with the Seals of the Royal Burgh or Irvine. Immediately under this is an extract from a Burns letter to his Irvine friend Captain Richard Brown dated Edinburgh 30 December, 1787, in which he credits Brown with encouraging him “to endeavour at the character of a Poet”. On the left middle is the front page of Burns Kilmarnock Edition and in the centre is the Beugo head taken from the Poet’s Edinburgh Edition. Centre right is the Founding Minute of Irvine Burns Club dated Irvine 2 June, 1826, with the signatures of the twelve founding members. Bottom left is an extract from Burns autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore dated Mauchline 2 August, 1787, in which he writes of Irvine “My twenty third year was an important era to me…” On the right of this is the front page of David Sillar’s book of poems printed by John Wilson, Kilmarnock, in 1789. Below this is an extract from Surgeon Fleeming’s Day Book showing the treatment and drugs prescribed for Burns during his illness in Irvine in November, 1781. Extreme bottom centre is one of Burns letters to David Sillar dated Ellishard 22 January, 1790, in which he enclosed the sum of £2- 4/- (£2.20 in today’s currency, i.e. the book would cost 5p in today’s money). To the right of this are two verses written by the Poet in Irvine where he contemplated becoming a soldier beginning “Oh why the duce should I repine…” Below this is a heckling comb with flax fibres. Bottom left is a map of Irvine as it was in Burns time. The glass of the montage is multi-coloured and the whole is attractively adorned with the bright blue flower of the flax.
Stained Glass Window – Irvine Burns Club.

Photo by Colin Hunter McQueen