1996

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RBWF Past President,

Murdo Morrison JP FSA (Scot)

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Motto — “A man’s a man for a’ that”

The Burns Federation
INSTITUTED 1885

HEADQUARTERS: DICK INSTITUTE, ELMBANK AVENUE, KILMARNOCK. KA1 3BU.
AYRSHIRE. TELEPHONE: 01563 572469.

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Clerical Secretary: Mrs. MARGARET CRAIG, Dick Institute, Elmbank Avenue, Kilmarnock. KA1 3BU.
Publicity Officer/Editor: PETER J. WESTWOOD, 28 Stranka Avenue, Paisley. PA2 9DW. Tel/Fax: 0141 887 4777.
Hon Treasurer:T. BRYAN McKIRGAN, c.A., I.DIP., M.A., 4 Balmoral Drive, Cambuslang, Glasgow. G72 8BG.
Tel: 0141 641 1920 Fax: 0141 641 9800.

CONVENERS
Finance Committee: DONALD URQUHART, 10 Suffolkhill Avenue, Dumfries. DG2 7PQ.
Schools Competitions: ANNE GAW, 7 Highfield Place, Girdle Toll. Irvine. KA11 1BW. Tel: 01294 217481.
Memorials Committee: S. G. GAW, ‘Camasunary’, Irvine. KA12 8SR.
Marketing/Advertising: MURDO MORRISON, 110 Campbell Street, Wishaw. ML2 8HU. Tel: 01698 372638.
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PAST PRESIDENTS
FROM THE EDITOR

It would not have been possible for me to edit this Bicentenary edition of the Burns Chronicle, the largest in the Federation's history without help from many quarters, none more so than from Malcolm Creedon and the staff of Solway Offset, Dumfries, printers of this historic edition.

My thanks must also go to all Club members and officials, to the executive of the Burns Federation, to the subscribers, to advertisers and in particular for the financial support given by The Southern Scottish Counties Burns Association, which has made it possible to introduce colour into the book, and produce what will become a 'collectors' item.

The response for material has been overwhelming to the extent that, purely on financial grounds a number of photographs and articles had to be excluded, to have included all material received would have increased the pages by many hundreds.

The aim was to cover as many Bicentenary events as possible on a world-wide basis and briefly record for posterity the events in what turned out to be a highly successful year, and rightly so, in honour of our National Bard, Robert Burns.

I have tried to include as diverse a selection of academic articles and photographs as possible, and in view of the Poet's death in Dumfries 200 years ago, and the many reasons given as to the state of his health and cause of death, a number of articles have been included by members of the medical profession on this subject.

The article on "Robert Burns as a Volunteer" taken from official records also gives factual information on the Poet during the last two years of his life, and indicates that he was not subjected to heavy drinking as many of his biographers, even in recent times often refer to.

The future of the Burns Federation and the Burns movement in general lies very much with young Burnsians. 130,000 school children entered the Federation's competitions during Bicentenary year. A 16 year old student from Irvine Royal Academy joins the senior Burns academics by having her article "Burns and His Women" included, while one of her colleagues had a poem she composed accepted for this publication. During the year a number of schools formed their own Burns clubs and have since joined the Burns Federation.

Included within the Chronicle is an extract from a book to be published by Colin Hunter McQueen of Glasgow, Rantin Ravin' Robin, in which he tells the life of Robert Burns entirely by illustration in the form of line drawings.

This special edition of the BURNS CHRONICLE is dedicated to all those tireless and devoted Burnsians who gave freely of their time and energy to make what has been a worthy and lasting commemoration to Scotland's National Bard ROBERT BURNS

PETER J. WESTWOOD.
When I inherited the Chain of Office from David Smith he did say that the year would go past very quickly and that was certainly true. The intensive activities of the Bi-Centenary took precedence in my diary and this meant attendance at over one hundred events and functions - each one of them very special and very enjoyable. Between Rail and Land Rover over nine thousand miles also went past and speech after speech seemed to be required sometimes in the atmosphere of a Burns Supper but also in the open air at Wauchope and Brow and the daunting experience of reading a lesson in the vastness of St. Giles and in Glasgow Cathedral.

Readings also at Alloway and Greenock and Dumfries with people gathered together to worship and to commemorate and celebrate the name and the works of the Bard.

The Burns Federation is all about people and when I mention people there are two words which are intertwined throughout the whole Burns movement. Enthusiasm and dedication.

Long meetings and late nights, detailed discussions about planning events, supporting and attending, giving that commitment which is so essential and the sheer enthusiasm to keep going with the dedication necessary to ensure success for the events.

It gave me an opportunity beyond compare to meet Ministers and the Prime Minister, the Secretaries of Burns Clubs and the Secretary of State, The Chair Persons of Councils and the Chair Persons of Burns Associations, Provosts and Politicians - many hundreds of people of prominence – all made possible through having the Office of President of the Burns Federation.

The most important people are those involved with the Burns movement and this year must be a platform for the future. I wish President Andy a good term of Office and for him, as for me, the year will spin past at inordinate speed. He will conduct the business of the Federation with the enthusiasm and the dedication that we need as we move towards the turn of the century.

A collective yet sincere “thank you” to all those who were so supportive and encouraging throughout my term of Office – I salute you all.

Murdo Morrison

---

*If happiness hae not her seat
An centre in the breast,*
*We may be wise, or rich, or great,*
*But never can be blest!*  

*Na treasures nor pleasures
Could make us happy lang;*
*The heart ay’s the part ay*
*That makes us right or wrang.*
THE POET WOULD HAVE APPROVED

Pictured in front of the Poet's statue in St. George's Square, Glasgow, from left to right:- President of the Burns Federation, Andrew McKee, Lavinia Drew, Great Great Great Granddaughter of Robert Burns and Fred Goodwin, Chief Executive of the Clydesdale Bank. The occasion was the launch of the four Clydesdale Bank Robert Burns £5 notes, issued to mark the Bicentenary of the Poet's death.
Clydesdale Bank Robert Burns Commemorative £5 Note Issue

To mark the 200th anniversary of the death of Robert Burns, Scotland’s national bard, Clydesdale Bank have produced a special issue of four £5 notes. Each features a verse from four of his most famous works; ’Ae Fond Kiss, A Man’s A Man For A’That, Tam o’Shanter and ScotsWha Hae.

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ROBERT BURNS BANKNOTES

Though Burns went through life barely making ends meet and, apart from that brief period in 1787 when his Edinburgh edition netted him over £1,100 (an incredible sum for a poet in those days), not being too well acquainted with banknotes of any kind, he has been honoured in recent years by several issues from the Clydesdale Bank.

This bank opened for business in 1838 and was taken over by the Midland in 1919. Four years later the Midland also acquired the North of Scotland Bank, but it was not until 1950 that the two Scottish banks were merged, and for a time the banknotes showed the joint name. The Clydesdale Bank reverted to the shorter title in 1963. In 1987 the Midland Bank sold the Clydesdale Bank to the National Australia Bank Group.

In March 1971 the Clydesdale Bank introduced a series of notes with the theme of Scotland’s Men of Life and Letters. It was decided that Robert Burns should be the subject of the £5 note and the Bank’s design consultant, Lewis Woodhuysen, was commissioned to produce a suitable design. He procured the services of Owen Wood, a well-known artist, to provide the original artwork which was then translated into the engraving technique employed in the printing of the notes by Thomas De La Rue.

A very great deal of care went into the production of the artwork. It was decided to use the bust-portrait by Alexander Nasmyth, but this had to be reversed so that Burns was facing into the note, and thus uniform with the other notes in the series. There was some controversy at the time of issue concerning which side the poet parted his hair, and the reversal of the picture added to the confusion. Some artistic licence was also taken in showing the poet holding a quill pen in his right hand, over a sheet of paper, with a closed book alongside and a spray of oats and barley in the background. Burns was shown in a dark blue coat, with a waistcoat faced in buff and blue, the Whig (Liberal) party colours.

The reverse of the note was based on images evoked by Burns’s poems - a field-mouse, oats, red roses and the rolling countryside of Kyle where Burns was born. The drawing of the field-mouse came primarily from a photograph in a natural history magazine and Schubert’s *Natural History, Country Life and the Cyclopaedia of Arts, Sciences and Literature*. The original drawing of the oats was not correct as the strain found in Burns’s time was a very poor relation to the modern variety. Similarly, the artist admitted to further botanical ignorance by illustrating the form of hybrid rose more appropriate to twentieth century gardens. The red, red rose to which Burns alluded was the only cultivated variety in existence in his lifetime, and was similar to the native wild rose. However, all of these matters were put right before the note was engraved.

A small number of the initial issue (dated March 1, 1971) was overprinted ‘Specimen’ for circulation within the banking world. The very first note issued, with the serial number D/A 000001, was presented by the Bank to the Birthplace Museum, where it is framed and on display.

The original issue was inscribed CLYDESDALE BANK LIMITED and in this guise it was re-issued on February 1, 1980 with automatic sort marks added to the reverse. These appeared as two tiers of seven short horizontal lines in three groups, but each tier had different arrangements of the lines. They were located to the left of the mouse’s nose and underneath its tail.

This version had a relatively short life, for in 1982 the Clydesdale Bank became a PLC and consequently the emended title was engraved on the obverse of notes issued on March 29, 1982. Originally these notes bore the signature of A.R. MacMillan as Chief General Manager, but notes issued on January 5, 1983 were signed by Richard Cole-Hamilton. The sorting marks were dropped from the issue of September 18, 1986. Later issues of this type were dated July 18, 1987, August 2, 1988 and June 28, 1989. From 1987 onwards the signatory was designated as Chief Executive.
The obverse of the note was substantially redesigned in 1990 when the dimensions were reduced from 145mm x 77mm to 135mm x 70mm to bring it into line with the notes of the other Scottish banks and the Bank of England. The chief differences lay in Burns’s portrait, the hand, quill-pen, manuscript and book being removed. The political colours on the waistcoat vanished, to be replaced by a neutral dark blue. The opportunity was also taken to make improvements in the poet’s portrait, in the hair, mouth, nose, ear and especially the eyes that had such a spellbinding effect on his contemporaries. The name ROBERT BURNS was moved from a vertical position lower left, to a horizontal position to the left of Burns’s head. The serial number lower right was moved some distance to the left, to permit the Bank logo of a three-masted galley in the bottom right-hand corner.

On the reverse, the principal changes were the addition of two double-lined bright orange bands, at left and right and cutting slightly into the vignette, and (lower left) another version of the ship logo. The vignette also now had a thin frame-line. This version, issued on April 2, 1990, was signed by A.R. Cole-Hamilton, but Frank Cicutto signed the notes issued on September 1, 1994.

With the bicentenary of Robert Burns impending in 1996, it was decided to re-issue the £5 note in a commemorative version. The serial numbers have the prefix R/B, and under the signature of Fred Goodwin as Chief Executive appears the issue date of July 21, 1996 - the actual 200th anniversary of the poet’s death. The reverse remains unchanged, but on the obverse there now appear verses from four of Burns’s most celebrated songs and poems, thus creating a quartet of distinctive notes.

The first of the works quoted on these notes is ‘Tam o Shanter’, Burns’s great comic masterpiece, written in November-December 1790 and first published in the second volume of Francis Grose’s *Antiquities of Scotland* in April 1791. The note reproduces the closing lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Now wha this tale o’ truth shall read,} \\
\text{Ilk man and mother’s son, take heed;} \\
\text{Whene’er to drink you are inclin’d} \\
\text{Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,} \\
\text{Think, ye may buy the joys o’er dear,} \\
\text{Remember Tam o’ Shanter’s mare.}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Ae Fond Kiss’, one of the world’s most famous love songs, was inspired by the tender farewell of Burns and Agnes McLehose on December 6, 1791 shortly before her departure for the West Indies. On December 27 Burns sent her from Dumfries a copy of the song ‘so genuine in its resigned passion’ that it eclipsed the other nine songs he had written for her:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{But to see her, was to love her,} \\
\text{Love but her, and love for ever.} \\
\text{Had we never lov’d sae kindly,} \\
\text{Had we never lov’d sae blindly!} \\
\text{Never met - or never parted,} \\
\text{We had ne’er been broken-hearted.}
\end{align*}
\]

By contrast ‘Scots Wha Hae’, composed in August 1793, although ostensibly the rallying cry of Robert the Bruce to his troops on the eve of the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, was actually a coded message against the tyrannical government of William Pitt which was afraid that the French Revolution would spread to Britain. The stirring words

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Lay the proud Usurpers low!} \\
\text{Tyrants fall in every foe!} \\
\text{LIBERTY’S in every blow!} \\
\text{Let us DO - OR DIE!!!}
\end{align*}
\]

printed on the banknote would later be adopted as Scotland’s national anthem.

‘A Man’s a Man for a’ That’ was written late in 1794 and sent to George Thomson in January
1795. The intense contempt for the artificiality of rank has made this a revolutionary song with a central place in the psalmody of radicalism, but the closing verse looks forward to a time when

\[\text{Man to Man the world o' er} \]
\[\text{Shall brothers be for a' that.}\]

This song, mainly composed of simple, monosyllabic words, has been translated into almost 50 languages and is now regarded as the hymn of the universal brotherhood of man.

These commemorative notes are now available in a special protective coating and in a choice of format:

An attractive presentation pack displaying all four commemorative notes. The price of this is £38.50, which is inclusive of postage, packaging and all other charges.

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To order these presentation packs, please complete the Order Form on page 9. You will receive your presentation packs within 21 days of receipt of your order (28 days for overseas orders).

LAUNCH OF BICENTENARY STAMPS

Members of Northumberland and Durham Caledonian Society were invited by Royal Mail to assist with the launching of the commemorative stamps to mark the Bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns. The event on 25th January 1996 took place at the Head Post Office in Newcastle upon Tyne. Pictured from left to right:-

Pipe Major M. F. Harper (Past President), A. Williamson (Past President), W. H. Moore (Vice President), I. C. Morton (Past President), R. H. Jackson together with Lyndsey Mitchell holding a 'blow-up' of the 25p stamp – "O My Luve's Like a Red, Red Rose". See article on page 233.
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THE BURNS FEDERATION
DICK INSTITUTE, ELMBANK AVENUE, KILMARNOCK. KA1 3BU. SCOTLAND.
TELEPHONE: 01563 572469
Salway Offset was formed in April 1973 by Malcolm Creedon and John Ronne. They were previously employed by Robert Dinwiddie & Co. Ltd., who had been printing in the High Street, Dumfries since 1846.

Dinwiddies Managing Director at that time was the well known Burnsian Noel Dinwiddie so both had a long association with printing for the various Burns Clubs worldwide.

The firm now has 20 employees and undertakes all type of printing from business cards to books.

Solway Offset are heavily involved in new technology while on a more nostalgic note have a small letterpress department with an Intertype typesetting machine, type cases and Heidelberg platen printing machines. The past two years they have been closely involved in the printing of Burns material.

It is interesting to note that one of their customers is Mrs. Rosemary Kerr daughter of Noel Dinwiddie who runs the firm of R. Dinwiddie & Co. Ltd., and still supplying menus and the various other requisites required by the many clubs in the Burns Federation.

Dumfries print workers have always had a close affinity with Burns. As we approach the 21st century the bond seems as strong as ever.

A selection of some of the titles printed by Solway Offset in connection with the Bi Centenary of the Poet’s death.
"SWEETLY AROMATIC WITH A KISS OF MALT"

TENNENT'S

Robert Burns
SCOTTISH ALE

(PERFECT POETRY BY ALAN MCLEAN OF THE SCOTSMAN)
THE ROBERT BURNS CONNECTIONS WITH NEW CUMNOCK

During Bicentenary year, many Burns Clubs organised and successfully carried out a variety of events to mark the occasion. A typical example being the events staged by New Cumnock Burns Club in Ayrshire. Apart from an exhibition in the Community Centre, which was officially opened by W. Turner, President of the Club, and lasted for several months, and agreed by all who visited as an outstanding success, not only for the Robert Burns theme but also for the display of memorabilia related to the history of New Cumnock and district.

The Robert Burns connections with the town and district are many, and to this extent the New Cumnock Burns Club decided to instal commemorative plaques on a number of buildings which had direct connections with the Poet.

New Cumnock born, Chris Rollie, an authority on the Poet and New Cumnock and a leading member of the Cumnock club, wrote and published his Robert Burns and New Cumnock to coincide with Bicentenary year. (A chapter from the book appears on page 97). Included in the book are many factual references to places known to Burns, for example:- Laight Farm, Old Mill Farm, Pencloe, the Old Church (Now a ruin) and the Castle Inn. During the summer commemorative plaques were unveiled on these buildings by members of the Cumnock Club, C. McLatchie, J. Clapperton, A. Dick and W. Goudie.
Members of the Exhibition Organising Committee posing for the camera during a break.

A group of Club officials and friends pictured after the official opening of the Exhibition in the local Community Centre.

One of the plaques, this particular one on the wall of the old church.
THE CAIRN This was erected in 1973, using stones taken from the Afton Water, by members of New Cumnock Burns Club to mark the 50th anniversary of the club. Occupying a prominent spot in beautiful surroundings between Laight and the river, it provides a fitting memorial to the Poet’s associations with the area. To Mrs. Dunlop, Burns wrote “There is a small river, Afton, that falls into the Nith near New Cumnock, which has some charming, wild romantic scenery on its banks.”

PENCLOE On 19th August, 1786 Burns wrote to Thomas Campbell of Pencloe, with whom he had recently became acquainted. Campbell, or ‘Pen’ as he was known, was a bit of a rhymester himself and shared the Poet’s love of romantic tributes to the lasses.
THE CASTLE INN In the 1780's this inn was kept by Mrs. Moore, who had formerly been housekeeper at Laight in Glen Afton. On giving up Laight in 1781, Captain McAdam moved into the Castle Inn with his former housekeeper. On 7th August, 1789, Burns wrote to John Logan care of Mrs. Moore, and frequently visited the inn on his travels between Mauchline and Ellisland. There is a strong local tradition that he also occasionally stayed here.

THE OLD CHURCH This church was built in 1659 when the former large upland parish of Cumnock was divided into two parts. The Rev. James Young "Jamie Goose" of the poem The Kirk's Alarm, was an 'auld licht' minister of New Cumnock parish in this church from 1758 to 1795. He was a dogmatic, 'textual preacher' of the type who frequently incurred the Poet's satire. He is buried close against the church wall at the north-west corner. John Logan of Laight is also buried in the churchyard.
LAIGHT FARM  Built in the 1760's for Captain Gilbert McAdam, in Burns's adulthood Laight was occupied by McAdam's son-in-law, John Logan, a friend and correspondent of the Poet who was so useful in gathering subscriptions for the "Kilmarnock poems". On Saturday 19th October, 1788, Burns stopped here to dine on his way to Mauchline, and four days later he breakfasted with the Logans on his return to Ellisland. Laight is little altered from that time, although a window in the west gable inscribed by Burns was removed in the 1970's. Tradition maintains that Burns wrote Sweet Afton during a visit to Laight.

OLD MILL FARM  In the 1780's this farm was occupied by the McKnight family, who kept it as a public house. On the wintry evening of Saturday 10th January, 1789 en route to Mauchline, Burns has just finished dinner at friend Bailie Whigham's Inn, Sanquhar, when the "funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs. Oswald..." (of Auchincruive) arrived and he was obliged to "brave all the horrors of the tempestuous night... twelve miles further on, through the wildest hills and moors of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock the next inn. Suffice to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock has so far recovered my forzen sinews, I sat down and wrote the enclosed Ode." (Dweller in yon dungeon dark). This Ode was written in the Old Mill Inn, where Burns spent the night, and sent off next day to the Edinburgh Evening Courant.
The 1961 issue of the Burns Chronicle carried an article by Dr. John Strawhorn entitled - "LETTERS FROM A LAND STEWARD - WAS HE POOR UNCLE ROBERT?" The question, though fully explored in that article, has yet to be answered with absolute certainty. But now, in the bi-centennial year of the Poet’s death, there is a possibility that the mystery explored by Dr. Strawhorn thirty-five years ago could at last be solved.

The substance of the article is as follows. The late Sir James Hunter Blair (7th Bart) of Blairquhan Castle, Ayrshire, had discovered among family papers six letters written between 1776 and 1779 and addressed to his ancestor James Hunter Blair (created first Baronet in 1786). The letters had been written by one Robert Burnes, the land steward at Robertland, an estate near Stewarton, Ayrshire, purchased by Hunter Blair c. 1774.

To the inexperienced eye there seemed little in the letters - or in others written at the same time by William Logan, the Robertland factor who appointed Robert Burnes - that might help establish the writer's identity more fully. There were, however, sufficient clues for Dr. Strawhorn to consider the possibility that Burns' "Poor Uncle Robert" and the land steward were one and the same. (The Poet referred to his uncle, Robert Burnes, as “Poor Uncle Robert” in a letter dated 7th February, 1789, announcing his death.)

Stewarton records for the time when Uncle Robert was known to be living in the Stewarton area do not reveal the presence of any other Robert Burnes. Indeed, the only recorded family group in the area that might cause confusion consistently used the alternative surname spelling, Burns.

One valuable clue in Robertland factor William Logan’s correspondence was reference to the fact that the newly appointed land steward had experience of lime quarrying, an occupation which
Uncle Robert is known to have followed in the summer months at the Lochridge quarries. There were other hints and clues contained in the available correspondence, sufficient for Dr. Strawhorn to conclude that although, "There is no conclusive proof that they were (written by "Poor Uncle Robert") but there is enough evidence to suggest that they may well be so. Later he says, The general conclusion from the external evidence would seem to be that Uncle Robert might well have been the land steward at Robertland."

I read the article several times, intrigued by the idea that Sir James, knowing of the relationship that existed between his land steward and Burns the poet and in spite of his position, would have been more aware of the Poet's problems and background than has previously been appreciated. These thoughts occurred to me early in 1993 as I began my preparations for the annual opening of Blairquhan Castle to the public, a regular, four week long, summer event.

Blairquhan Castle remains, as many well know, very much a family home. During its open-to-the-public period we invite our visitors to explore some twenty rooms, including a small museum and two picture galleries, where, with the help of discreet information cards, they may learn something more about the history of Castle and family than is obvious by simply looking at the buildings, furniture and portraits. As a result of my enthusiasm it was decided to prepare a small exhibition where connections between Robert Burns and the first baronet could be clearly illustrated and explained. So, with the active encouragement of the present laird, Jamie Hunter Blair, I set about gathering together all the relevant information I could find.

I began by researching the first baronet who started life as James Hunter (1741-1787). This Ayrshire-born younger son was one of the Hunters of Abbotshill, a cadet branch of the Hunters of Hunterston, and his family of successful, prosperous merchants had provided Ayr with many of its Provosts. At fifteen James Hunter was apprenticed to Coutts Bank in Edinburgh, rising to become a partner in 1763. By the time of his marriage to Jean Blair of Dunskey in 1770 James was a city Councillor and Magistrate. Elected Member of Parliament in 1781 he was re-elected in 1784 before he resigned his parliamentary seat to serve as Edinburgh's Lord Provost until his premature death in 1787. In 1786 he was created baronet in recognition of his services to the city and the community.

Now I turned to Robert Burns who, with life and mind in turmoil, arrived in the capital in November 1786. From the list of subscribers to Burns' Edinburgh edition, published in April the following year, I learned that James Hunter Blair purchased not just one copy but eight, an unusually large number. (Blair became part of the family name in 1777 when James Hunter's wife inherited her father's estate in Wigtownshire.)
My research soon disclosed that not only did Lord Provost Hunter Blair help introduce Burns, a fellow Ayrshireman, into Edinburgh society but, as Freemasons, the two men shared a common meeting place at the Canongate Kilwinning Lodge No. 2. A print showing Burns’ acclamation as Caledonia’s Bard at Lodge St. Andrew on January 13th, 1787 identifies among the assembled guests Sir James, Scotland’s Grand Treasurer, and, across the room, Sir John Whitefoord of Blairquhan. I realised that here was a new name and association to explore when I learned that Sir John was one of the Poet’s patrons.

At this time Sir John was the owner of two Ayrshire estates, Blairquhan and Ballochmyle, but was in financial difficulty as a result of the disastrous Ayr Bank crash of August 1773. In fact he was under constant pressure to dispose of both estates. When I found records stating that around 1786 Sir James acquired title to the Blairquhan estate I began to suspect that Burns would have known much about both his patron’s and Sir James’s personal affairs.

Reading up on the Ayr Bank crash I discovered that financial stability only returned to the area when a new banking company was established in Ayr in the mid-1770s. The new bank was called Hunter and Co., and it was interesting to note that one of the joint founders was none other than a William Hunter, brother of James.

Shortly after turning up this fact I noted that an Ayr merchant, John Ballantine, patron and close friend of the Poet, was a director of the Hunter Bank and shortly thereafter found in the list of directors the name of William Niven of Maybole, another Burns’ intimate. The accumulating scraps of information were now encouraging me to believe that Poet and the Lord Provost knew more about one another when they met in Edinburgh than I could have imagined when my researches began.

By now, convinced that Burns would have been well aware of James Hunter Blair’s family and business background, I wondered if he might not have visited Blairquhan, as did James Boswell, for until 1786 the estate had been owned by his patron, Sir John Whitefoord. Certainly Burns must have been familiar with the Castle and its location for at that time the imposing bulk stood beside the Crosshill to Straiton main road, not hidden from view as it is today.

The performance is but mediocre, but my grief was sincere.-
The last time I saw the worthy, public, virtuous man—A Man he was! How few of the noble kind breed that help for such, deserve the designation?—he pressed my hand, asked me with the most friendly warmth if it was in his power to serve me. If so, that I would oblige him by telling him how. —I had nothing to ask of him; but if ever a child of his should be so unfortunate as to be under the necessity of asking anything of so poor a man as I am, it may not be in my power to grant it; but, by G— I shall try!!!

Extract from a letter by the Poet on his grief of hearing of the death of Sir James Hunter Blair.
From a piece of text on display in Blairquhan’s small museum I already knew that Burns had written an Elegy (a form the Poet admitted to finding difficult) on the death of Sir James in 1787. More interestingly I learned from Dr. Strawhorn’s article that the poet had privately admitted to much more personal feelings shortly after the Lord Provost’s death. The admissions he made were these. “The performance (the elegy) is but mediocre, but my grief was sincere. The last time I saw the worthy, public-spirited man - a man he was! how few of the two-legged breed that pass for such deserve the designation! - he pressed my hand, and asked me with the most friendly warmth if it was in his power to serve me; and if so, that I would oblige him by telling him how. I had nothing to ask of him; but if ever a child of his should be so unfortunate as to be under the necessity of asking anything of so poor a man as I am it may not be in my power to grant it, but by God I shall try.” Here Burns was writing from the heart and at a time when there was no point in flattering and nothing personal to be gained by expressing deep emotions.

While exploring Sir James’ banking career I came across the following, words written by Sir William Forbes, partner and closest friend. “In his friendships he was warm, steady and sincere, and ever ready to promote the interest of those to whom he formed an attachment. In his disposition he was cheerful and fond of society, and his house was at all times distinguished for hospitality... He possessed in an eminent degree a species of knowledge of the utmost importance to him as a man of business - great knowledge of the world, and an almost intuitive discernment of the characters of men.” It seems to me that here was a man who might well have taken the sort of personal interest in Burns and his personal affairs that the Poet hints at in the private confession of regard and intention quoted earlier.

But now, back to the vital question. WAS Robert Burnes, land steward on Hunter Blair’s Robertland estate, the Poet’s uncle? In his article Dr. Strawhorn draws favourable conclusions from the similarities that exist between the lives and lifestyles of “Poor Uncle Robert” and the land steward. He also points out that there is one way of resolving the problem. Compare the handwriting in the Blairquhan letters with a piece of text written by “Poor Uncle Robert” himself.

But here is the heart of the problem. The only recorded example of Uncle Robert’s handwriting is a letter quoted in full by Scott Douglas in his four volume edition of Burns’ Works published in the 1800s. Scott Douglas, however, fails to give a provenance.

Dr. Strawhorn quotes Uncle Robert’s letter at Appendix A to his article. Having noted and commented upon similarities of style and spelling common to both the Blairquhan letters and the Scott Douglas text, he makes the following observations. “A noticeable difference is in the punctuation, for while in the former it is virtually non-existent, in the latter it is a credit to the writer - or perhaps to the editor? Apart from this striking difference, there are obvious similarities. There are the same types of mis-spelling - and in the last word of the printed text the odd HOST for HASTE suggests that as in the (Blairquhan) letters the writer wrote a, e and o indistinctly. In both are the same clumsy constructions. And in each case there is the same autograph Robert Burnes.”

There is no reason to doubt that the letter written by “Poor Uncle Robert” and quoted by Scott Douglas still exists. Somewhere it lies valued and protected and you, dear reader, might know exactly where that resting place is. A clear photocopy would almost certainly enable a handwriting expert to decide if the Robert Burnes who wrote the Blairquhan letters was indeed Poor Uncle Robert.

If this proves to be the case then another small window will have been opened upon the Poet’s life, a landscape that is forever growing. (As a matter of interest a seventh letter signed Robert Burnes has been discovered in the Blairquhan archives and the careful examination of family archives, correspondence and papers is continuing in the search for further evidence of what I call the Burns/Hunter Blair connection).

I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to ask for help through these pages. Perhaps,
Lochlie, 17 February, 1784.

Dr. Nephew, - I had several times the happiness to hear from you when you wrot to my brother, where I am just now at Lochlie to pay my last respects by witnessing his interment. I have lost a good friend and a loving Brother, but his family greater. However, we must all put up with the dispensations of Providence; for he was a long time prisoner before he died, and I am now very frail myself, and dos not expect it will be long till I follow him. But altho' he be gone, it is my desire that a correspondence should not fail betwixt us in this country, and relations of our nativity; and tho' I were gone off, believe our children will be desirous to keep up the dear correspondence which their fathers espoused.

My wife has been very tender this twelve months. I have only two sons and one doughter at home with their mother.

When you writ to me, direct to me in Stewarton, and if you have an opportunity, let my friends hear from you. This with my kind wishes to your wife and family.

I am, - your loving Uncle,
Robert Burnes

Excuse these mistakes in writin, by reason of host.

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BURNS BICENTENARY SEMINAR

ROBERT BURNS IN DUMFRIES

By Donald R. Urquhart

The review of Hugh Douglas' book "The Tinder Heart" in the Sunday Times of 23 June 1996 occupies the front page of the book section. In the two columns of Muriel Spark's review we read - "He died in Dumfries of an unspecified rheumatic illness at the age of 37;". And that is that.

This period of his life accounts for some 233 of his 715 letters and 280 of his 840 poems and songs. A third of his output in four and a half years. A considerable accomplishment and his talent must be judged on the quality of these works. My Luve is like a Red, Red Rose, Auld Lang Syne, A Man's a Man for a' That. But that same pen could write in vitriol-

"Here lies a mock Marquis, whose titles were shamm'd,
If ever he rise, it will be to be damn'd."

Which is not the best way to make friends and influence people.

This period of his life was the target of every "potboiler" writer. It is a period which is not very well recorded. James Mackay's biography does much to remedy this.

My intention in this brief paper is to try to identify facts which may allow a clearer view of the place and social conditions in which Robert Burns and his family lived.

However, the colourful descriptions remain in our mind's eye and are hard to dismiss, indeed they may to some extent be correct, but I suggest they should not be accepted without some verification.

Let me start at the end- "he was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave" -

John Syme and other friends arranged a civic funeral complete with military guard of honour. Robert Burns' estate paid for the grave and the mort-cloth.
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It was no paupers’ corner- next to his grave are the burial places of Provost Jackson; James Gracie - Banker; John Lewars - Excise Officer; and John Bushby - Lawyer and Banker. Certainly the grave was unmarked but remember it was in a corner of the kirkyard, easily found and no doubt had a well trodden path to its side. Initially Jean Armour Burns had the needs of an orphaned family to look to and the efforts of his friends were dedicated to raising money to ensure their security. It is clear from the notes of the Mausoleum Committee that the problem was how to provide a marker for the grave of such a remarkable and famous man. They succeeded. His present grave is well marked and well maintained and a place of pilgrimage.

Dumfries in the 1790’s was a town of 5,600 population, bounded roughly by St Michaels Kirkyard; Brooms Road; Leafield Road; Hoods Loaning; Catherine Street; Academy Street; Buccleuch Street and the River Nith. The development of the Buccleuch Street and Castle Street area only became possible with the completion of Buccleuch Street Bridge in 1794. The area between streets such as High Street and Irish Street were divided by closes running at right angles to the main streets and there the bulk of the populace were housed and workplaces such as blacksmiths were located. The layout of streets is still based on the original mediaeval pattern. A street frontage house in Bank Street or Burns Street would be superior accommodation. Houses of three rooms and a kitchen of 12ft x 12ft would have a rental of 10 to 12 pounds. As Burns’ salary was around £60 per annum about 20% of income went on housing. From sources such as Dr Burnside’s manuscript for the First Statistical Account and Grierson’s Diaries we know a number of other details which add to the picture of daily life. That street lamps were put up in mid September and streets were being paved with a Police Tax of 9d in the £ rent.

The Midsteeple stood in the town centre and here between 1781 and 1791, five persons were hanged. The bells were rung on weekdays at 6am, 6pm and 1 Opm by “Blin Tam” Wilson to summon the lieges to labour and repose.

The town was linked by sea trade to various mainland ports and by post-chaise to Carlisle, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Nith was being made navigable with the provision of quays at Glencaple and Kingholm in 1746. The banks of the tidal reaches were being strengthened with stone revetments and ships tied up at the Dock Park. In size and function these ships were not dissimilar to our articulated lorries. The Customs Port of Dumfries extended from the foot of the Sark Water in the East to Southwick Point in the West. There was very limited road haulage between centres and most individuals used horseback. Journey times were ;

Dumfries via Brownhill to Sanquhar - 6 hours
Sanquhar via Muirkirk and Strathaven to Glasgow - 11 hours,
Sanquhar to Muirkirk - 3 hours
Glasgow to Falkirk - 5 hours
Dumfries to Penpont by chaise - 3 hours
Moffat to Glasgow by overnight Mail Coach - 9 hours.
Dumfries via Annan to Carlisle by post-chaise - under 5 hours.
Dumfries to Carlisle by mail coach and 4 horses - under 4 hours
Dumfries to Edinburgh by mail coach and 4 horses - 9 hours 5 minutes.
Mail coaches left the Kings Arms, Dumfries, (now Boots - Chemists) on week days for Edinburgh Carlisle and Portpatrick.

The roads used between towns were the military roads such as that between Dumfries and Castle Douglas which goes out the Dalbeattie road turns off to Lochfoot and via Haugh of Urr to Castle Douglas rather than by the A75 which was only improved to mail coach standards in 1800 and is still a little lacking.

The Post Office was in Friars Vennel and the postal service was expensive. Grierson states that he had a letter from London enclosed in a frank but the date being wrong it was charged postage of 1s 9d (7% of Burns’ weekly income). Franks were letters carried free by the Royal Mail having
been personally addressed, dated and signed by a Member of Parliament or a senior Post Office official. They had to be sent on the day they were signed. Patrick Miller Jnr, became an M.P. in 1794 and would have assisted Burns with franks but from his frequent use of them Burns appears to have been on good terms with gentlemen of some influence. The Dumfries Weekly Journal kept the town adviser of events but alas in the 19th century all Burns’ references were cut out and placed in a scrapbook which is now lost and no copies of the paper for 1796 have survived. The Dumfries Advertiser was published. National papers came by coach and were available in the Coffee House.

The town had a Theatre, lending library and Assembly Rooms. The Assembly Rooms were in the vicinity of the Loreburn Centre and were elegant, 40ft x 24ft, with card and tea rooms in proportion. Burns had access to these facilities and contributed books to the library. It is worth remarking that his own collection of books and music was very extensive. He attended the Dumfries Theatre and it must be realised that an evening’s entertainment was very different from our visits to the theatre. The programme for Miss Fontenelle’s Benefit on 26 November 1792 was an adaptation of “The Country Girl”; Song by Mrs Warrell; Miss Fontenelle’s Address, “The Rights of Woman”; Song by Mr Meadows; the celebrated entertainment “The Critic” and in the course of the Entertainment a representation of a Naval Engagement complete with Fire Ships etc. etc. starting at 6.30p.m. Grierson describes an evening of 1st January 1794 when he went to the Theatre at 7pm saw “King Richard III”, other entertainments, and “No Song No Supper” as the farce which ended at 1 am. “Much disturbance owing to people being in liquor”- well it was New Years Day! There was really no other form of public entertainment and it is no surprise that Burns was an enthusiast. The fire ships were large models which were set on fire with clouds of smoke. The theatre in Glasgow is said by Grierson to be “by no means as handsome as Dumfries”. Scenery for the theatre was painted by Alexander Nasmyth “done at the desire of Robert Burns”. On 12th September 1794 Grierson paid 3d admittance to see a collection of birds in a caravan consisting “an ostrich, a cassowary and a great number of the parrot kind.” Menageries passed through. Dumfries en route to Glasgow and one is described in 1797- admittance 1s.- an elephant “astonishing tractility”; a tiger; a “nyl-ghau”; a cow with two heads and a ram with four horns and hair in place of wool, also two vultures and a pelican.

Dumfries was a meeting place each year of the Caledonian Hunt in October and on their visits balls, dinners and Race Meetings took place. The races were held at Tinwald Downs about three miles north of the town. Monday to Wednesday were given by the Dumfries and Galloway Hunt and Thursday to Saturday by the Caledonian Hunt. Purses were up to 100 guineas. Burns would be present as an excise officer and would be known to many since the Caledonian Hunt had subscribed en bloc to his Edinburgh Edition. In 1792 he received a Diploma as a Member of the Caledonian Hunt. He was also a member of the Royal Archers of Scotland, the sovereigns escort, and while not active he would as a member have a certain social recognition in such company.

The area depended on agriculture and Grierson advises that in 1794 it “has on the whole been a good and early harvest” and in 1795 “there was never a finer harvest rendered”. In this plentiful situation meal riots occurred in 1796, not because of poor harvests but because farmers were holding out for high prices in a futures market due to the war with France and demand from the Army. In April 1796 the 6d loaf (2% of his weekly income) weighed only 1lb 11oz. By contrast a Marks and Spencer, St Michael’s Harvest Brown Loaf is 800gms and 85p. On £20,000 per annum this 1lb 12oz loaf is 0.22% weekly income and if you shop at Gateway even less. The riots were largely aimed at diverting loads of meal and potatoes to the Market rather than to shipping and 1500 stones of meal and potatoes seized by the mob, who did no injury to persons or property, were sold in the Market. The Magistrates on Sunday 13 March called out the Constabulary, The Royal Dumfries Volunteers, and troops stationed in the town to preserve the peace and the price of meal was set at 3/- per stone. Given Robert Burns poor health and the risk of being on half pay
such prices would be a worry. Given his poor health at that time it is not likely that he would have paraded with the Volunteers that Sunday but would no doubt have been portrayed as a brutal Cossack subjugating the rioters if he had.

The presence of troops was not due to unrest but the need for the army to be quartered throughout the country so that they could be readily supplied from the adjacent countryside. Regiments changed about six monthly with some 300 men in each unit. The Cinque Ports Cavalry and the Angussshire Fencibles attended Burns funeral with Col McDoual’s Light Cavalry and the Fifeshire Cavalry going and coming in their place. Their barracks may have been in the vicinity of the Council Offices in English Street and they exercised in the Dock Park and the Kingholm. Greirson indicates that the behaviour of the troops was good but in the case of the Strathspey Fencibles in 1795 there was trouble with mutiny which was severely put down. Two mutineers were shot at Musselburgh and another sentenced to 500 lashes only a month after the mutiny.

Robert Burns was troubled on his sick bed at the thought of debt and legal action. In the present time of credit cards and £4m overdrafts this may seem odd but in 1790 out of a total of 70 committed to jail in Dumfries Dr Burnside records 23 were for debt. This was for the locality and of these in the town area 13 out of 23 in jail were debtors. Debt could be a very serious business and to a fevered brow very real. It is clear that a great deal of trade was carried on against notes of personal credit. Thus Alexander Crombie owed Burns £20, Burns owed Thomas Boyd £20 and Boyd owed Crombie £20 so Burns sent Crombie’s letter of credit to Boyd saying in the accompanying letter -"Crombie cannot take it amiss that I endeavour to get myself clear of this bill in this manner as you owe him and I owe you.”

The technology of local industries was in pace with the rest of the country. At Crawick the forge was famous for its range of miner’s tools. At Leadhills and Wanlockhead the use of pumps and steam power were being developed. At Dalswinton Loch Patrick Miller had produced the world’s first mechanically powered means of transportation. Robert Burns was familiar with these places and events. In March 1796 an apprentice glass grinder in Dumfries set up a small hot air balloon which flew as far as Lincluden College. In July 1795 Patrick Miller built a large flat bottomed barge with no sides only a rail to which was attached two broad wheels on each side. This novelty was either a wheeled raft or a floating cart depending on your point of view, but illustrates the experimental nature of industry.

But the Nation was at war with France in early 1793 and we read in Grierson of the celebrations in 1794 and 1795 when British victories were reported with parades and the firing of cannon on Corberry Hill and the ringing of the town bells. The King’s Birthday was always the occasion for celebration and on 4th June 1795 the Royal Dumfries Volunteers paraded in Queensberry Square under Col De Peyster to recieve their colours. Robert Burns was a member of that company. In late December 1792 he was brought before an Excise Inquiry as to his loyalty to the Crown. Many interpretations can be put on the reason for this but my personal view is that when the Government sent out edicts requiring a check up on loyalty in view of the risk of war with France, and the general sympathy in the nation for the French Revolution that had previously held sway, it was a case of the Supervisors of the Excise putting their house in order and making sure the finger could not be pointed at them . They called Burns in, investigated, got his assurances, put a shot across his bows, and were able to give him - and in turn themselves - a clean slate. If they had not done so they could have been in serious trouble for harbouring disaffection in their midst.

The weather during the winters of 1793-94 to 1795-96 were very hard. Each winter there was sufficient ice on the College Loch to allow skating and curling and in 1795 there were ice flows on the Nith. Flooding of the Whitesands and up into Bank Street occurred and in 1796 great quantities of wood were swept away from the Whitesands. This was possibly timber imported from the Baltic. The picture of Burns lying overnight in the snow behind the Globe Inn is false since Grierson carefully recorded the weather and there was no snow in January or February 1796 (Jas Mackay- Burns p719).
The River Nith was not a good source of drinking water; farmers were known to dispose of dead mares into its floods, and wells were frequently tainted with pollution. Numerous wells existed in yards and gardens and the site of one is marked in Queensberry Square. The ultimate consequences were the outbreaks of cholera which had devastating effect some 40 to 50 years later. It is not surprising that brewers flourished and sma’ beer which killed off bacteria instead of people was in common use. Thirst must be assuaged even in Dumfries. The banks of the Nith were traditional routes and rights of way and are enjoyed as such to this day. Burns’ Walk is still a very pleasant walk and there are still hazels spreading wide along Clouden’s side. There is a great peace and kinship with Nature when wandering along the side of a shady rill or larger river.

Robert Burns was on good terms with clergymen around and in Dumfries; Rev Dr Babington, Episcopal Church; Rev Andrew Jaffrey of Lochmaben-“worthy old veteran of religion and good fellowship”; Rev Dr Burnside of St Michaels Kirk; Rev William McMorine of Caerlaverock- who baptised Elizabeth Riddell Burns in the Bank Street house and officiated at Burns’ funeral, to be Moderator of the General Assembly in 1812; Rev William Inglis of the Anti Burgher Church; Rev James Little of Colvend - “Burns company would be a great treat”; Rev John Craig of Ruthwell, Burns took tea with Mrs Craig when on stay at the Brow Well; Rev George Duncan of Lochrutton, father of Henry Duncan of Savings Bank fame and relative of Burns’ biographer James Currie. The churches of Dumfries do not seem to have had the same power through the cutty stool that Burns had seen in his Mauchline days. Social conditions were changing with the growth of political thought inspired by the French Revolution. A less Calvinist attitude and possibly a more urban rather than pastoral congregation as in Ayrshire may have created this more enlightened ethos. Burns had as close friends Episcopalians such as Syme and McMurdo, and Dr Maxwell was a Roman Catholic. Burns’ letter to Bishop Geddes displays elements of ecumenism which were carried into his social life. Robert Burns rented a pew in Mr Inglis Anti Burgher Church in December 1791 and is said to have attended St Michaels under Dr Mutter for morning service and Mr Inglis for evening service. The records for St Michaels show no entry for Burns in the Sittings Book for 1793 but he is there for 1794 & 95 in Pew 80 with William Hyslop of the Globe Inn. Dr Muter had died in December 1793 after 13 years poor health and it could well be that with the appointment of Dr Burnside Burns became a Pew holder. Interestingly Mrs Burns rented Pew 18 rather than 80 from 1797 with Mr Lewars.

James Barke says in an introduction to part of “The Wind That Shakes the Barley” series that he may be harsh in his judgement of Chloris - Jean Lorimer. He worked on the basis of conventional wisdom that she was the daughter of William Lorimer “a notorious smuggler” whose wife was a drunkard as described in Burns’ report to his Excise Supervisor. The trouble is that Burns was referring to Mr Lorimer of Cairn Mill and not Jean’s father at Kemys Hall whom Burns continued to ask to his house for tea with his wife. George Haugh his neighbour in Bank Street is always referred to as simply a blacksmith but the Haughs had extensive holdings on the stent rolls and there were Haughs who were gunsmiths. Blacksmiths at that time were manufacturers of goods in iron rather than farriers and George Haugh may have been more of a manufacturer than we think. Burns wrote “The Rights of Woman” in November 1792. In August 1793 Thomas Muir was sentenced to exile in Botany Bay for sedition and part of the case against him was possession and quoting from “The Rights of Man” by Thomas Paine. Burns asked George to hold his copy of the Rights of Man for him for fear of being found as an officer of the Crown with it in his own possession. He trusted Geordie with more than a book. Similarly Jock and Meg Hyslop of the Globe Inn are seen as genial publicans. William Hyslop was a merchant and vintner in Dumfries. His wife was a Maxwell of Terralquhartie and the family had links with the Stewarts of Shambellie. The Globe Inn was one of the better inns of the town and John Hyslop was the owner’s son and was more than an innkeeper.

These people of Dumfries who were his friends were all well respected. Indeed many were
part of the civic oligarchy of the Burgh with relatives often linked by marriage to the Provost Blair family and often Provosts themselves.

Colonel De Peyster, American born, fought in Canada against the French, 47 years in the British Army, commander of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers. Provost Richardson, “brewer Gabriel” whose son was Sir John Richardson, Arctic Explorer. Provost Staig, nine times Provost, who accepted Robert Burns’ proposals to revise beer taxes much to the Town’s benefit. James Gracie, Captain in the Volunteers and manager of the Bank of Scotland who offered the use of his carriage to Burns when at the Brow. Burns’ landlord Captain Hamilton who also lived in Bank Street and was son-in-law of William Craik of Arbigland whose son was personal physician to George Washington and whose gardener’s son was a founder of the United States Navy, John Paul Jones. Provost John McMurdo, chamberlain at Drumlanrig Castle, whose son was to have McMurdo Sound in the Antarctic named after him. To prepare a list of all Burns’ friends in Dumfries would be too long a task for the confines of this paper but people like John Syme, John and Jessie Lewars, Dr Maxwell and many others should share the inscription on the tomb of James McClure, privileged to lie within the Mausoleum’s enclosure - “a man who by his punctuality, his integrity, his benevolence, and the uniform uprightness of his character, conferred respectability on the humble station of a letter-carrier. He was the faithful and constant friend of the Poet Burns, and after his death was most active and successful in his endeavours to promote the interests of the family.”

The entire population of Dumfries lined the route of his funeral’s passage - proof enough of his standing in the community and the esteem in which he was held in his residence in Dumfries.

I trust that should you next see W. E. Henley’s statement “I propose to deal with the Dumfries period with all possible brevity. The story is a story of decadence; and even if it were told in detail, would tell us nothing of Burns that we have not already heard or are not all-too well prepared to learn.” you will give pause and gently scan this wee toon and remember Burns’ words -

“God ha’ Mercy on Honest Dumfries.”

21st JULY 1796

This was the day twa hunder years ago when the grim reaper cam’ for Robert Burns before the barley-corn had time tae grow and ripen whaur the ploughshares did their turns.

For lang before the man had reached his prime the voice was silenced yet the legacy in print he left tae a’ the warl’ in rhyme became his ain Immortal Memory.

Some wad maintain the reaper reaped in vain because o’ a’ the days o’ Januar’ ae day is marked tae be the Poet’s ain when cronies meet wi’ cronies near and far.

Should auld acquaintance ne’er be brocht tae min’ they’ll drink tae him wha first sang “AULD LANG SYNE”

Struan Yule
Few men of genius have had to run the gauntlet of criticism more searing, more diverse, and more prolonged than Robert Burns. In his own time it was directed chiefly from a rigid ecclesiastical system, and from the general atmosphere of self-righteousness which that creed encouraged. The criticism has been continued in our own day from totally different angles, the insanity-of-genius school regarding Burns less as a conscious sinner than as the victim of his own genius; and what may be called the curiosities-of-literature view-point, which finds a fascination in the conflict between his narrow material environment and his spacious spiritual vision. Between all the shafts of criticism Burns has become a sorely battered target, and it would need a vast volume to refute the charges that have been brought against him.

The harsh criticism to which Burns has been subjected is due largely to his biographers — never was man more unfortunate in his biographers — who too readily accepted the sordid stories which probably originated in the minds of the poet’s political opponents, provincial scandal-mongers, and vindictive victims of that wit which "had always the start of his judgment." These stories, handed from inaccurate biographer to unsuspecting biographer, have become part of the voluminous literature that has gathered about the name of the Inspired Ploughman, and that has been drawn upon by those who have directed their shafts at his character.

More than sixty years ago the dull-looking "Excise Register of Censures," discovered at Somerset House, rescued one side of the Poet’s character, and now, a hundred and thirty years (1926) after Burns’s death a manuscript volume of the Minutes of the Dumfries Volunteers is interpreted to confound the critics still further. The great value of this article lies in this, that the Volunteers set up a standard of discipline in some ways even more rigid than that of the Church, and yet Burns stands the test and comes off with flying colours. His attitude to his military duties shows that his membership was not, as has been suggested, a mere piece of

Robert Burns in the uniform of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers.
hypocrisy meant to deceive or placate his superiors in the Excise, who told him, when he sought to defend his attitude to the French Revolution, that his duty was to act not to think.

Burns's work as a Volunteer has hitherto either been minimised or misinterpreted. Several of his biographers attach so little importance to his enlistment in the Royal Dumfries Volunteers that they do not even mention it. Others refer to it only as an explanation of the existence of the song, "The Dumfries Volunteers," or as a proof that the Poet was a patriotic Briton, despite his sympathy with the French people. In point of fact, as we shall see, he was not only an enthusiast but a leader of the movement, and that, too, at a period which has frequently been regarded as the least admirable of his short life.

To say, as has been said by more than one essayist, that Burns became a Volunteer to prove his loyalty to the Government, is an insult to the memory of the Poet. A military life always had an attraction for Burns. Not only did he as a child "strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier," but in 1782, when his flax-dressing venture literally ended in smoke, he consoled himself thus:-

"Oh, why the deuce should I repine,
An' be an illforeboder?
I'm twenty-three, and five feet nine,
I'll go and be a sodger."

Writing to Mrs. Dunlop in 1787, and referring to a suggestion made by her, he said: "Would the profits of that [second and third editions of his poems] afford, I would take the hint of a military life as the most congenial to my feelings and situation." Again, a year later, he wrote to Miss Margaret Chalmers: "Your friendship I can count on, though I should date my letter from a marching regiment. Early in life, and all my life, I reckoned on a recruiting drum as my forlorn hope."

It will thus be seen that Burns needed no great incitement to take up arms when the call came; and there can be no doubt that he became a Volunteer, as so many of his fellow-townsfolk and fellow-countrymen did, because he was opposed to the turbulent crowd who would have "set the mob aboon the throne," and wished to do his part in preventing social disorder, and because he believed that his country was in danger of invasion. It was such a crisis as this that would revive the flame kindled in his breast by the story of the Liberator of Scotland, which, as he explained to Dr. Moore, the father of General Sir John Moore, "poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins which will boil along there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest."

Not only did Burns join the Dumfries Volunteers, but, like Sir Walter Scott in Edinburgh, he assisted in creating the force; he attended a meeting summoned by the Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of that part of the country, Mr. David Staig, the Provost of Dumfries (and the father of Jessie Staig, to whom Burns paid several poetical compliments), to discuss how best they could serve their native land in the time of crisis, and when the meeting resolved to form a Volunteer Company, Robert Burns's name was among the signatories to the petition for the necessary permission.

The first entry in the Corps Minute Book referred to, sets out that this meeting, at which the Dumfries Volunteer movement was inaugurated, was held in the Court House, on 31st January 1795. With the Deputy-Lieutenant were his two bailies and the leading professional and business men of the town, the list and subsequent signatories including John Syme of Ryedale and James Gray, staunchest of Burns's friends; Dr. Maxwell, the friend of the French Revolution; Dr. John Harley, John Armstrong, writer, who became secretary to the Corps; Rev. Dr. Wm. Babington, Episcopal minister in Dumfries; Thomas White (probably of Dumfries Academy); David Newall, solicitor; Captain John Hamilton, the poet's landlord; Lieut.-Col. A. S. de Peyster, the "respected colonel" of the Ode on Life; Captain John Finnan, in whose company Burns was later enrolled; James Gracie, banker the "Gracie, thou art a man of worth"; "Old Q's" chamberlain, John McMurdoo, writer, whose praises and those of
his daughter, a "bonnie Jean" and "Phyllis the Fair," Burns sang; Francis Shortt, town clerk, a lieutenant in the corps, and secretary of the Loyal Native Club, which was pilloried by the poet in the well-known quatrain; Alexander Findlater, his co-worker and superior in the Excise; John Lewars, another Excise officer, and brother of Jessie, who attended Burns on his deathbed, and who is enshrined in "The Toast" and in several other complimentary verses; and David Williamson, the rendering of whose account for the dying poet's volunteer uniform drove him into a paroxysm of anger and the humiliating position of having to beg George Thomson and his cousin James Burness for a few pounds.

The meeting on 31st January declared its "sincere attachment to the happy Constitution of Great Britain, and our firm resolution on every occasion to protect the lives and properties of ourselves and fellow subjects from every attempt of the ambitious, designing, and turbulent, who threaten to overturn the laws of our country, and who, by anarchy, sedition, and bloodshed, may endeavour to destroy the sacred bonds of society."

Following this initiatory meeting came another on the 3rd of February, when the offer of service and the rules and regulation were signed by each of the sixty-three gentlemen who attended. Among the patriotic three score and three again appears the name of the poet, and it is important, in view of the many statements that have been made so to his want of loyalty, to read in the Minute Book that Burns subscribed his name to the following which, substituting Fifth for Third, is precisely what patriotic Britons were subscribing to in the months immediately succeeding the outbreak of the war in 1914:-

"We... hereby declare our sincere attachment to the person and Government of His Majesty King George the Third; our respect for the happy Constitution of Great Britain... As we are of opinion that the only way we can obtain a speedy and honourable peace is by the Government vigorously carrying on the present war, humbly submit the following proposals to His Majesty for the purpose of forming ourselves into a Volunteer Corps, in order to support the internal peace and good order of the town, as well as to give energy to the measures of the Government."

There was no hesitancy or half-heartedness
about the war policy of Robert Burns and his fellow Volunteers of Dumfries.

One is not surprised to find that Burns enrolled himself in a Corps which undertook “to serve... during the present war, without pay, and find our own clothing.” The man who – as we hold, notwithstanding Stevenson’s unsupported and ungenerous suggestion – out of pure love for the lyric repute of his native country, contributed, without fee or reward of any kind, those priceless songs of his to Thomson’s collection, would have spurned any proffered fee for preparing himself against the day when a foreign foe might attempt to desecrate the soil of his beloved Caledonia. This and other conditions of service suggest that the spirit, if not the person, of Burns was at the drawing up of the rules and regulations. One rule, for example, gave the rank and file the power, which they exercised, of selecting their own commissioned officers; another made it necessary for every man to run the gauntlet of the ballot by their fellows before enrolment; while, later, fines were imposed on officers and men who were absent from drill without good reason, and on those guilty of being the worse for drink while on parade; while insolent men and overbearing officers were also subject to the censure of the Committee and the Corps.

On the 21st of February, 1795, the first election of captains and lieutenants was held in the Court House – Col. de Peyster had been elected major commandant on the previous day, - and again Robert Burns was present, one of the seventy-five men who voted John Hamilton to be first captain; John Finnan to be second captain; and David Newall, Wellwood Maxwell, Francis Shortt and Thomas White to be lieutenants. These commissions were gazetted 24th March, 1795.

On the same day as that on which the officers were elected, the meeting having adjourned to the Assembly Rooms, each man was separately balloted for, a majority of votes being necessary for election. It was here, on the 21st of February, 1795, that Robert Burns, as an original member, was balloted into the Royal Dumfries Volunteers; but he did not, as has been so often said, celebrate his enrolment by writing “Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?” The great national song, which created enthusiasm for the national cause from Maidenkirk to John o’ Groats, was not written until the month of April. It must not be supposed that those elections and ballots were mere formalities, for there is disagreeable evidence in the Minute Book that in this, as in other matters, the Committee and the Corps took their duties seriously.

The two captains, having been elected, drew the names of the men who were to serve under them; and to John Finnan, the captain of No. 2 Company, fell the honour of drawing for his company the name of the most illustrious, and one of the most enthusiastic Volunteers which Great Britain’s danger and Napoleon’s ambition caused to be enrolled in these islands. With him in the same company were his great friends, Dr. Harley, John Syme, James Gracie and John Lewars.

At the Old Assembly Rooms on the 28th of March, Burns, with fifty-seven others, took the Oaths of Allegiance and signed the “Rules, Regulations and Byelaws for conducting themselves in a military capacity.”

As happens in every well-regulated household or society, the Royal Dumfries Volunteers had their little troubles, and in the first one in the history of the Corps we find Robert Burns figuring. A point of good taste was in dispute, and naturally we find Burns’s independence asserting itself. We find him, because his spirit of independence was outraged, taking serious and successful action against the Committee, which held several of his great personal friends, among them Co. de Peyster, Captain Hamilton, Captain Finnan, Lieut. White, James Gracie, John Syme, Wm. McCraken, and Alexander Findlater. As has been said, the Royal Dumfries Volunteers were, by their own desire, an unpaid Corps; but as funds were required for necessary outlays in connection with Corps matters, the Committee, at a meeting on 18th May, 1795, appointed several of their number to call on gentlemen and solicit contributions to the Corps funds.

This decision at once met with keen opposition from certain members of the
Monday Evening.

Sir,—From what we have learned of the proceedings of our committee to-day, we cannot help expressing our disapproval of the mendicant business of asking a public contribution for defraying the expenses of our Association. That our secretary should have waited on those gentlemen and other of that rank of life who from the first offered pecuniary assistance, meets our idea as highly proper, but that the Royal Dumfries Volunteers should go a-begging with the burnt-out cottager and shipwrecked sailor is a measure of which we must disapprove.

Please, then, sir, to call a meeting as soon as possible and be so very good also as to put a stop to the degrading business until the voice of the Corps be heard.

We have the honour to be

(Here follow 23 names, including that of Robert Burns).

There is no external evidence that Burns's hand helped to frame the letter, but the whole spirit of the document and of its phrasing suggests that the poet, if he did not actually write it, at least had assisted in its composition.

On the 29th May, 1795, a general meeting of the Corps was held to discuss the matter, and it was conceded that the exertion of the Committee were well meant, and that no reflection could be cast against the members, but it was agreed that no subscriptions should be taken under a guinea; and the return of all subscriptions below that sum was recommended and the Committee advised to “fall upon some other plan” for providing money taken from volunteering individuals only. No application was to be made “unless to a few independent and wealthy inhabitants who have not come forward with their personal service, and who need not be pointed out, as they are easily known.”

Whether or not Burns instigated the opposition to the indiscriminate collection of money for the Corps' upkeep, it is certain that he had been taking a prominent part in the work of the Corps, and had become one of its leading members; for at the first general meeting after this affair he was chosen one of the eight men appointed by the rest of the Corps to manage its affairs. At the meeting in the Assembly Rooms on 22nd August, 1795, at which Burns was elected to the Committee, sixty members of the Corps were present. Those elected to serve with the Poet were Robert Jardine, Deacon Anderson, John McMorine, Alexander Brown, Thomas Gordon, Wm. Paton and Wm. Laidlaw.

This appointment proves that Burns was highly respected and trusted by his fellow Volunteers, and that he took a keen and active part in the administrative work of the Corps; and there is ample further evidence in this Minute Book that he was no “slacker”. The names of the members present at the meetings are not given regularly, but on the occasions on which the attendance roll is inscribed, Robert Burns’s name always appears. But there is more conclusive proof that the poet was steadfast in his support of the Corps and that he was conscientious in preparing himself for active work in the field. As has been said, the Corps in its rules authorised a system of fines for non-attendance at drill, unless good and sufficient reasons for absence were given. Non-commissioned officers and privates suffered penalties of 1s. for the first offence and 1s. 6d. for succeeding abstentions from drill; and officers paid 2s. 6d. for a first offence and 5s. for each succeeding offence. In addition, as has been said, fines were imposed for inebriety when on parade, and for insolence to superior officers. These fines were freely and sternly enforced by the Committee of which Burns was a member, and by the Committees before and after his appointment, lists of names with the amounts of the fines being given in the Minute Book. Privates and officers appear to have been punished without distinction or favour; and one officer paid repeatedly the penalty for absence from parade. In March, 1796, Charles Smith was sentenced by the Committee to a reprimand at the head of the Corps at the next drill for being absent from guard, and Smith was ordered to pay a fine of 10s.; and at the same meeting George Christie suffered a like punishment for
being drunk under arms, and being guilty of unsoldierly behaviour. Three men who did not turn out were each fined 5s. for neglect of duty; and the Committee to maintain its own dignity and round off what must have been a strenuous meeting, fined Robert Grainger 5s. for making disrespectful remarks regarding the Committee. One of these culprits (Charles Smith) sent a letter of remonstrance to a general meeting of the Corps, but for his pains was found guilty of prevarication and was expelled the Corps, and order being given that the fact should be published in the Dumfries Journal. At one meetings — on 24th August, 1795 — in the business of which Burns took part, the Committee imposed fines — for non-attendance only — to the extent of £9 6s., those fined including Captain Hamilton, 2s 6d.; Lieut. Francis Shortt, 7s. 6d.; and Dr. Harley, 1s. The examples quoted prove that no favouritism was shown by the Committee, which makes more important one outstanding fact, namely, that although, at the date of the meeting last mentioned, the Poet had been a member of the Corps for some seven months — six working months at least — not once does the name of Robert Burns appear in a list of those guilty of absenting themselves from drill or for otherwise offending against the rigidly enforced rules.

By means of this Minute Book, we are able to trace Burns to, or almost to, his fatal illness, and incidentally correct one more of the misstatements of Currie, the Poet’s first editor and perhaps most inaccurate biographer, who says: “From October, 1795, to the January following, an accidental complaint confined him to the house.” We shall see that he was attending to the work of the Volunteer Corps in November. It has been to all his biographers a difficult point to decide when actually the Bard was seized with the long illness which ended fatally. His own letters are somewhat contradictory; but however that may be, Burns attended a Committee Meeting — his last recorded — on 5th November, 1795, at which he took part in the preparation for presentation by the Corps of a Loyal Address to the King. At the Committee Meeting Colonel de Peyster suggested that an address should be presented to His Majesty congratulating him on his happy escape from the late insult upon his sacred person. A few members of the Committee had met and made a draft which he submitted, and which was approved by the Committee — Burns, as has been said, was a member of it, and was present at the meeting — for submission to a General Meeting held at the Court House on the same day. The address was in the following terms, and was passed with unanimity:

“To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, the humble address of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers.

“Most Gracious Sovereign, — We, your Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, composing the Corps of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers, penetrated by the recent and signal interposition of Divine, Providence in the preservation of your most sacred person from the atrocious attempt of a set of lawless ruffians, humbly hope that your Majesty will graciously receive our unfeigned congratulations.

“Permitted by you, Sire, to embody ourselves for the preservation of social tranquility, we are filled with indignation at every attempt made to shake the venerable and we trust lasting fabric of British Liberty.

“We have directed our Major Commandant to sign this address in the name of the Corps assembled at Dumfries, 5th November, 1795.”

So ended Robert Burns’s presence at the Committee meetings; and it is a singular fact, in view of his known anti-Hanoverian opinions, that the Poet’s last work as a Committee man of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers was to take part in the presentation of a loyal address in the warm terms just quoted.

If there be any truth whatever in the statement by Cunningham that Burns’s accession to the Royal Dumfries Volunteers was objected to by some of his neighbours on account of political feeling — and we have discovered no substantiation of it — the minutes which have been quoted prove completely that the objections were soon overcome. And if
Cunningham be right, the fact that the Poet was so soon at the head of the Corps’ affairs was a great personal triumph, and a tribute to his whole-heartedness in the cause which, let it always be remembered to his credit, he was one of the first to espouse.

For the light that it throws on the habits of the Poet at a particularly interesting period of his life, this Minute Book of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers (gifted to the Ewart Library by the inheritrix of Col. de Peyster’s estate) is a most valuable contribution to Burnsiana. It is important for it covers part of the time during which, according to his principal detractor, Henley, he was, because of his vicious habits, an outcast from society; and because of those habits was “burnt to a cinder.” Here Henley quotes the words reported by an old man as having been uttered by John Syme, Burns’s friend, and reads into them — if ever they were spoken, which is doubtful — a meaning that they probably never had.

If Burns’s work during the year 1795, his Volunteer year, the year that ended in his fatal illness, which his critics say was the consequence of his drunkenness, be reviewed, we find how impossible the stories are. It is conceivable that a man, in the condition to which he is said to have descended, could have attended his drills regularly for two hours on two days in every week, attended regularly his Committee meetings — his presence there is proof that the story of social ostracism was a lie — and assisted in transacting the important and exacting business of a new Volunteer Corps, when arms, accoutrements, and the general paraphernalia of such a body had to be provided and maintained? Not only is Burns by this Minute Book proved to have been a man of most regular habits, which coincides exactly with his colleague Findlater’s and his friend Gray’s testimony, and the “Excise Register of Censures,” but during those months he was hard at work on his Excise duties, and had contributed to Scottish song some of its most brilliant gems. During his period of strenuous Volunteering, Burns continued his great work for Scottish song by contributing generously to Thomson’s work, still refusing to accept payment because he was rendering patriotic work for his native country. Among the numerous songs which he wrote in the busy months of 1795, were the great patriotic song “Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?” that trumpet call to democracy: “A man’s a man for a’ that”; one of the finest specimens of his humour, “Last May a braw wooer”; one of his immortal love songs, “This is no my ain lassie”; as well as the Heron Ballads. If the strenuous labour — active Volunteering, exacting Excise duties, and the composition of at least three of his greatest songs, all in the compass of some ten months — be the record of a decadent, we should pray that to Scotland might be born today another such decadent.

No; the truth is that though Burns was not a heavy or a habitual drinker, his craving for convivial company led him occasionally to drink too much — which in his verse he glorified and exaggerated — and that he had many enemies who did not hesitate to enlarge upon his occasional excesses. He was a man of great individuality and consequently he attracted great attention. The “fierce light that beats upon a throne” was nothing to the fierceness of the local light that searched every cranny of the life of the man who died in the humble home in the Mill Vennel of Dumfries. The searchlight discovered blemishes. It could not be otherwise. Burns was nothing if he was not open. There was no hypocrisy in his composition. He was a seer, far ahead of his fellow, and consequently misunderstood by many. He was a political revolutionary, and therefore looked at askance and suspected by many of his contemporaries. He had a vitriolic tongue and pen, which he used remorselessly on occasion on those whom he did not like; and those victims of his “rough” tongue, human nature, even in Dumfries, being what it was, lost no opportunity of retaliating by improving and spreading tales of his dissipation; tales, some of them, which were merely oral half a century after the poet’s death, yet believed, in spite of the written evidence of his contemporaries that he seldom drank to excess, that he was deeply interested in his family’s welfare and education, that he was a highly
respected citizen, and in conversation a moral purist. That many doors in Dumfries were shut to Burns we need not doubt, but the doors that were closed to him were not closed because of his dissipation. His political opinions being what they were, his caustic epigrams and epitaphs on men and women, created a sufficient number of enemies, and consequently the ground was ready for the seed sown by those who wished to malign him. Because they hated his politics, groaned under his castigations, and were unable to retaliate in kind, they took the arrows which Burns himself made, put poison on the tips, and drove them into the reputation of the greatest genius of his day; his biographers turned them in the wound, and the sore is being healed up only now. Is it too much to hope that the facts here presented from the manuscript Minute Book of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers, in the Ewart Library, Dumfries, and the deductions therefrom, will help somewhat towards healing the wound?

NOTES

Note A.

ORIGINAL MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL DUMFRIES VOLUNTEERS

LIST OF INHABITANTS OF DUMFRIES WHO ATTENDED THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE ROYAL DUMFRIES VOLUNTEERS, ON 31ST JANUARY, 1795.

John Syne Benjamin Bell
John Harley Kinloch Winlaw
John Armstrong Henry Clint
Hugh McCornock James Stott
Thomas Gordon David Newall
Thomas White Captain John Hamilton
Robert Clugston Lt.-Col. A. S. de Peyster
Andrew Smith Captain John Finnan
Rev. Dr. Wm. William Laidlaw
Babington Samuel Clark, junior
John Kennedy William Hyslop, Junior
George Duncan Deacon Robert Anderson
William Boyd

Simone Mackenzie James Gracie
John McMorine

James Denniston
Thomas Glendinning
William Paton
David Williamson
James Mundell
John Aiken
William Johnston
James Grieve
James Rae
George Grieve
John Ferguson
Riddell McNaught
James Graham
William Richardson
Hugh Maxwell
Wellwood Maxwell
Convener Wm. Hayland

James Hamilton, jnr.

LIST OF THOSE WHOSE NAMES WERE ADDED ON 3RD FEBRUARY, 1795, TO THE ABOVE, AND FORMED PART OF THE ORIGINAL CORPS.

John McMurdo
Francis Shortt
Thomas Williamson
David Newall
Samuel Johnston
James Spalding
William Selkirk
Frazer Richardson
James McClatchie
A. Findlater
Alex Coupland
Andrew Johnston
William Wallace
John Lewars

Wm. Maxwell
Edward Maxwell
John Weems, junior
John Coulthard
John McVitie
John Kerr
Thomas Boyd
William Thomson
Robert Spalding
Thomas Halliday
John Caird, junior
Leonard Smith
Thomas Grierson

Note C.

COLONEL AND MRS. DE PEYSTER

Colonel Arentz Schuyler de Peyster, who commanded the Royal Dumfries Volunteers during the troublous times of the end of the eighteenth and opening of the nineteenth centuries, was descended from a Huguenot family which had settled in America. He was in the Regular Army, and during the Seven Years’ War he commanded at Detroit.
Michilimacinaac, and in Upper Canada. It was his great tact and decision that enabled Colonel de Peyster to break the Indians from the French service. For some time he commanded the 8th Regiment, and as Colonel he retired to Dumfries, the native place of Mrs. de Peyster, who was a sister of Mr. John M'Murdo, one of Burns's great friends and fellow-volunteers, and Chamberlain to the Marquis of Queensberry. To the Colonel's home, Mavis Grove, Burns was always a welcome visitor, and the fact that the Colonel also courted the Muses formed a further link with the National Poet. The social unrest and the threatened invasion by the French were the causes of the old war-horse again taking up the sword, and although he was over sixty when he took command of the Dumfries Volunteers, he very soon had the Regiment in a state of great efficiency. From the Minute Book of the Corps, which has been so freely quoted from in this work, we take this extract from a Minute of 20th February, 1795: “That Colonel de Peyster shall be Major Commandant of the Corps, who, being present, accepted thereof.” At a meeting on the following day called for the selection of officers, the Colonel said he was truly sensible of the honour done him in electing him Major Commandant: and to show her appreciation Mrs. de Peyster would provide a stand of colours to be embroidered “with such figures and emblems of loyalty as the Volunteers shall suggest.” Mrs. de Peyster requested that they would accept the flag as a free gift from her. The meeting considered that a great honour had been conferred on the Corps. The colours were presented with great ceremony on the Square of Dumfries, on the King’s Birthday in 1795. The Rev. Dr. Burnside, after prayer, congratulated the Corps on its splendid discipline for which Colonel de Peyster’s persistence in drilling had to be thanked.

**THE DUMFRIES VOLUNTEERS**

*Tune — “Push about the Jorum.”*

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

*The Nith shall run to Corsincon,*
*And Criffel sink in Solway,*
*Ere we permit a foreign foe*
*On British ground to rally!*
*We'll ne'er permit a foreign foe*
*On British ground to rally.*

*O let us not, like snarling tykes,*
*In wrangling be divided,*
*Till, slap! come in an unco loon*
*And wi' a rung decide it!*
*Be Britain still to Britain true,*
*Among oursels united!*
*For never but by British hands*
*Maun British wrangs be righted!*
*No! never but by British hands*
*Shall British wrangs be righted.*

*The kettle o' the Kirk and State*
*Perhaps a clout may fail in't!*
*But deil a foreign tinkler loon*
*Shall ever ca'a nail in't.*
*Our father's blude the kettle bought!*
*And wha wad dare to spoil it?*
*By Heav'n's! the sacrilegious dog*
*Shall fuel be to boil it!*
*By heavn's! the sacrilegious dog*
*Shall fuel be to boil it.*

*The wretch that would a tyrant own,*
*And the wretch, his true born brother,*
*Who'd set the mob aboon the Throne,*
*May they be damn'd together!*
*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!*
*But while we sing "God save the King"*
*We'll ne'er forget The People.*

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See Page 14
This short essay sets out to show that during his last years, the Scottish bard continued to pen radical democratic effusions of which, some survived, but others were lost or destroyed. The poem *Lines on Ambition* is presented as one of the “lost” poems, now found.

Is the canon of Burns fixed for all time? Kinsley was more cautious than write with absolute certainty in his 1968 3-volume edition of the Collected Works: “The canon of Burns’s work will probably never be fully established”, he wrote, admitting “some of my judgements, through chance discoveries” may “turn out to be wrong” (1). The canonical door was, therefore, left open by Kinsley because of the possibility that “lost” poems might yet be found. This means, in short, that the canon of Burns is still unfixed.

The notion that Burns ceased to write radical works after January 1793 has gained wide acceptance on the back of MacKay’s recent biography. However, the chance appearance in 1872 of the entire manuscript for the *Ode for General Washington’s Birthday*, destroys this view at a stroke. It was written in June 1794. It is, without doubt, the most radical piece penned by Burns. Moreover, the song *A Man’s a Man*, which was the primary democratic anthem of the 1790’s, shows the notion that Burns stopped writing radical material after January 1793 to be not only myth, but so obviously wrong it is absurd. The words “it’s comin’ yet, for a’ that” simply means, no matter what draconian oppression the Pitt government threw at reformers, democratic ideals would win through in the end. The song was published *anonymously* (a critically important historical point so often missed by biographers) in *The Glasgow Magazine* of 1795. It was never credited to the poet under his name during his lifetime. In fact, quite remarkably, the first publication of the song under the poet’s name was in the columns of *The Morning Chronicle*, during May 1797 - not in Thomson’s *Select Collection* of 1805. As this historical publication is not in Kinsley, Henderson and Henley, Scott Douglas, or MacKay, it is quite clear that no Burns scholar has studied the London newspaper in any detail since the bard’s death. Works such as *A Man’s A Man* and the *Washington Ode* do not drop out of the sky.

In headnotes to *The Tree Of Liberty* Dr Chambers argues that it was very likely there were other lost poems which might never be found -

It is far from likely that the whole democratic effusions of Burns have come down to us. For many years, that kind of authorship was attended with so much reproach, that men of humanity studied to conceal rather than to expose the evidence by which it could be proved against him (Burns). And even after the poor bard’s death, the interests of his young family demanded...that nothing should be brought forward which was calculated to excite a political jealousy regarding him. Hence, for many years there was a mystery observed on this subject. During that time, of course, many manuscripts might perish. (2).

Chambers’ statement is revealing. It refers to the continued culture of oppression, fear and caution which echoed from the 1790’s through until the Reform Act of 1832. With such an intensely xenophobic fear of radical ideas, it is understandable that many poems only slowly appeared from sources who guarded them with caution. There is little doubt that the appearance of a corpus of overtly radical works after the bard’s death would have seriously jeopardised the attempt to raise a subscription for the poet’s family. So, Chambers, the most respected Burns editor of the 19th century believed “many manuscripts” of pro-democratic works of Burns were lost or perished. The idea of “lost” poems is old hat.
Dr Chamber's view is supported by an eye witness, Mr John Pattison. Pattison visited Dumfries in late 1795 with his father, also John Pattison, brother to the bard's "worthy, wise, friend", Alexander Pattison of Paisley. John junior recalled that at dinner with Burns and Dr Maxwell during late 1795, "Burns repeated many verses that have never seen the light, chiefly political". (3) Pattison wrote of the visit in 1848 and did so anonymously in the Glasgow Citizen newspaper. MacKay includes the story of the visit but remarkably skips over this important remark without comment. He states erroneously in a footnote that Pattison's letter was in The Glasgow Courier of January 1848, not the Citizen as in Chambers. The only source where it is known the letter was by Pattison is Chambers' biography. Having checked the Courier, the letter is emphatically not there. By 1848 The Tree of Liberty and the fragment of an Ode to Liberty (the final stanza of the Washington Ode) had been in print. Pattison's comments, therefore, point to other unknown, unrecorded poems. So, even by the mid-19th century, it was known that works of the bard had been lost as an eye-witness's account attest.

The fact of missing or lost letters is not in dispute. It is widely known letters were either lost, withheld or destroyed. MacKay undermines the title of his The Complete Letters of Robert Burns by suggesting there is evidence to alert us to "the possible existence of many other letters of Burns hitherto unrecorded". (4) He makes this comment because the list of those who wrote to Burns does not match the list of people he replied to. For instance, it is known there were seven letters written by the Earl of Buchan to Burns, yet there are only three extant letter to the Earl from Burns. Buchan was a leading supporter of the reform movement. It does not seem tenable that Burns would not have replied to every letter from the Earl, whom he greatly admired. Further examples are letters to Burns from Sir W. Cunningham and J. Gregory who thank Burns in their letters for receiving poetry directly from him. The letters from Burns to them have not survived. (5) Moreover, the letter of Burns to Roscoe, Pindar, and Wollstonecraft have not survived. As the bard regularly included poetry in his letters, this evidence also suggests lost poems. So, it is an indisputable fact that letters of the bard were lost or not recorded. If we add to this the evidence from Chambers that a "sheath" of poems by Burns was lost by Collector Mitchell's family; that many letters by the poet to Robert Aitken were stolen (6), and ponder what was destroyed in the "bonfire" of unknown Burns' manuscripts by Mr Greenshields of Lesmahago in 1871 (7) - it is quite evident that there are "lost" poems.

This evidence bridges the credibility gap that poems were lost or destroyed and shows that there are certainly works written by the poet which did not come down to us. Now, we are faced with the real possibility that several of these poems have been found in newspapers of the period. After the feathers that flew in the Burnsian hen-coup of January 1996, will these poems be looked at and judged solely on the merits of the case? That there are "lost" poems is beyond doubt; that the poems I have collated are indeed the poems by Burns is the only question. Is Lines on Ambition one of the lost poems?

The first pointer to suggest Lines on Ambition, published in The Edinburgh Gazetteer, in December 1793, may have been written by Burns is the pseudonym, A. Briton. In 1788, in a letter published in the Edinburgh Evening Courant, Robert Burns first used the pseudonym A. Briton. When Burns enclosed a copy of the letter signed "A. Briton" to Mrs Dunlop, he told her it was for her eyes only. It was not widely known during Burns's lifetime that he had been the author of the letter in the Courant nor that he was "A. Briton". If no other writer employed such a pen-name - and there is no evidence to suggest any other author did - then it follows, Burns wrote Lines On Ambition. However, the poem itself must stand up to rigorous analyses in comparison to the bard's works before provenance can be established.

Was the pen-name "A Briton" commonplace? No evidence supports such a view. It was a common geonym which had been around for many years, but that does not mean it was common currency among poets. From extensive reading of British newspapers during the period 1788-
1798, there are only three examples of the pen-name “A Briton”. The first was by Burns in his 1788 letter, then it appears with *Lines on Ambition* 5 years later, in *The Edinburgh Gazetteer*. Then, 2 years after the publication of *Lines on Ambition*, the pen-name re-surfaced within *The Morning Chronicle*, in late 1795 - a newspaper Burns promised to send occasional poems in a letter of mid-March 1794. The example from *The Morning Chronicle* is also being provisionally attributed to Burns on contextual and stylistic evidence in *The Lost Poems*. A detailed scan of newspapers after the death of Burns reveals no further examples of A. Briton. It is surely a significant coincidence that a pen-name used by the poet can be found on only two further occasions during his lifetime, then disappears with his death. Beyond doubt, *Lines On Ambition*, based on the pen-name alone, merits serious consideration as a potential lost work of the bard.

There is an even ten syllable count throughout the poem and a language control indicative of a poet who has great confidence in their skill. *Lines on Ambition* is a broadside attack on the opponents of the pro-democracy camp. The comparison of contemporary political figures to Caesar does not name specific individuals, but is loaded with general implication. The political upheaval in Caesar’s Rome may have been superficially similar to the early 1790’s and the contrast probably influenced “A. Briton” in December, 1793. For instance, in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, in Scene 1, Act 3, after the death of Caesar, Cassius declares “...cry out “Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement”. These were the all important do-or-die words of the 1793-4 period. Brutus, contemplating the death of Caesar, pronounced “... ambition’s debt is paid” and in Scene 2, recalls “... but as he was ambitious, I slew him ...death for his ambition. Who is here so base, that would be a bondsman?” (A Scottish translation of the last line might read - *Wha sae base as be a slave*, as found in *Scots Wha Hae*) Of course, many intellectuals and poets of the period would have read Shakespeare, so no exclusive link can be made to Burns from Shakespeare. It is certain that the author of *Lines on Ambition* is a historically aware poet who read Shakespeare. So far, this profile includes Burns.

The meaning of “ambition” in *Lines on Ambition* is a narrow definition, which focuses mainly on politicians in public office. It is used to mean the same in Burns’ *A Winter Night*, to describe the personal abuse of power by statesmen. The poet believed that many social inequalities were man-made, not accidental or the product of nature. The same point is made in *Man Was Made to Mourn*. In *A Winter Night*, stanza 8, Burns’ use of Miltonic abstraction is striking:

> See stern Oppression’s iron grip,
> Or mad Ambition’s gory hand,
> Sending, like bloodhounds from the slip,
> Woe, Want, and Murder o’er a land!

The ring to “mad Ambition’s gory hand” reads as though it could easily have come from *Lines on Ambition* - Caesar’s glory was gained “thro’ Roman blood”. The meaning of the word “ambition” may have been part of an educated culture where an intertextuality of language existed among professionals and aristocrats during the 1790’s, but the number of radical poets in December 1793 were few. The Burnsian image of “ambition” and its “gory hand” from *A Winter Night* finds strong echoes in *Lines on Ambition*.

When *Lines on Ambition* was published, many Scottish radicals such as Muir had been either imprisoned or transported and their followers largely neutralised. The drum-beat of the pro-war jingoist camp were resurgent and dominant. Dundas managed Britain’s war effort and held almost absolute power in Scotland. It is well documented that Burns was not enamoured by Dundas and would have been very likely to see him as an ambitious Scottish equivalent to Caesar. This point carries validity if we consider the allusions of Burns to the Roman period which flowed naturally and extempore in his epigrams. In the localised context of referring to Lord Galloway, Burns lashed the fuedal family as though their end was nigh -
Bright ran thy line, O Galloway,
Thro' many a far-fam'd sire:
So ran the far-fam'd Roman way,
So ended in a mire.

As an extempore flash of Burns's satirical wit, the epigram illustrates that the poet did compare what he considered to be the impending fate of the Pitt government with the fall of Rome. Rome fell through slavery, injustice and corruption; Britain, according to Burns, was on the slope of a sliding, venal age to use the language of Thomson's classic poem Winter. The only reference in Burns to Caesar is his description of political in-fighting for ambition and glory in his extraordinary Miltonic Election Ballad Addressed to Graham of Fintry, stanza 10, “Heroes in Caesarian fight”.

The poet read Rober De Lohme's The British Constitution during 1793. De Lohme's work argues that the Constitution of 1688 had stripped away monarchical power to prevent tyrannical behaviour by Kings and deemed war-mongering by the King, without parliament’s consent, tyranny. It further states that there was an almost perfect equilibrium between the powers of the state, the King and the “Executive Power” in Britain which gauranteed freedom and prevented tyranny by parliament. If the “Protector”, or political leader, abuses the trust of office through “ambition”, says De Lohme, the “Protector becomes a tyrant”. The Constitution, according to De Lohme, did not allow the possibility of one person’s “accumulation” of power. He concluded it was not possible for tyranny to exist in Britain. In 1793 Burns must have wondered what relevance the theory of De Lohme’s work had to the reality of everyday life. By handing his copy of De Lohme's Constitution to the Dumfries library in September 1793 the poet may have calculated his act would be publically seen as that of a loyal subject. In reality, he probably felt like throwing it into the river Nith, in despair at the gap between political theory and practice.

What peace, freedom and equilibrium was there in 1793? Implicit in Lines on Ambition is the belief that the principles of the Constitution were being flouted. Dictatorial powers had been adopted to crush the pro-democracy movement. Scots radicals were made an example of. From the inscription Burns wrote inside his copy of De Lohme's book, it is known he admired the noble ideals within the Constitution, but wished to see “a better” written in the future. There is no contradiction between admiring the theoretical ideals of the 1688 Constitution and detesting the abuse and expedient practice of power by government. Both MacKay and McIntyre appear to suggest that Burns’ agreement with the unpracticed ideals of the Constitution can be equated with loyalty to the political leaders of the time. Burns was far from being a loyalist Hanoverian bard in his last years. The Dumfries Volunteers, far from being anti-French, strikes a final note in favour of “THE PEOPLE”.

During 1793 the poet also read and carefully studied the poetry of the Della Cruscan’s The British Album and annotated the 2 volumes with comments. The poets of this radical volume are largely forgotten, but may have given the bard ideas which he developed into poetry. A few lines can be found on the theme of Lines on Ambition. For instance, from stanza 6, Elegy written On The Plain of Fontenoy, (which Burns composed 4 lines on reading), there is “For thousands ev’ry age in fight to fall.../ And that is Fate, which we Ambition call”. More akin to Lines on Ambition is Della Crusca’s Ode to Folly: “Let others court Ambition’s smile, / Or pant for Glory’s laurel wreath”. It cannot be argued that these writers did not influence Burns merely because Henderson and Henley blasted them as a “dreaded shoal” of radicals. Henderson and Henley were high Tories who detested radical poetry as their remarkable “trash” remark on The Tree of Liberty reveals. Thus, it is known Burns was reading poetic works of a similar nature to Lines on Ambition only months before the new poem was written.

The message of the poem is forthright. It argues that statesmen who abuse political power for self-aggrandizement are tyrants or despots. Caesar is cited as the classic historical case. The poem suggests that Caesar’s greatness and glory were based on the blood and suffering of those he
enslaved. The democratic thrust of the poem is that modern ambitious statesmen of Caesar's ilk should be condemned and their desire for fame turned to infamy. After damning Caesar in the specific, the poem turns to the general context of contemporary "tyrants," by implication Pitt and Dundas, and looks to a future when dictatorial leaders are spurned: "But henceforth may that wretch accurs'd expire, / Whose glory on his country's ruin grows." The context of "ruin" at a national level is found in Burns's Strathallan's Lament, "Ruin's wheel has driven o'er us". It is also found in Prologue for Mrs Sutherland, "Wrenched his dear country from the jaws of ruin". Burns, as MacKay has rightly commented, believed Pitt and Dundas were taking Britain down the road to ruin by mid-1793. (9).

The lines which refer to "ruin" of the country by political ambition bear a striking resemblance in form, tone and sentiment to lines penned by Burns in June 1793 in The British Album, a collection of verse edited by Robert Merry (known under the pen-name of Della Crusca):

Perish their names, however great or brave,
   Who in the DESPOT'S cursed errands bleed!
Who but for FREEDOM fills a hero's grave,
   Fame with a seraph-pen, record the glorious deed!

The similarity of "Perish" and "expire"and "accurs'd" and "cursed" is clear. The praise to be heaped upon those who "fight for Freedom, and for Patriot laws" in Lines on Ambition is also echoed in "Who but for FREEDOM fills a hero's grave, / Fame with a seraph-pen, record the glorious deed!". These lines are accepted to the canon by Kinsley, (number 412C), although MacKay makes the error of commenting that these lines have not "so far been admitted to the canon" in his Wordfinder Appendix B, number 92, with no evidence or authority to support the rejection. They are accepted here on the authority of Kinsley. The lines by Burns in the Della Cruscan The British Album are not only strikingly similar to Lines on Ambition, they could easily be slotted in as part of the poem near its end, although one line known to be by Burns exceeds the ten syllables found in the new poem. The four lines accepted to the canon by Kinsley are not so much a seamless dress to Lines on Ambition; they are, though, strikingly similar and appear to be the same strong radical brew from the same vessel!

From what is known about Burns' political sentiments at this period, notably his opposition to the war, Lines On Ambition fits his sentiments like a glove. There can be little doubt the bard viewed Pitt's government as one led by tyrants, as the Washington Ode vividly suggests:

Dare injured nations from the great design
   To make detested tyrants bleed?
   Thy England execrates the glorious deed!
   Beneath her hostile banners waving,
   Every pang of honour braving,

   England in thunder calls: "The tyrant's cause is mine!"
   It therefore would have been entirely in keeping with Burns' views for him to write:
   But those who dare a people's rights invade,
   Who millions, for dominion would enslave;
   May all their toils with infamy be paid,
   Not tears - but curses visit them to the grave.

Moreover, there are echoes from many Burns' letters in the use of the word "curse". To Peter Hill, Burns wrote "may the wrath and curse of all mankind, haunt and harass" those "who have involved a People in this ruinous business", in reference to the war with France (CL 553). In the same letter, he goes on "...CURSED be he that curseth thee", quoting from Deuteronomy, chapter 28, verse 29. The words quoted from Burns are of the same strong, passionate and indignant religio-political language found in Lines on Ambition.

 Implicit in the radical sentiment of Lines On Ambition is the view that statesmen are morally
obliged to be honourable and noble, that their actions should be beyond reproach, above corruption; and a bulwark to tyranny. The poem is, therefore, essentially idealist. It's *raison d'être* is the frustrated desire of idealists down the ages, to see public leaders reflect the public will, without self-interest, for the public good. This ideal is contrasted with the expedient British leadership of 1793 - a sentiment expressed by Burns a few years previous in his pseudonymous letter addressed to William Pitt:

..our Country... (was) sacrificed, without remorse, to the infernal deity of Political Expediency! Not that sound policy, the good of the whole; we fell victims to the wishes of dark Envy and unprincipled Ambition. (CL p.510-511).

If these were the views of Burns in 1789, a time of relative political stability, would his sentiments not have been more strident during the political tumult of the 1790's? The letter is an attack on "unprincipled Ambition" in the vien of *Lines on Ambition*.

At first appearance, the poem is certainly not the work of an uneducated rhyming ploughman who wrote mainly Standard Habbie poetry in Scots vernacular. So, few contemporary readers would have guessed Burns as the author, given their narrow, parochial view of the bard - a trap we are well advised not to fall into two centuries later. This, of course, was the objective of employing the style and language used. It is certain that *Lines on Ambition* cannot be an impersonation of Burns. He was not famed or known for this style of poetry.

The description "Macedonia's Chief", referring to Alexander the Great, is echoed in Burns', "Then sat down, in grief, like the Macedon chief", from *Bonie Mary*, verse 3. In the frivolous bawdy song, *Bonie Mary*, the mention of "Macedon chief" is surprising and unexpected. It is interesting that the song was sent to Cleghorn at the end of October, 1793, only two months before the publication of *Lines on Ambition*. Moreover, an uncommon word in poetry of the 1790's, "Discordant", in the line "Discordant passions in his bosom rage" is also found in Burns' work, written less than a month after *Lines on Ambition* saw print. In *To Miss Graham of Fintry*, stanza 2, the poet wrote "Discordant, jar thy bosom-chords among", where "Discordant" and "bosom" form part of one sentence as in *Lines on Ambition*. While "perus'd" was not used by Burns in poetry, "peruse" can be found in *Epistle to James Tennant and Sketch - Inscribed to the Right Hon. C.J. Fox*. However, "perus'd" is found in several letters, including a letter to Mrs McElhose. (CL 462) The adjective "warlike" is seen in *When First I Saw*, verse 2, "Did warlike laurels crown my brow" and *Parcel o Rogues*, "Thru many warlike ages". There are over 90 examples where Burns used "tears", many similar to *Lines on Ambition*. The phrase "disturb'd the quiet of his breast" is echoed in *Man Was Made to Mourn*, stanza 10, "Disturb thy youthful breast". There are more than 80 examples of "breast" among the poet's works. The word "briny", uncommon to poetry of the 1790's, is found in *Poor Mailie's Elegy*, stanza 5, "An down the briny pearls rowe", where "pearls" are tears which "flood" in *Lines on Ambition*. A few words which might have seemed to be alien to the bard are found in his works. The first four couplets, therefore, clearly bear the imprint of Burns.

The word "henceforth" seems unlike Burns. However, he used this word in *Epistle to James Smith, The Ordination* and in an epigram *On Mr. James Gracie*, "May he be damned to Hell henceforth". The description of Caesar, pining "unnotic'd and unknown" is echoed in Burns's "obscure, unknown" from *My Father Was A Farmer* and "unnoticed, obscure" in *The Ronalds of the Bennals*. The word "wretch" is found in Burns in more than 30 occasions. In *The Cotter's Saturday Night* the poet describes the glitter of titled pomp as "Disguising oft the wretch of human kind". In *Passion's Cry*, completed just prior to *Lines on Ambition*, the word "expire" also ends a line of poetry in the same way it does in the new poem, "Love grasps his scorpions, stifled they expire". In *The Brig's of Ayr*, the phrase "their country's glory" echoes line 20 of *Lines on Ambition* which refers to "his country's ruin". In line 22, "country's cause" is echoed in *On Glenriddel's Fox Breaking its Chain,* "Quite frantic in his country's cause". The notion of a tyrant's wrongdoing
being the foundation of their glory is also found in *On Glenriddel’s Fox* “Thought cutting throats was reaping glory”. In stanza 5 of the same poem we find classic Rome “her fiat hurl’d / Resistless o’er a bowing world” contrasted with the contemporary “Billy Pitt” bleeding the country with taxation. “Rome” and “Greece” are mentioned in *Scots Prologue for Mrs Sutherland*. Thus, the comparison between ancient Rome and the political leaders of the 1790’s is a familiar theme in Burns’s poetry. So, the main body of the poem bears the imprint of Burnsian language and is in tune with his turn of phrase.

There is also a distinctive use of the word “May” which begins three lines of the new poem in lines 21, 23, and 27; “May fortune always their endeavours bless ...” May victory crown their labours with success /...May all their toils with infamy be paid”. There are five such lines which begin “May...” in *Here’s A Health Tae Them That’s Awa*, one which strongly echoes *Lines on Ambition*, “May liberty meet with success”. Also, in the Burns’ poem *Lament for the Absence of Creech*, and in *Epistle to John Maxwell*, the word “May” is followed by “fortune”, exactly as in line 21 of *Lines on Ambition*. Accordingly, the use of “may”, prior to praise or condemnation, is part of the stock and trade feature of Burns’ poetry.

In the call for “Patriot Laws” and “rights” in the new poem, there is an echo of *The Tree of Liberty*, which calls for “And equal rights and equal laws, / Wad gladden ev’ry isle, man”, which was probably composed after *Lines on Ambition*. The words “labours” and “toils” are found throughout the poetry of Burns, particularly in *The Cotter’s Saturday Night* and *Epistle to Davie*. The rhyme of “cause” and “laws” is found in Burns’s *Birthday Ode for the 31st December 1787*. The word “dominion” was used in one of Burns’s first songs, *Westlin Winds*, “tyrannic man’s dominion”. Moreover, the ring and sentiment of the final line “perform’d a villain’s deed” is similar to the line from the *Washington Ode* “damned deeds of everlasting shame”. Both poems share the same condemnation of tyrants’ “deeds” and “everlasting shame” is echoed in the notion

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**Roisin Dubh**

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that "curses" should "visit them to the grave. / In deep oblivion may their acts be hid". In fact, the entire tone and sentiment of *Lines on Ambition* can be read as a literary stepping stone in the evolution towards the *Washington Ode* which was written six months later.

If Burns could write a powerful democratic Ode in June 1794, he was certainly capable of writing other works of a similar nature after early January 1793. A work like the *Washington Ode* does not just "explode" into existence out of a cultural void: it is a representative snap-shot picture of the poet's radical thoughts in mid-1794 and conveys his view of the British government, the war being fought against France and the grinding of "ruin's wheel" over the virgin-green shoots of democratic. Of course, the government line was that the radicals were all "evil Jacobins", that the reform movement was insurrectionary, that the National Convention of the Friends of the People which met again in January 1794 at Edinburgh was a revolutionary government-in-waiting. *Lines on Ambition*, therefore, appears to be another example of what Chambers called the lost "democratic effusions" of Burns.

From a detailed analysis of the words employed in *Lines on Ambition*, there is no cluster of four or five adjectives and/or adverbs which pose a problem to its authenticity. Many radical works by Burns reveal up to three adjectives or adverbs used on a one-off basis; that is, they are not found in any other poem. So, more than three or four such words would seriously question the bard's authorship. In *The Lost Poems*, several works of Burns are looked at in detail to wring out of them his distinctive style in contrast to several other poems from the period which all show a cluster of 4 or more adjectives or adverbs never used by Burns. It is the case, therefore, that it is relatively easy to spot a radical poem Burns did not write.

Rather, the striking similarity between the poem and the four lines by Burns written in *The Della Cruscan British Album* during 1793, strongly point to him as author of *Lines on Ambition*. Moreover, the language of the poem reflects the known radical sentiments of the poet at the time and reveal many echoes from his known poems written before, and after, the new poem. There is considerable reference made in De Lohme's *The British Constitution* to Caesar, Rome and tyranny, which Burns was reading prior to the composition of the poem. The footnote to the poem which explains that "Erestrates...set fire to the temple of Diana" to "perpetuate his name" is in tune with the many classical names feature in Burns's poems such as *On Glenriddel's Fox*. Given the extent of detailed cross-reference in the poem to the known works of Burns, surely the surprising return of the known pen-name, A Briton, clinches the argument. In the late 18th century in Scotland the evidence confirms that only one poet used such a pseudonym - Burns. The poem, therefore, is provisionally attributed to the bard as the most likely author. A detailed scan of other poets during the period suggests there is no possibility that another poet of the period could have written *Lines on Ambition*.

**LINES ON AMBITION.**

As Caesar once period's the warlike page,
Frought with the acts of Macedonia's Chief,
Discordant passions in his bosom rage,
And sudden tears declare his inward grief.
And when his anxious friends, who round him stood,
Ask'd, what disturb'd the quiet of his breast -
While yet his eyes distill'd a briny flood,
The future tyrant thus his cares express'd -

"........................ my years attain'd,
His triumphs round the earth's wide orb were spread;
And ..................... seat the hero gain'd,
And Conquest twin'd her laurels round his head.
While I remain unnoticed and unknown,
A novice yet among the sons of Fame,
Where are the trophies I can call my own?
What spoils of victory can Caesar claim?"
Thus Julius, burning with Ambition's fire,
At length; thro' Roman blood, to empire rose -
But henceforth may that wretch accurs'd expire,
Whose glory on his country's ruin grows.
May fortune always their endeavours bless,
Who struggle to defend their country's cause,
May victory crown their labours with success,
Who fight for Freedom, and for Patriot Laws.
But those who dare a people's rights invade,
Who millions, for dominion would enslave;
May all their toils with infamy be paid,
Not tears - but *curses* visit them to the grave.
In deep oblivion may their acts be hid,
That none their despot victories may lead;
As Greece her sons, to sound his name forbid,
Who, to be known, perform'd a villain's deed.

*A Briton.*

The last two lines refer to Erestrates, who, to perpetuate his name, set fire to the temple of Diana - to Esphus.

**Footnotes.**

5. Op cit. See notes to letters numbers 137 and 97, in Appendix 1.
THE LIFE OF ROBERT BURNS
AN ILLUSTRATED STORY
BY
COLIN HUNTER McQUEEN

CLOCHNAHILL ~ MOUNT OLIPHANT
FOREWORD
BY PETER J. WESTWOOD
HONORARY PRESIDENT THE BURNS FEDERATION

Ever since the untimely passing of Robert Burns on 21st July, 1796, thousands of books have been published on his life and works, and in this the Bicentenary year of his death, like in previous years yet more volumes have been added to honour Scotland’s National Bard.

Not all the books published over the years have been biographies of his life, his songs, poems or letters. There are books for example on ‘Burns the Farmer’, ‘Robert Burns Freemason’, ‘A Burns Encyclopedia’, ‘Robert Burns till his 17th Year’, ‘Robert Burns for Beginners’, and recently ‘The Deltiology of Robert Burns’, the list is endless.

*RANTIN’ ROVIN’ ROBIN* by 54 year old Glasgow born Colin Hunter McQueen, is unique in that he tells the story of the life of the Poet by illustration only (Line drawings), with appropriate captions. An artist in his own right, through his work as a modelmaker, sculptor and painter, Colin with his knowledge and love of Robert Burns was the ideal person, and to those who know him, it will come as no great surprise that he has produced an illustrated account of the great man’s life. As a perfectionist Colin’s attention to factual detail shows throughout.

There has been limited attempts in the past to present aspects of the Poet’s life in illustrated form, but never the complete life as illustrated in Colin’s book *RANTIN’ ROVIN’ ROBIN* with brief but factual captions to each illustration.

The easy to follow illustrated story (The following pages being only an extract) is suited to all from the very young to senior Burnsians and academics.

Peter J. Westwood
The aftermath of Culloden left many families in hardship, Robert Burnes of Clochnahill in Dunottar Parish suffered also, two of his sons leave home to find work in the south.

His sons Robert and William (the Poet's father) wave a last sad goodbye and Clochnahill disappears into the horizon. An older brother 'James' settled in Montrose in 1748.
The two brothers part on 'Garnock Tap,' a local hill. Robert for England, although he settled in Stewarton Ayrshire, his brother William made for Edinburgh to work as a gardener.

William worked hard for two years in Edinburgh landscaping gardens, the next two years he spent in Ayrshire as Gardener at Dundonald to the Laird of Fairlie.
William later moved to Carrick - near Maybole. In 1754 he found himself working at Doonside House, Alloway and he lodged at Doonside Mill for three years.

Still lodging at Doonside Mill he rented seven and a half acres from Provost William Fergusson of Ayr while still in his service. Here he built with his own hands 'The Auld Clay Biggin' – Burns Cottage.
In 1756 at a Maybole Fair he met Agnes Broun (the Poet’s mother), they were later married at Maybole in 1757 and settled at Alloway in the ‘Auld Clay Biggin’.

William and Agnes had their first child (Robert Burns, Poet), on 25th January 1759, early that same day William rode into Ayr to bring the Rev. William Dalrymple to baptise the baby.
About ten days after the birth a storm damaged the south gable and roof of the cottage. William took Agnes and Robert to a neighbours house then returned to make repairs.

As the years passed William and Agnes Burnes were blessed with the births of three other children in the Alloway Cottage – Gilbert 1760, Agnes 1762 and Annabella 1764.
Old Betty Davidson a cousin of Agnes Broun (Brown) had board and lodging in the 'Auld Clay Biggin', in return for help with the dairy and other work around the house.

One day a highland bull got stuck in Alloways Haunted Kirk, it was mistaken for the De'il by a local woman who heard its frustrated bellows! The story spread and would help stimulate the young poet's mind.
She also excites young minds with stories and songs of devils, ghosts, fairies, witches, warlocks, brownies, spunkies and kelpies - which stayed with young Robert for the rest of his life.

Young Robert and Gilbert must have spent many happy summer days at play in the near woods around the River Doon and at the Auld Brig near Alloways Haunted Kirkyard.
The family travelled for Sunday Worship to the seventeenth century Kirk of Ayr near the High Street under the Rev. William Dalrymple until a replacement was had for the ruined Kirk Alloway.

In 1765 young Robert and Gilbert attended a school opened at Alloway Mill by a William Campbell, it closed not long after when Campbell went to work in Ayr.
That same year William Burnes introduced his sons to eighteen year old John Murdoch of Ayr who had been appointed to teach them and some neighbours children at Alloway.

Because of cramped conditions and to keep the family together they moved in 1766 to Mount Oliphant Farm owned by William's employer - Dr. William Fergusson of Doonholm. In 1767 another son - William was born.
John Murdoch left for Dumfries in 1768, so William again became teacher as well as father to his children when work was done. Another two children were born - John in 1769 and Isabella in 1771.

Since they could not be spared from the farm at the same time, Robert aged 13 and Gilbert 12 attended Dalrymple Parish School week about during summer quarter 1772, to improve their penmanship.
John Murdoch returned from Dumfries as English Master at Ayr Grammar School in 1773. Young Robert lodged with Murdoch for three weeks at his house in Sandgate and attended classes for English and French.

At that time it was the custom to pair off male and female during the harvest time – Robert picks out stings and thistles from the hand of his 'handsome Nell' and writes his first poem.
Times at Mount Oliphant got harder, the family were close to poverty due to the infertile soil and the loss of cattle. In a letter years later Robert called the farm 'A Ruinous Bargain'.

William Burnes sent Robert to Kirkoswald in the summer of 1775 to improve his education and to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling etc. under school teacher Hugh Rodger.
As Robert and Gilbert were the principle labourers on the farm they worked in all weathers and this seriously affected young Roberts' health until his dying day.

Robert meets his uncle Samuel Broun at Ballochneil Farm, two miles south of Kirkoswald. Uncle Samuel was son-in-law to Robert Niven tenant of the farm and Robert lodged there during his schooling at Kirkoswald.
William Niven, son of a Maybole merchant and nephew of Robert Niven of Ballochneil, started school with Burns and, as was the custom, treated their teacher, Hugh Rodger, to a draught of ale in the 'Ladies House', run by the refined Jean and Anne Kennedy.

While in the back garden of Hugh Rodger's schoolhouse taking the altitude of the sun, young Robert met "the charming Fillete" who stayed next door. Her name was Peggy Thomson and she later in life received from Burns - a signed copy of his Kilmarnock Edition of poems.
William Niven Burns's classmate lived in Maybole and Burns stayed at his home at weekends. Here they stop to view the ruins of Crossraguel Abbey and to discuss mankind in general.

One day the Ministers' daughters inquired why Robert hadn't noticed them, and why he walked eyes fixed to the ground. He answered, it was right for man to contemplate the ground from whence he came and for woman to look on man from whom she was taken.
On one occasion Hugh Rodger schoolmaster fell foul of the debating skills of his young pupil Robert. Rodger was left - hand shaking, voice trembling and prematurely closing the class for the day.

A last nights sleep at Ballochneil Farm and young Roberts' mind swims with the events of the long summer weeks he spent in this new and exciting world.
Roberts stay in Kirkoswald lasted roughly eleven weeks. The last week he could think of nothing else but Peggy Thomson and here on their last night they bid each other a sad farewell.

He would keep in touch with his friends, come back and visit, but he would leave in the morning for his family, hard work and the certain drudgery of Mount Oliphant.
We can only imagine how happy the re-united family must have been and how young Robert would have had many tales to tell and many questions to answer each and everyone.

Old Williams' Master, Dr. Fergusson died in 1776. So now William had to deal with a factor (probably a lawyer) instead of the straight dealing he had with Fergusson.
Whatever happened then, difficulties ensued and Williams' rent arrears were answered by threatening letters and legal jargon sent to him by the factor.

These letters had a terrible effect on the Burnes household and left the whole family in tears! But old William struggled on two years more 'til the end of his lease.
The most recent biography of Lincoln is a superb work. The authoring family boasts three generations of Lincoln scholars, and accesses the Meserve-Kunhardt Collection, without question the world’s greatest collection of Lincoln photographs and artifacts.

It’s organization is strictly chronological: the reader is born with, grows up with, goes to court with, runs for office with, accommodates Mary Todd with, fights the Civil War with, and finally dies with – one of the most noble geniuses the world has seen.

We learn who were Lincoln’s own heroes, and frequently mentioned is the poet Robert Burns. Implicitly the admiration of Lincoln for Burns is understandable, given the similarities of their lives: an austere country childhood, intense self education, and a firm belief in the innate dignity of all men everywhere as creations of a Divine Being. Both knew hard work and the value of honesty and freedom. Both felt strongly that all men deserved an equal chance. Both liked simple truths expressed in honest terms – and both could give expression such pure elegance.

Lincoln’s respect for Burns is evident from the following passage taken from the pages detailing the forty-seventh month of his fifty month presidency:

January 25, 1865: Of the 106th anniversary of the birth of his favorite poet, Robert Burns, Lincoln writes the celebration committee that “I can not frame a toast to Burns. I can say nothing worthy of his generous heart, and transcendent genius.”

Such almost self deprecating finesse was most characteristic of Lincoln humility – or was it just a superbly clever way of saying “I really don’t have time for that right now – I have a war to finish.” Read this magnificent book and find out!

(P. G. B., Ed.)

6 Ibid., p. 263.
A CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF BURNS

By
W. Stewart Ross

In a copy of the "Gallovidian"

Is there any concrete variety in the record of the beauty of the maidens who live in song? Had we seen Helen of Troy, should we have worked ourselves into phrenzy, and sunk a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers of Ilium for her? Had we, in the fields of green Glencairn, met Annie Laurie, should we at once have recognized that her face was the fairest that e'er the sun shone on, and have felt a strong impulsion to, for her sake, lay us down and die? It is doubtful if you, reader, would have felt a single pulse beat quicker had your life-period so synchronized that you could, when out for an evening walk, have met Helen by the Ilissus or Annie by the Cluden. I have, in my time, met several of the maidens whose charms have "waked to ecstasy the living lyre," and have been struck only by the mendacity of the living liar.
Nay more, in divinely impressionable days, I have tuned my own harp of the heather under the alders by the Lochar to immortalize such eyes of melting azure, as never sane, sober mortal behold, but which in inchoate days glisten in the glamour of love’s young dream. Certain seniors who praised my verses, when they extracted from me the identity of the heroine thereof, gave vent to derisive laughter. There is, with most of us, the period of erotic romanticism when every goose is a swan.

This pessimism of experience has often come home to me; but it presented itself with special accentuation the other day, when I read the following, which has just been published for the first time. It is a memorandum by Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe of Hoddom, and is written on the back of a receipt from his father’s Dumfries agents, Walker and Gordon, dated 8th January, 1808. The memorandum is as follows:-

“I do not choose to remember — or rather to record — Burns’s frailties, however such things might amuse the public — he was exactly like other people as to his fault — these, however, bore no proportion to his genius.

“He was very unlucky in his position — tho’ those called his superiors pretended [at first (sic)] to relish his compositions and conversation, they were not fitted, for the greater part, to do so — he must quickly have discovered this — hence his rudeness in conversation, which was much complained of.

“Mr. Riddell was a man of very limited understanding — Mr. McMurdo, and perhaps one gentleman more, were the only people [in Dumfriesshire] who really could understand his merit.

“Some of his gentle friends were foolish, crack-brained Whigs [democrats], who, I have no doubt, egged him on, nay inspired, his extravagant notions, which did him so much harm — this was suggested to me by a person, who though he entertained very different political notions from Burns, loved, admired, and befriended him to the last.

“There was a lady — it is needless to outrage her ashes by recording her name — whose intimacy with B. did him essential injury — their connection was notorious — and she made him quarrel for some time with a connexion of her own, a worthy man, to whom her deluded lover lay under many obligations.

“She was an affected — painted — crooked postiche — with a mouth from ear to ear — and a turned up nose — bandy-legs — which she, however thought fit to display — and a flat bosom, rubbed over with pearl powder a cornelian cross hung artfully as a contrast, which was bared in the evening to her petticoat tyings. This pickled frog (for such she looked, amid her own collection of natural curiosities) Burns admired and loved. They quarrelled once, however, on account of a strolling player — and Burns wrote a copy of [satirical] verses on the lady — which she afterward kindly forgave, for a very obvious reason. Amid all his bitterness he spared her in the principal point, which made her shunned by her own sex, and despised by the rest of the community.

“He was a Jacobite and a Democrat — strange conjunction! His intemperance was venial — when one considers that the gentry with whom he associated generally drank [caroused with] brandy and water when ever they met in the morning — and never dined together without getting drunk.”

The “lady” referred to is, of course, Mrs. Riddell of Woodley Park, now known as Goldielea, an elegant and picturesquely situated residence three or four miles from Dumfries, on the Galloway side of the Nith. Mrs. Riddell was the “Maria” of the love and devotion of the poet, Robert Burns, and the “pickled frog” of the grotesque aversion of another poet, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, for that he too was a poet — and more — every balladist and student of English literature knows. One man’s meat is another man’s poison. Did we all, whether poets or not, run after the same Chloe, there would be a social chaos which would end in our racial extinction.

I know not the effect the reading of that insolent and ungallant memorandum by the duke of Hoddom made upon other sentimentally embued with the intense and tragic story of Burns; but it
filled me with sorrowful indignation. From boyhood upward, I have been in love with Maria of Woodley Park, who, according to Cunningham, Hogg, and others of her contemporaries, was as beautiful as she was naturally gifted and educationally accomplished. The woman who dared to be the friend of Burns in the darkest hour of his Gethsemane won my romantic devotion. Flat-breasted, bandy-legged, painted and corrupt "pickled frog" indeed! Now, in my experienced maturity, I regard the libel with stoical scorn; but, in chivalrous days gone by, I should, with burning cheek, have muttered "Pickled Frog" through clenched teeth, and had Sharpe been a contemporary of mine, there had been another breach of etiquette. I should have journeyed as knighterrant to Hoddom to seize him by the throat and shake the likelihood out of him of again uttering such slanderous venom. But vindication is not needed. Students of the life of Burns will continue to pay grateful and tender tribute to the memory of Maria of Woodley Park.

How often in my ardent, irrepressibly-rhyming adolescence, I have fixed my rapt gaze upon Goldielea, and recalled in ecstatic vision of lyre and love scenes its interior had witnessed, only some fifty years before I was born. It was there I always conceived of Burns at his best; for there he associated with one of the few women, besides Clarinda and Mrs. Dunlop, who were worthy to associate with him in the sphere of his higher self. In his daft and impulsive capacity, he had Hymeneally fettered himself to a leg "sae taper, ticht and clean," stripped to dance a detergent utility-jig in a tub on the green at Mauchline; and he escaped from the worthy but commonplace wife of a common gauger to the society of a refined young lady of finished education and brilliant talent, who appreciatively and sympathetically followed him into the lofty empyrean into which his genius soared. In his "diggings" in the Mill Hole he would be pestered by Jean anent outstanding trifles owing for oat-meal, and rent, and coals. At Woodley Park he would be inspired by Maria to ascend to the plane of his higher being — to, oblivious of the mean conditions of his social destiny, rejoice in the opulence of his poetic endowment and feel that the garland Coila had wreathed for his brow would go down to the ages unwithered and green.

Maria, was undoubtedly, one of the few who understood him — faults and all. Ah, what it is for one not of the common clay, nor built on the conventional pattern, to find that he is, for once, understood; and doubly dear is this recognition when it comes in the guise of the appreciation and sympathy of a gifted and loveable woman. True, a man's fealty is to his wife and children, even when he was maritally blundered, and no one seems to have been more honourably conscious of this than Burns; but, although the eagle acknowledged his duty to the sparrow's nest, he did not feel it his duty to minimize himself into a sparrow, and he revelled in the society of the poetic, accomplished, and beautiful lady of Woodley Park.

But we have it from the pen of a high-bred contemporary that the lady of Woodley Park was an "affected, painted, crooked postiche, with mouth from ear to ear, and a turned-up nose, bandy-legs," etc., etc., in depreciatory ugliness. Allan Cunningham, who was also a contemporary of the lady, describes her as "beautiful," and places it on record that "she was young and accomplished," and that her verses have more of nature in them than the ordinary lines of poetesses, and her letters are lively and witty, and partake not a little of the sarcastic turn of the poet's own mind. Allan Cunningham was a personal friend of Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe. The two friends do not seem to have seen eye to eye on the subject of "Maria".

What ailed the literary and partisan dandy of Hoddom? Had Maria, for reasons femininely instinctive, refrained from lifting upon him the light of her countenance? She does not seem to have been above playfully teasing votaries who laid offerings upon the altar of her attractions. She, possibly just for the humour of the thing, stimulated jealousy in Burns himself by coquetting, as she knew how, with certain theatrical and military personages, till he felt provoked to fling several satires and pasquinades at her beautifully mischievous head. These satires are, I daresay, clever enough in their way; but it has always been my opinion that Burns did not appear to advantage in them, and that Maria was only "drawing him out," and archly laughing at him. By her marked
and, likely, carefully-played attention to a military officer, whom the poet petulantly stigmatized as “one of those lobster-coated puppies,” she actually irritated him into prematurely writing her epitaph:—

Here lies now, a prey to insulting neglect,  
What once was a butterfly, gay in life’s beam:  
Want only of wisdom denied her respect,  
Want only of goodness denied her esteem.

But Burns, alas, required an epitaph before Maria did, and the course of events proved whether or not she had a competent and lofty estimate of the ill-starred and wildly-conglomerated genius whom in her serious moods she adulated, and in her pesky moments she sportively plagued. Men older than Burns was when he died, and who have had more ample opportunities for the study of human nature in its more gifted and idiosyncratic aspects, have, without their knowing it, been playfully twined round the little finger of enchantresses less potent than was the talented and highly-educated lady of Woodley Park. “She had,” Cunningham places on record, “a fine library, and was in the habit of lending him (Burns) books. She was an elegant scholar, and sometimes translated, from French or Italian or Latin, verse for his amusement.” So much for the “pickled frog” of that jaundiced exquisite, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe.

Burns’ too sensitive and not over sagacious jealousy of Williamson, the actor, which he gave vent to in his bitter pasquinade of bad taste, “Epistle from Æsopus to Maria”, Maria could afford to quietly laugh at, and still extend to the satirist her friendly regard and her appreciative estimate of his genius. But an estrangement of a serious complexion was shortly to follow. In a dinner-party at Woodley Park which began in conviviality and ended in an orgie, Burns so grievously misconducted himself toward the lady of the house, that even the pachydermatous social etiquette of the party and the period felt constrained to register its decided reprehension. From that night the doors of his friends of social position were closed upon the poet. His biographers, with palliative euphenisms, admit that he “saluted” the lady, after he and most of the other guests had got considerably more than a wee drap in the e’e. Cunningham alleges, to cover a breach of etiquette more serious, that the poet administered to Maria’s lips “a smacking kiss.”

This, outrageous as it may seem, would not, in Dumfriesshire, at the end of the eighteenth century, have socially ostracized a social ornament of the brilliancy and magnitude of him who sighed to David McCulloch of Ardwell, “It’s a’ owre noo,” as he kept on the shady side of the High Street of Dumfries, while the other side teemed with the local gentry, on their way to a County Assembly.

The precise character of the poet’s breach of social convention was communicated to me some fourteen years ago, by Robert A. Riddell, M.A., son of the lady whom, in Bacchanalian irresponsibility, Burns had insulted. Mr. Riddell had had the relation of the untoward circumstance at Woodley Park made to him in detail by his father, Walter Riddell, who, in spite of the scandal his intoxicated indiscretion had occasioned, loved Burns, and, till the last day of his life, spoke of him with tender regard, a fact hardly compatible with Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe’s allegation in regard to Mrs. Riddell and the bard, that “their connection was notorious.” A certain fastidiousness of taste has, as far as I am aware, up till now, suppressed details as to the poet’s conduct to his hostess on that now far-off night of revelry. We owe so much to Burns in the living present that, out of gratitude we should leave the curtain unlifted upon this wassail episode of the dead past. Mr. Riddell, I feel convinced, did not colour the episode too luridly, for the lady who was unhappily involved in it was his mother, who, for evidently precautionary reasons, Sharpe refers to in 1808, as already dead, but who survived till 1820.

Some twelve or thirteen years ago, I was wont to meet Mr. Riddell, frequently. He had, in early life, been called to the bar, and had spent much of his life abroad. He had vivid boyish recollections of Dumfries and neighbourhood. Robert Riddell of Glenriddell, the hero of “The
Facsimile of a Sonnet by the Poet to Maria.

Whistle," was his uncle; Riddell of Kinharvie, Newabbey, he claimed as a relative, as also Riddell of Carzeild, in Kirkmahoe. He was well-nigh ninety years of age, but with no mental indications of senility. As late as 1891 he published his essay, "Christianism and Natural Religion," a copy of which lies before me as I write. He was proud of his mother and inherited her literary taste, to which he added a proclivity for independent and speculative thought. He constantly lamented that he had no relic of Burns. His father had possessed many letters and other mementoes of the bard, which, preparatory to going to the Wye district for artistic purposes, he being an artist and personal
friend of Turner, he stored at Gillows', in Oxford Street, which was, with its contents, consumed by fire.

For his inebriated breach of propriety toward his hostess, the lady of Woodley Park, the remorseful contrition of Burns seems to have been intense. On the terrible day which succeeded the madly irresponsible night, figuring himself in Hell, he wrote thus to Woodley Park:

“To Mrs. Riddell.

“Dumfries, 1795.

“Madam,—

“I dare to say that this is the first epistle you ever received from this nether world. I write you from the regions of Hell, amid the horrors of the damned. The time and manner of my leaving your earth I do not exactly know, as I took my departure in the heat of a fever of intoxication, contracted at your too hospitable mansion; but, on my arrival here, I was fairly tried, and sentenced to endure the purgatorial tortures of this infernal confine for the space of ninety-nine years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days and all on account of the impropriety of my conduct yesternight under your roof. Here am I, laid on a bed of pitiless furze, with my aching head reclined on a pillow of ever-piercing thorn, while an infernal tormentor, wrinkled and old and cruel — his name, I think, is Recollection — with a whip of scorpions, forbids peace or rest to approach me, and keeps anguish eternally awake. Still, Madam, if I could in any measure be reinstated in the good opinion of the fair circle whom my conduct last night so much injured, I think it would be an alleviation to my torments. For this reason I trouble you with this letter. To the men of the company I will make no apology. Your husband, who insisted on my drinking more than I chose, has no right to blame me; and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt. But to you, Madam, I have to apologize. Your good opinion I valued as one of the greatest acquisitions I had made on earth, and I was truly a beast to forfeit it. There was a Miss J——, too, a woman of fine sense, gentle and unassuming manners, — do make, on my part, a miserable d—ned wretch’s best apology to her. A Mrs G——, a charming woman, did me the honour to be prejudiced in my favour; this makes me hope that I have not outraged her beyond all forgiveness. To all the other ladies please present my humblest contrition for my conduct, and my petition for their gracious pardon.

“Regret! Remorse! Shame! Ye three hell-bounds that ever dog my steps and bay at my heels — spare me! spare me!

“Forge the offences, and pity the perdition of, Madam,

“Your humble slave,

“R.B.”

I am, as I have said, in possession of the details of the rollicking and reckless abandonment of that now far-away night beneath the roof of that Galloway mansion. I had these details from one whose mother was the victim of the orgie, and who had had the account direct from the lips of his own father. I doubt whether there may be, at this hour, anyone else upon this planet who knows as much of that night as I do. But what I know must die with me. Those who know riotous, intoxicated human nature may conjecture, and those who have a sympathy with “the light that led astray” will forgive; for, although in the case of sporadic Genius the light may lead to hell, it is “light from heaven.” To those who give us much we must forgive much. From what was divine in him we have the legacy of his songs; for what was human in him we can surely forgive what has now been for long only a handful of dust.

Burns was not, however, generally forgiven during the remainder of his life; and Jean Armour asked him, as he lay, impeccable and forsaken, on his death-bed, “Where are a’ your gran’ frien’s,
The dying man replied that a hundred years hence he would be better understood. His reply was oracular. The hundred years have gone, and he is better understood. If our standard of morals is not purer now than it was at Woodley Park at the close of the eighteenth century, our code of conventional etiquette is more fastidious, and yet the offence that extracized Coila’s bard from the set of the élite is forgiven or forgotten. At the distance of over a hundred years, we have attained a perspective by which we can the more correctly recognise his magnitude in relation to his environment. The sublime endowment, the great, grand, but fettered and tortured soul, remains. He gives such glimpses of the divine that we feel drawn all the closer to him by the recognition that he was only human. In his constitutional mood, how earnest was his contrition.

Where human weakness had come short.
Or frailty stepped aside.

Exempli gratiā, see the foregoing letter from the little room in the Mill Hole to the lady of Woodley Park, the morning after the orgie.

Burns has taken hold of the human heart in virtue of his being so intensely human, so marred by human weakness and elevated by human strength. But his faults were never of the pusillanimous, mean, and sordid order. They were the faults of a lofty manhood, driven by the storm of impulse and not scrupulously amenable to the helm of discretion.

An honest man may like a lass,
An honest man may like a glass,
But mean revenge and malice fause
He’ll still disain.

Mrs. Riddell vouchsafed no epistolary reply to the penitent poet’s letter from Hades. Her ultimate manner of reply was nobly generous. Ere many months had gone by, we find the poet, in vain quest of health, at the Brow Well in Ruthwell, to which many an evening in my boyhood I resorted in virtue of its tragic association, to dream and weep. For here, with the hand of Death upon him, had come the wreck of one worn of dissolution by the sordid hardens of the common world and with an ardour and might of soul in him which had fitted him to drive through the gates of glory in the chariot of the sun. For him, on the portal of death which was opening, was fixed, the importunate bill of “a rascally haberdasher,” and incentive to the invocation. “Poverty! thou half-sister of Death, thou cousin-german of Hell!” He had come to march in a world in which he was born to be out of step. Procrustus-like, they had tried him by their conventional standard, and cut him down to their mean dimensions; and, deserted and monetarily harassed, he was dying. An invitation to dinner was sent to him, and a carriage to take him to the repast. The invitation was from Mrs. Riddell; the carriage was hers. Her state of health was unsatisfactory; and she, too, to try the medicinal effects of the Brow Well, had left home, and had taken up her abode in the adjacent village of Clarencefield. From his little lodging at the Brow Well, she recalled him to her favour — which possibly, in her heart, he had never forfeited — and to the hospitality of her table. The scene in a peculiarly solemn life-drama has been depicted by the lady’s own pen. She states:-

“I was struck with his appearance on entering the room: the stamp of death was impressed on his features. He seemed already touching the brink of eternity. His first words were, ‘Well, madam, have you any commands for the other world?’ I replied that it seemed a doubtful case which of us should be there soonest, and that I hoped he would yet live to write my epitaph. (I was then in a poor state of health). He looked in my face with an air of great kindness, and expressed his concern at seeing me look so ill, with his usual sensibility. At table he ate little or nothing, and he complained of having entirely lost the tone of his stomach. We had a long and serious conversation about his present state, and the approaching termination of all his earthly prospects. He spoke of his death, with firmness as well as feeling, as an event likely to happen very soon, and which gave him concern chiefly from leaving his four children so young and unprotected, and his wife in the hourly expectation of lying-in of a fifth. He shewed great concern about the care of his literary
fame, and particularly the publication of his posthumous works. He said he was well aware that his death would occasion some noise, and that every scrap of his writing would be revived against him to the injury of his future reputation; that letters and verses, written with unguarded freedom, would be handed about by vanity or malevolence, when no dread of his resentment would restrain them, nor prevent malice or envy from pouring forth their venom to blast his fame. The conversation was kept up with great evenness and animation on his side. I had seldom seen his mind greater, or more collected. There was frequently a considerable degree of vivacity in his sallies, and they would probably have had a greater share, had not the concern and dejection I could not disguise damped the spirit of pleasantry he seemed willing to indulge. We parted about sun-set on the evening of the 5th of July. The next day I saw him again, and we parted — to meet no more!

Here was a woman — I reverently uncover to her hallowed memory! — whom close association with Burns had not blinded to his Titanic pro-portions. His frailties on the plane of a human brother of ours were great, and no one knew this better than Mrs. Riddell; but his endowments above the plane of our conventional humanity were greater still. Let her social circle judge her as they might, the episode in the orgie at Woodley Park was, by her, ignored.

Bent, tottering, racked with pain, the poet was evidently on his way to the tribunal of Eternity: the lady felt that that tribunal might compute him rightly, but that he had not been understood in Time. I have always regarded this, Maria of Woodley Park, as the heroine of literary history. And now an infamous scrap of paper turns up in which she is disgracefully aspersed and, as "a pickled frog," held up to derisive obloquy. The irrefragible vindication, however, of Mrs. Riddell is to be found in the story of the poet's life and in the tragedy of his death — and after. It was she who, to the Dumfries Journal, wrote the first appraisement of the departed bard that was ever published.

Multitudinous estimates of the poet's life and character have been written since; but, I make bold to say, never one that, more truthfully and lovingly, limned him, "warts and all," than this pen-portrait of the lady who had known him and seen through him and recognized the essential psychic might which lay under the envelope of somatic faults and failings. Subsequent attempts at the poet's portraiture, from that of Currie to that of Carlyle, have been based upon hers, or have, in proportion as they diverged from her miniature, departed from the truth. She had known him, just as he was, at his best, and at his worst, and had the generous discrimination to recognize that his best was, immeasurably, in excess of his worst. She could say, with the sympathetic truthfulness of his tutelar muse:

I saw thy pulse's madd'ning play
Wild send the Pleasure's devious way,
Misled by Fancy's meteor ray,
By Passion driven;
But yet, the light that led astray
Was light from heaven.

She urges, in delicate extenuation:—

"The penchant Burns had uniformly acknowledged for the festive pleasures of the table, and towards the fairer and softer objects of Nature's creation has been the rallying point whence the attacks of his censors have been uniformly directed; and to these, it must be confessed, he shewed himself no Stoic. His poetical pieces blend, with alternate happiness of description, the frolic spirit of the flowing bowl, or melt the heart to the tender and impassioned sentiments in which beauty always taught him to pour forth his own. But who would wish to reprove the feelings he has consecrated with such lively touches of Nature? And where is the rugged moralist who will persuade us so far to 'chill the genial current of the soul' as to regret that Ovid ever celebrated his Corinna, or that Anacreon sang beneath his vine?

"I will not, however, undertake to be the apologist of the irregularities even of a man of genius, though I believe it is as certain that genius never was free from irregularities as that their absolution
may in great measure be justly claimed, since it is perfectly evident that the world had continued very stationary in its intellectual acquirements had it never given birth to any but men of plain sense."

Mrs. Riddell, as the first to speak after his funeral, took up a thankless task. She states apologetically:—

"Conscious, indeed, or my own inability to do justice to such a subject, I should have continued wholly silent, had misrepresentation and calumny been less industrious; but a regard to truth, no less than affection for the memory of a friend, must now justify my offering to the public a few at least of those observations which an intimate acquaintance with Burns, and the frequent opportunities I have had of observing equally his happy qualities and his failings for several years past, have enabled me to communicate."

It was, moreover, this woman, whom Kirkpatrick Sharpe's memorandum would hold up to derisive opprobrium, who first made a levy upon her purse to, now that their bread-winner had been laid under the sod in St. Michael's Kirkyard, keep the wolf from the door of Bonnie Jean and her bits o' helpless bairns. She furthered in every way in her power the subscriptions raised on their behalf. She put herself into correspondence with Currie in regard to a monument, and, on the subject of an epitaph, she corresponded with Erasmus Darwin, the celebrated grandfather of a more celebrated grandson. She herself, among her many accomplishments, was a minstrel of no mean harp, as echoes of hers which have reached us testify.

Sincerely meaning all that the valediction of the living over the dead may mean, I solemnly say, God rest thy soul, Maria Woodley. No gentler, nobler, more chivalric spirit than thine ever tended to make earth tolerable to that great doomed soul that chronically dashed itself in despair against the prison bars of its mean environment. As a boy stravaging about in the Caerlaverock woods and reciting Burns to the solemn fir or "the fragrant birk," for Burns' dear sake, Maria, I fell in love with you. Even then I had recognized that there are plenty to stand by a man when he is up, but you were of the heroic mould that dares to stand by him when he is down. In my devotional visit to the Brow Well, Maria, you, the beautiful and highly-accomplished young English-woman, have always been the goddess of that tragically sainted shrine. I have always regarded you as the sacred Mary who, on the occasion of the martyrdom of Genius, was last at the cross, and first at the sepulchre. You gave joy to the heart of that dying man, among the foremost of the sons of our Scotland: and fear not that should a hundred jaundiced dandies hiss from their graves in Hoddom or elsewhere, that the world shall reduce thee in its esteem, Maria Woodley, or permit the mildew of slander to touch the white rose of thy solemn renown.

But Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, too, was one of the delights of my boyhood. He was the friend of Sir Walter Scott, and was wit, artist, antiquary, and poet; but he had had Oxford culture, was of a county family, and was a stiff stickler for social caste. His ballad "The Murder of Caerlaveroc," was one of my early enthusiasms. The lines, which depict how, on their bridal night, young Kirkpatrick and his bride had their chambers stealthily invaded by the jealous rival, Lindsay appeared to me quite a masterpiece of its kind.

In long-past, fondly remembered, but irrevocable years, I have, at the risk of a broken neck, climbed Caerlaverock Castle's gray and siege and time battered walls to where, in fancy, I fixed that the tragic bridal bed had been; and there, amid lichens and wallflower and ivy, I recited the ballad to the vivacious jackdaws and the sleepy owls, always imparting a special expression of solemn pathos to the following lines:—

Now to the chamber doth he creep—
A lamp, of glimmering ray,
Shewed young Kirkpatrick fast asleep
In arms of lady gay.
He lay wi' bare, unguarded breast,
By sleeping juice beguiled,
And sometimes sighed, by dreams opprest,
And sometimes sweetly smiled.

Unclosed her mouth o’ rosy hue,
Whence issued fragrant air
That, gently, in soft motion, blew
Stray ringlets of her hair.

He louted down, her lips he press’d,
Oh, kiss foreboding woe!
Then struck, on young Kirkpatrick’s breast,
A deep and deadly blow.

Sair, sair, and meikle did he bleed:
His lady slept till day,
But dreamt the Firth flowed o’er her heid,
In bride-bed as she lay.

Far away from Caerlaverock, and with many strenuous years added to my life, I am still of opinion that this is after the best manner of ballad poetry. But, “pickled frog!” Ugh! Haste, shade of Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, and for your insult to Maria Riddell, sit ghastly in the old “Repentance Tower” that, from the adjoining height, frowns down upon Hoddom and the halls of your fathers.

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HO honour FOR ALLOWAY MINISTER

T he publication of The Burns Federation edition of The Complete Letters of Robert Burns, Ed. James Mackay, (1987) stimulated my interest in the prose works read by the poet. I began to try to read what Burns had read, but in 1991 it became more than a hobby when I registered for external post-graduate study at the University of Strathclyde. In November 1995 I was awarded a Ph.D. for my thesis “Literary, Philosophical and Theological Influences on Robert Burns”.

My reading pilgrimage took me through the school books used by Burns, the novels of Smollett, Sterne, Mackenzie and Richardson, the French writers Molière, Racine, Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot, the philosophers Locke, Hutcheson, Smith, Reid and Hume, the theology of Boston, Watson, Goldie, Taylor and Hervey, and many of the sermons of the period. I also looked at the prosecution of the heresy case against Dr. William McGill (featured in “The Kirk’s Alarm”) and at the writings of the main protagonists in it, concluding my study with an attempt at assessing the personal religion of Robert Burns.

It was a very satisfying and rewarding journey, and anyone following in my footsteps would be able to dismiss out of hand much of the nonsense that is perpetuated by those who cling to the myth of the “Heaven-taught ploughman.”

J. Walter McGinty,
Minister Alloway Parish Church and a Past President of Alloway Burns Club.
The Manse, 7 Doonholm Road, Alloway.
I. THERE WAS A LAD WAS BORN IN POLAND

I was born on November 12, 1919, in Łódź (pronounced Wooj), Poland, a large industrial town of over 600,000 inhabitants. The principal industry of Łódź were cotton textiles. Indeed the town was nicknamed “Polish Manchester.” The skyline of Łódź was filled with a forest of smokestacks, and the air was badly polluted with smoke and soot. As a child I believed that soot is a normal component of the atmosphere.

I attended a private school for boys, where I excelled in mathematics, physics and chemistry. I played a cornet in the school band, and I was involved in school dramatics as an actor, director and playwright. My favourite Polish writers were Sienkiewicz (1905 Nobel Prize in Literature), Reymont (1924 Nobel Prize in Literature), Prus and Orzeszkowa. I read English and Scottish authors in translation: Shakespeare, Kipling, Dickens, Scott and Stevenson. I was quite daft about Molière. My favourite poets were Mickiewicz, the greatest Polish poet, and Tuwim, the finest poet and satirist in twentieth century Poland.

I “first committed the sin of RHYME” at the age of 16 or 17. I belonged to a youth organization and at one of our monthly meetings I read satirical verses which I composed for the occasion. By now I have forgotten the verses but I do remember that my audience was duly impressed.

II. TO LEARN BONTON AND SEE THE WORL’.

I graduated from high school in June 1937. A few months later I left Poland for Belgium where I was to pursue university studies. I knew several languages: I learnt German and Latin in the high school, and English at home from a private tutor. Unfortunately in Belgium they spoke only French and Flemish. My first task was to learn French. I also had to learn differential calculus, spherical trigonometry, and theory of numbers which were required for the university entrance examinations but were not taught in my high school in Poland. This I did, and I passed the examinations at Université de Liège with flying colours. In the academic year 1938/9 I studied mathematics and sciences. On August 1, 1939, I left Liège and returned home for summer vacations.

III. WHEN WILD WAR’S DEADLY BLAST WAS BLAWN.

On Friday morning, September 1, 1939, Hitler and his Nazi hordes invaded Poland. Eight days later German troops entered Łódź. In this light-hearted autobiography I cannot describe the horrors of Nazi occupation and the enormous tragedy that befell my family and the millions who suffered and died during the occupation. I was lucky. On 16 November 1939, I managed to escape from Poland and to traverse Germany by train from Breslau to Aachen where I hoped to cross the border into Belgium. Unfortunately in Aachen I had to show my Polish passport and this caused a minor sensation among Nazi officials. As far as I know, nobody had tried the same escape route before. Anyway, a Nazi customs officer with some assistance from several army officers proceeded to beat me up to prove their racial superiority. Eventually they got tired of the pleasantries and allowed me to board a train for Brussels. Before I left Belgium in August I had some francs left

* At the Annual General Meeting of the Burns Federation held in Dumfries on 14th September, 1996 Professor Minc was appointed an Honorary President of the Burns Federation.
Dundee, May 1943, Newlyweds: Cathie and Henryk.

and I invested them in a return visa to save myself a trip to the Belgian consulate in Warsaw. Although the validity of my visa had expired the Sureté Nationale decided to honour it and let me enter Belgium.

A week later my brother escaped from Poland by the same route and arrived in Belgium. This time the kind Belgians were not so kind; they deported him to Germany.

IV. I’LL GO AND BE A SODGER.

On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Belgium. I decided to join the Polish Forces in France. There were no trains nor buses in Brussels, and I had no option but to go on foot. I managed to cross the French border and after many adventures I reached Rouen where I enlisted in the Polish Army. I fully expected that my basic training would keep me occupied for several months, but Hitler had other ideas.

In mid-June we were in full retreat again. By this time I was an expert in the art of escaping. I managed to outrun German panzer divisions and reached St.-Jean-de-Luz on the Spanish border before them. I was lucky to find a British convoy there, and the next day, 23 June 1940, I embarked with a company of sappers on the S.S. Arandorra Star. Apart from Polish Army units and a few French poilus, my fellow passengers included King Zogu of Albania (whom I did not meet) and the former director of Premier Blum’s cabinet (with whom I shared a cabin.) Ordinary civilians and families of soldiers were not allowed to embark.

After three days of dodging U-boats we reached Liverpool. We paraded in the streets of the town loudly cheered by Liverpudlians who were happy to see our coming to their rescue. We were also very happy not to have been trapped in France. The same day we arrived in Biggar, Scotland.
V. FREEDOM'S SWORD WILL STRONGLY DRAW.

In Biggar we were encamped on a bare, green hill with a large number of empty tents and absolutely nothing else. We just slept on the ground. After a few days conditions improved; our professional colleagues, the Royal Engineers put up for us prefabricated, state-of-the-art, wooden latrines on the crest of the hill, without any cover, so that our officers, men and nurses could socialize without regard to rank and sex.

Officially I came under British command on 1 July 1940, and I was posted to the 1st Polish Army Engineer Coy. We remained in Biggar several weeks. At the beginning of September 1940 we were loaded on a train and sent to Tayport, Fife.

VI. MY HUMBLE KNAPSACK A' MY WEALTH, A POOR AND HONEST SODGER.

Here is *curriculum vitae meae* from autumn 1940 to about 1951.

(a) On the military front:
- In the first few months we were engaged in construction of minefields and antitank obstacles on the beaches.
- At the beginning of 1941 I was posted to a searchlight platoon. Our task was to illuminate the beaches when and if the Germans would attempt to land in Scotland. They did not.
- On 15 May 1941 I was posted to an Engineering O.C.T.U. which I left after six months with the rank of a corporal cadet officer.
- In 1943/4 I was involved in disposing of particularly difficult minefields in MacDuff and Wick.
- I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in March 1944. At the time I was engaged in disposing of a minefield in Tayport, within an earshot of my wife's place of work.
- From 30 May to 30 June, 1944, I attended a bridging course at the R.E. School in Ripon. The following report was received:

*Lt. MINC Henryk*

Distinguished. The above Officer was outstanding for his knowledge and despite language difficulties was very good in discussion. I think he would be a first class instructor for his own Forces. I consider this Officer worth 'distinguished' in all respects'.

This was the only "distinguished" grade awarded in the course taken by over eighty officers, mostly British, ranking from lieutenants to a brigadier.

- In 1945 I was in charge of disposing of a very large minefield in Carnoustie: 5206 Mark V mines!
- I was awarded the Polish Army Medal (for mine disposal); also the British Defence Medal and the War Medal.
(b) On the personal front:
- I met Cathie, my wife-to-be, on Sunday, 1st of December 1940, at 7 p.m. She was walking home from a church service where the minister exhorted his flock to be kind to Polish soldiers.

- In autumn 1941 I was ordered to volunteer to help Scottish farmers in the harvest. Farmers paid the Army 10s per soldier for an 8-hour day. The Army kept 8s6d and generously let me have 1s6d plus my pay of 2s a day. Of these princely sums I managed to save enough money to buy Cathie an engagement ring. We became engaged on Christmas 1941.

- Cathie was called up to the A.T.S. on 15 January 1943. We were married in Dundee on April 16, 1943, the 197th anniversary of the Battle of Culloden, but the two events were probably unrelated. Cathie was discharged on 4 January 1944 for “family reasons.” Although she was born in Tayport and her family (Duncan) had lived in the Tay area for at least 400 years, she became overnight an “alien”. She was not allowed to leave Tayport without police permission, nor was she allowed under any circumstances to enter restricted areas, whereas I, as an allied officer, was not subjected to any restrictions.

- Our first son Robert was born in Dundee on 6 July 1944. Our No. 2, Ralph, was born in Tayport on 9 September 1945, and our youngest, Raymond, in Newport-on-Tay on 14 May 1951.

- In 1947 I was awarded a prize for short stories in Esperanto. The stories were published in the book *Premiitaj Romanetoj*. On 10 July 1950 I was granted a British Certificate of Naturalization.

VII. THO’ POOR IN GEAR, WE’RE RICH IN LOVE.

I was demobilised in June 1948, after eight years of army service. We could not find any rented accommodation, and we were forced to buy, on the never-never system, a modest but and ben without a bathroom. We shared an outhouse with a neighbour, another proud houseowner.

During the following year I worked as a bookkeeper in an agricultural repair business. After a year the business was on its last legs. I was unable to find another job. Actually I was offered a position of a bookkeeper but the Ministry of Labour intervened. I was told that I cannot be employed in any position for which there are British applicants, whether they are qualified or not.

After a few weeks on the dole I got a job in a linoleum factory in Newburgh at less than £4 a week, then in a sawmill in Tayport, and finally in a jute factory at a princely £5 a week. The conditions of work were not bad, particularly in the jute factory. The natives (my co-workers) were friendly especially after I joined the local brass band and became its star euphonium player. In the factory I was *jis a semple lawbourer*. Although I had a fair knowledge of university mathematics, I was not allowed to do anything that required thinking, not even to measure a rectangular space for a loom. I was allowed to hold a measuring tape but the numbers had to be read by a qualified mechanic.

In 1951 out of sheer boredom I started attending evening classes in mathematics at the Dundee Technical College. After two years I passed an external matriculation examination of the University of London. Then the Scottish Department of Education awarded me a scholarship, and in September 1952 I became a full-time student.

VIII. I WILL AWA TO EMBRO.

During the first two quarters of 1952/3 I was enrolled as a student at the Dundee Technical College. My instructor in pure maths was Dr. Gow. The Applied Maths instructor’s name I do not remember. I was the only student in each of my classes. By winter time Dr. Gow contacted Professor Aitken, a famous algebraist, number theorist and statistician in Edinburgh. They agreed that I may be too good for the Technical College and that I should pursue my studies in the University of Edinburgh. So in the spring of 1953 I became a *civis Edinburghiensis*.

For the next two years and a quarter I
studied in Edinburgh, learning philosophy in the same classroom as David Hume did 200 years earlier, astronomy from the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, and pure and applied mathematics from distinguished scholars like Max Born who a year later was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics.

In Embro I stayed in lodgings but every weekend and holiday I would travel to Tayport to rescue Cathie who was *sair trachled wi three bairns*.

**IX. TO SPEEL THE BRAES O’ FAME.**

In the course of my studies I earned a prize, two medals, and a bunch of First Class Merit Certificates. In my third year I attended a research seminar in nonassociative algebra. I was the only undergraduate in the seminar. Nevertheless I obtained some new results that later became the basis for my Ph.D. thesis.

By 1954 our financial situation became precarious. Keeping a house in Tayport and lodgings in Embro was just too expensive, and it became painfully obvious that we would not survive on my scholarship till 1956 when normally I would have earned my M.A. degree. I decided to take my final examination a year earlier. In 1955 I was awarded an M.A. degree with Honours in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. I was capped in the McEwan Hall by Sir Edward Appleton, a Nobel Prize Winner.

At that time we moved to a new municipal house in Tayport with all modern conveniences including an internal W.C. My fame had spread to Tayport, and local notables by whom I was *despised an rejeckit* in times of my labourership began to notice me again.

**X. TO SCHOOL THEM WEEL MY EIDENT CARE.**

In the autumn 1955 I enrolled as a student in Dundee Training College. For a whole academic year I had to study Plato, Rousseau, and the other gurus in education who never taught in anything resembling a high school. In June 1956 I was awarded a Chapter V Certificate, the acme of teaching qualifications in Scotland. I was offered then a teaching position in the Morgan Academy in Dundee, and I accepted the offer.

My first act in my new profession was to purchase a second hand graduate gown with all its trappings, and a brand new tawse. The gown was required, and the tawse, I was told, was indispensable. The first year of my high school teaching career was quite interesting. I had to relearn Euclid’s geometry and, in general, to find ways to impart knowledge and love (?) of mathematics to my pupils. I achieved good results with my “A” classes, particularly with older pupils who were studying for the High School Leaving Examinations. With youngsters of 12 and 13 I had two basic problems which I could not solve: (i) how to stop girls from giggling; (ii) how to stop boys from clowning and showing off in front of girls. I still do not know how it can be done.

I was surprised to find that pupils were ridiculed and chastised for speaking Scots. To the best of my knowledge they learned no Scots poets other than Burns, and even his poetry was limited to a “wee, sleeket, cowran, tim’rous beastie.”

I have hardly ever met friendlier people than my colleagues in Morgan Academy.

**XI. FAREWELL, OLD SCOTIA’S BLEAK DOMAINS.**

I found my second year of teaching rather boring. I had to teach exactly the same material as in the previous year, and by now I knew all that there was to know in high school mathematics. I started moonlighting, teaching evening courses in Dundee Technical College. I was also working on my Ph.D. thesis, and I got two research papers accepted for publication.

I decided to look for a university position. I answered many, many advertisements. It *wis a richt trachle*: I had to type applications on my ancient typewriter in sextuplicate since Xerox was not invented yet. I got some encouraging replies but no offers. Eventually a friend explained the facts of life to me. It seems that there was a legal requirement to advertise open academic positions, but the actual
vacancies were filled long before the advertisements appeared. Needless to say I wis richt scunnert. I found in a journal four advertisements of open positions in mathematics, three in Canadian universities and one in Australia. I applied to all four institutions, and I got four offers. I decided to accept a lectureship in mathematics at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

XII. AN' OWRE THE SEA.

We left Scotland in August 1958. I visited my brother and his family in Montreal. I had not seen him since November 1939. We arrived in Vancouver a fortnight later.

I spent two years in Vancouver spreading mathematical gospel. During this time I managed to write several research papers and to obtain a research contract from the U.S. Air Force. In 1959 I was awarded a Ph.D. degree by the University of Edinburgh, and I was promoted to the rank of an assistant professor. Hooanever, our three sons were growing up, the cost of living was rising, and thus in 1960 we came to the conclusion that we cannot survive on an assistant professor's salary. I accepted associate professorship in mathematics at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

XIII. IN DISTANT CLIMES I WANDER.

I wis fair contentit wi' ma wark at the University of Florida. I received research grants, and I published a large number of research papers. I was working (with a collaborator) on the first of my mathematical opera magna (it was published in 1964). I also had some success as an actor in the Gainesville Little Theatre (as Ajax in "Tiger at the gate" and as a count, or a duke, in "The chess game"), and in playing baroque sonatas on recorders. Unfortunately my wife, a Fifer, did not enjoy the subtropical climate of Florida, nor the mosquitoes, nor the chiggers, nor the problems posed by racial segregation. In 1963 I was offered a full professorship of mathematics at the University of California in Santa Barbara. California here I come!

XIV. WHEN A' MY WORKS I DID REVIEW.

These notes are not meant to give the details of my scientific and academic careers. Suffice to mention that I have published 78 mathematical research papers and 5 other
mathematical articles, 3 books on advanced mathematics (translated into Russian and Chinese), 9 research papers on ancient history and ancient numismatics, 3 articles on Burns (one of which is still to appear), and over 40 descriptions of ancient coins and ostraka for the Bulletin of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, where I served for ten years as a member of the Advisory Board. I was awarded research grants and research contracts by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research and the Office of Naval Research each year from 1960 to 1988.

XV. LIFE IS ALL A VARIORUM.

I have now enjoyed California sunshine for nearly a third of a century. For twenty-eight years I was a professor of mathematics at the University of California. I retired on July 1, 1990, and I was awarded the euphonious title of professor emeritus which gives me the all important right to free parking on the university campus and the use of the university library.

In the sixties my hobbies were amateur acting, baroque music, swimming (I still swim a mile a day) and table tennis (as an official; my youngest son was the star). On a more serious level, each spring quarter from 1969 to 1980 I taught mathematics as a Visiting Professor at the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. Apart from my work at the Institute I became involved in ancient numismatics (I was the only non-Israeli on the Executive Committee of the Israel Numismatics Society) and archaeology. I own a fine collection of Hasmonaean coins, ancient lamps, terra cotta figurines, pottery, cuneiform tablets, Coptic papyri, etc. I became fluent in modern Hebrew. I lectured in my classes in Hebrew and each year I gave a public lecture on Hasmonaean coinage. I have acquired a good knowledge of Biblical Hebrew, working knowledge of Aramaic and Latin, and a smattering of Phoenician, Coptic and even ancient Egyptian which I studied by a correspondence course.

XVII. THERE CAME A PIPER OUT O' FIFE.

My last trip to Israel was in 1983. After that I became heavily involved in matters Scottish. First I developed a taste for Scottish literature and history. Then I joined the Scottish Society of Santa Barbara and became a member of several societies in Scotland. I also learnt to play the Great Highland Bagpipe and to gar it skirt. I was taught the art of piping by world class pipers. On 1st October 1990 I was appointed the Piper-to-the-Chief of Clan Fraser. In 1991 Cathie and I were invited by the Rt. Hon. Lady Saltoun, the Chief of Frasers, for a lunch in the Caerlurg Castle where I had the honour to play piobaireachd for her Ladyship and Captain Ramsay, her husband. I am also the official piper of American Friends of the University of Edinburgh.

XVIII. YE SCOTS WHA WISH AULD SCOTLAND WELL.

During the last ten years I have built up an extensive Scottish Library containing over 1300 titles, including a fine Burns collection of 300 items and several early editions of Fergusson and Scott.

Santa Barbara, July 1993.
Henryk, before the 4th of July Parade.
In 1988 I became the Program Chairman of our Scottish Society. Over the years I gave several Burns Supper addresses, and many talks on Burns, Fergusson, Hogg, Stevenson, Soutar, MacDiarmid, Young and Garioch at monthly meetings of the Scottish Society, and at Scottish Games. I also lectured on Scottish coins and tokens at the Scottish Society and the Santa Barbara Coin Club meetings. In 1991 I was elected Chieftain of the Scottish Society of Santa Barbara. I held this office for four years.

I am proud that in 1990 I managed to persuade the Scottish Society of Santa Barbara to become affiliated with the Burns Federation, and I have been representing the Scottish Society of Santa Barbara at the annual Conferences of the Burns Federation. I am a member of University of Edinburgh Graduates’ Association, American Friends of Edinburgh University, Scots Language Society, Saltire Society, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, and Hogg Society.

My biggest remaining ambition is to complete my set of Burns Chronicles.

That's aa, ma Burnsian freens, that's aa;
I quat ma pen an ink.
I howp ye thocht ma story's braw.
Aefauldlie, HENRYK MINC.

ROBERT BURNS AND ROBERT MUIR
By Lorna Darlington
(INCORPORATING RESEARCH BY HUGH WILKIE, PAISLEY)

In the Autumn if 1789, at Ellisland, his new home beside the River Nith, North of Dumfries, Robert Burns lay prostrated by a terrible migraine, which lasted for nearly three weeks. During this illness he was quite unable to rise from his bed, and, although he was not to die for another six and a half years, he had many hours in which to think about his life, so far, and his eventual death.

In his next letter to his chief correspondent, the 59-year old Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, written on 13th December, he describes his imaginings about an After Life, and also the Church’s promise that Heaven will be enjoyed by “the Just, the Benevolent and Amiable, and the Humane”. Burns then goes on to write in this same letter, his hopes that he would there meet again three people whom he had loved but who were already dead. First, he hoped to meet his father, and thirdly his (Highland) Mary, whose early death he bitterly regretted. However, immediately after his father he hoped that he might meet again “the disinterested friend of my early life, MUIR. Thy weaknesses were the aberrations of Human nature, but thy heart glowed with everything generous, manly, and noble, and if ever emanation from the All-Good Being animated a human form, it was thine!”.
Burns went on to copy out for Mrs. Dunlop his Epitaph on Robert Muir:

"What Man could esteem, or what Woman could love
Was he who lies under this sod.
If such Thou refusest admittance above
- Then whom wilt Thou favour, Good God?"

It may shock people to read of the Poet yearning to meet Mary Campbell, when he had been married for more than a year to Jean Armour, particularly after she had just nursed him through his prostrating illness. But we are not surprised that Burns wished to meet again his wonderful but unfortunate father, nor that he should long to see his friend, Robert Muir, "the man who rejoiced to see me because he loved me and could serve me." (Here we catch a glimpse of Burns's adverse experience, since becoming famous, of people wanting to see him to use him to serve their own ends).

Robert Muir's family were of old Ayrshire stock. His grandfather, David Muir, had been a weaver, living in the hamlet of Crookedholm, South East of Kilmarnock. In the eighteenth century many members of this small parish were known as 'Cameronians', a sect noted for their particularly strict religious observance. (A congregation was formed here in 1775 and a Meeting House built in 1785).

In October 1726 this David Muir inherited a property in Holmhead of Kilmarnock. When young, he had married Agnes Dickie and they had a son, born on 27th February 1714, called William. On 22nd December, 1746 this William Muir married for a second time. His new wife was Janet Craig, daughter of William Craig of Holm, in the parish of Kilmarnocks. Out of their seven children only two reached maturity. The survivors were Agnes, born at Kilmarnock on 28th November 1754, and Robert, born 8th August 1758. As Robert Burns, the Poet, was born at Alloway on 25th January 1759, these two boys were close in age. Both were born in Ayrshire, both their fathers were called William, both had sisters named Agnes (Robert Muir's four years older than himself and Robert Burns's four years his junior) and both of them had the same first name.

In 1771, when Robert Muir was only thirteen, his father died, aged fifty-seven. The Muir family were by then living at Loanfoot, the buildings and ground of which lay to the West of Kilmarnock, on pleasantly rising ground South of the road to Irvine. The place enjoyed fresh air and a delightful prospect over the prosperous market town of Kilmarnock. (Nowadays, this small estate of Loanfoot is partially occupied by the greenhouses of the Parks and Gardens department, and here they cultivate the many plants used to adorn the district's flower beds). But the young Robert Muir, his widowed mother, and as yet unmarried sister were now faced with the fact that William Muir had left Loanfoot encumbered with debts. Life was not going to be easy for them.

Robert Burns, at the same age, was working long hours at Lochlea, helping his father on his 130 acre farm. However, he did manage, with his father's encouragement, to spend some time on improving himself. At the age of fourteen he stayed at Ayr for three weeks with John Murdoch, twelve years his senior, who had tutored Robert, his brother Gilbert, and some other children from an early age. Murdoch was now the English Master at the Grammar School and he helped Robert to improve on his Grammar and French.

Robert Muir, now fatherless at an early age, probably had to forego some of the further education which he might otherwise have enjoyed in order that he might begin to earn some money. He may, therefore, not have been taught how to express himself elegantly in writing, (unlike Burns). Many years later Burns was to exclaim over his friend Muir's letter-writing! But it would appear that Muir must have had a great natural appreciation of poetry and wit, as well as possessing a gentle and warm disposition. By the age of twenty-one Muir had established himself as a wine merchant, and he seems to have been a most industrious young man, for by the age of twenty-four he had his own wine shop in Fore Street, Kilmarnock.
In 1780, at Tarbolton, quite near Kilmarnock, Robert Burns had helped to establish the Bachelors Club, and also became a Freemason there in 1781. However, his father died on 13th February 1784, aged sixty-three, and Robert, as the eldest son, had to assume family responsibilities. He and Gilbert moved his mother and the rest of their family from Lochlea to Mossgiel, just outside Mauchline. Mauchline stood on a more direct road to Kilmarnock and Burns began to visit that town, which was within walking distance, and soon made new friends among the more prominent townsfolk. Being a Freemason gave him immediate acceptance by many of them and Kilmarnock was enlivened by his presence.

In 1786 a Farmer’s Society was founded at Kilmarnock. The Members met on the first Friday of each month, to dine and discuss farming topics. Robert Burns of Mossgiel may have attended some of these meetings. Early in the same year, 1786, he met Robert Muir and the two men took to each other immediately. Burns was later to address him as “My Friend, My Brother”, and, in a letter of 8th September that year referred to him as “The Man of my Bosom”. But on 20th March 1786 Burns wrote to Muir for the first time, a brief note, written from Mossgiel, enclosing his fairly long poem on “Scotch Drink”, perhaps written to tease Muir about his dealing in Foreign wines and spirits, rather than keeping to the (Burns said) far superior Scottish beer, and of course, that essential drink, the Water of Life! Verses 14, 15 and 16 seem particularly to refer to wine merchants. I will give a free translation, here:-

“Alas, that my ‘Muse’ ever had reason to accuse any of her own countrymen of Treason! But many people daily ‘wet their whistle’ all winter long with fine wine and never ask how much it costs. Brandy is overheating rubbish, the terrible source of many illnesses, robbing many a poor dolt of half his life-span, and besides this, the money we pay for it is sent to our worst enemies. Any Scot who is patriotic, especially you (Muir), should think of hard-up devils like myself. It does not become you to deal in these bitter unpleasant foreign liquors”. Burns continues this poem with more verses in praise of whisky! This is one of his earliest longer poems, and was among the first which he chose to be published.

Muir soon became one of Burns’s most ardent admirers. He strongly felt that Burns should make a Collection of those poems which he had already written, and publish them. But Burns told his new circle of friends that he could not afford to have his poems put into print at his own expense. So some friends arranged a Subscription List for him in April 1786. Subscribers promised to buy copies of the book before it was published and with this promise of funds, John Wilson, a Kilmarnock printer and fellow Mason, agreed to undertake the production of the First Edition of Robert Burns’s early poems. However, he declined to repeat this procedure, the following year, and earned this premature Epitaph from Burns:-

“Who’er thou art, oh Reader, know
That Death has murdered Johnnie,
And here his Body lies, fu’ low
For SAUL,- he ne’er had ony”.

(John Wilson was born in 1750, and did not die until 1821!)

So in 1786 Burns’s friends and acquaintances, old and new, ordered varying numbers of copies of his “Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect”, in advance of publication. The main subscribers were: Robert Aiken the wealthy Ayr solicitor, who took 145 copies, the Poet's brother Gilbert and John Wilson, the publisher, 70 copies each, and Robert Muir, who took 72 copies, out of the 612 copies which were to be printed at three shillings each, and so the famous Kilmarnock Edition was made ready for distribution on 31st July 1786. (In this the Poet’s name is printed as BURNS, without an E. On 1st March 1786 he had signed his name “Bums” for the first time). Robert Muir’s generous gesture, subscribing for so many copies when he was not free of his late father’s debts, himself, helped to cement Robert Burns’s regard for him, and may also have helped to persuade John Wilson that he would not be left entirely unpaid, with piles of unsellable books filling his shop!
The year of 1786 was full of events and experiences for Burns, both good and bad. In April James Armour repudiated Burns as a son-in-law, and in July and August Burns did penance in Mauchline Church, in order to be free of any commitment to Jean Armour. But before this, on about 14th May, he had enacted a ceremony of betrothal to Mary Campbell, exchanging inscribed Bibles. She was employed at Coilsfield, the property of Col. Hugh Montgomerie, who was to become the 12th Earl of Eglinton in 1796. Burns considered himself betrothed to Mary, although, even then Jean Armour was pregnant with his twins, a girl and a boy born on 3rd September. Burns's understanding Mother took the little boy Robert into her own household and Jean looked after the girl baby, also called Jean, but this baby died in October 1787.

Then, in October, Mary Campbell suddenly died while at Greenock. The news of her death must have come as a terrible shock to Burns, as at no time are we given the impression that she was frail. His continuing anguish over her death was surely due, not only to the fact that he felt himself so suddenly bereaved, but also because he had not been with her when she died.

On 27th November 1786 Burns left Mauchline to visit Edinburgh, and soon found himself the centre of attention. During this crowded Autumn he took the time to write to Robert Muir on at least four occasions. We know of letters he wrote on 8th September, 18th November, 15th December, and 20th December, and he was to continue this correspondence and friendship with unabated warmth. While touring the Borders with Robert Ainslie Burns mentioned Robert Muir in his Journal on 12th May, 1787, and on 26th August he wrote to him from Stirling at the start of his Highland Tour with William Nicol.

On 21st April 1787 the first Edinburgh Edition of Burns's poems was published, this time by William Creech. But he, by his prevarication and dilatory payment, completely soured Burns's original idea of writing for money. Henceforward he would prefer to give away his work, rather than ever again suffer in a similar demeaning way, begging for payment. We now think that Creech was instructed to keep Burns in Edinburgh by these delaying tactics, in order that the Government could keep an eye on him - the Rebel from the West, with his inflammatory socialistic ideas about Kirk and State. But Burns had no suspicion of this, and he writhed under the injustice of Creech's non-payment. Of this first Edinburgh Edition of 2,800 copies, Robert Muir took 40 copies. This was a further instance of continued support for his much loved and admired friend. He had offered to take 60 copies, but Burns refused this generous gesture. Muir acted as a sort of "bank" of copies of both these first editions, which Burns could "draw" on when he found that he wished to present one to an acquaintance or even to members of his own family, most of whom had not subscribed originally.

Burns must have been aware of Robert Muir's failing health. On 7th March 1788 he wrote to Muir for the last time, and in this letter - "I trust the Spring will renew your shattered frame" - the Poet sets out his feelings about death in order to comfort his friend, reminding him that everyone is doomed to die one day. But nothing said or written can alter the irrefutably sad fact of either losing a loved and compatible friend or finding that one's own life is nearing its end. Muir was terminally ill with Pulmonary Disease (consumption), and had been worn-down and weakened by his long drawn out legal battles to do with his late father's debts, with seemingly endless correspondence and even Court appearances during the first half of 1786. Now, at long last, Robert Muir was triumphant, and on 16th April 1788 it was officially declared that he was free of all debts. One week later, on 22nd April, he was dead.

In that same month Robert Burns at last decided to go through a second form of marriage with Jean Armour just before she again gave birth to twins, but in the event neither of these babies survived. Even so, Burns confirmed this marriage in Mauchline Kirk in August. It was now that he moved South. He took on the lease of Ellisland, and moved there by himself on 13th June and Jean came to join him in December. His happy Kilmarnock days were over. For the remainder of his life he would live near to, or at, Dumfries. Perhaps he did not wish to go to Kilmarnock any more that Muir was dead.
After his death Robert Muir's wine shop at the Cross of Kilmarnock went to a relative, John Muir, a merchant and postmaster, while the family home, Loanfoot, devolved on to Robert's sister Agnes, but she herself died in 1791, shortly after she had finally gained full possession and had sold the property to Miss Henrietta Scott, later Duchess of Portland. Agnes had married on 21st July 1774, at Ayr, a William Smith of Hillhousehill Farm, (South of Fenwick), and they had at least three children.

Dr. Durrie, who published an Edition of Burns's poems after his death, received a letter from the poet's brother, Gilbert, in which he had this to say about Robert Muir:-

"Mr. Robert Muir, merchant in Kilmarnock, was one of those early friends that Robert's poetry procured him, and one who was dear to his heart. This gentleman had no very great fortune or long line of dignified ancestry, but what Robert says of Captain Matthew Hamilton might be said of Muir, with great propriety, - that 'he held the Patent of his honours immediately from Almighty God'. Nature had indeed marked him as a gentleman in the most legible characters. He died while yet a young man, soon after the publication of my brother's first Edinburgh Edition".

In Burns's own words (Journal. 12th May 1787)" he was a most gentlemanly, clever, handsome fellow".

This would seem to confirm that Robert Muir was the man whom Robert Burns admired the most, of all his many friends.

THE BIGGEST
BURNS NIGHT 1959
THOUSANDS ATTEND GLASGOW'S BICENTENARY RALLY
By
Bob Horne

During my schooldays I was introduced to the poetry of Browning, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Scott. Robert Burns featured hardly at all. We learned to recite To a Daisy and To a Mouse. Two songs written by the poet were included in the curriculum and it is easy to understand why the majority of Scots knew very little about his works in later life. I attended my first Burns Supper in London in 1939. The speaker who proposed the toast to the Immortal Memory was John Ross Campbell, an authority on the life and works of the Poet.

Campbell gave a splendid address, but what remained in my memory was his reference to a recently published biography written by the German Professor Hans Hecht. I was later able to borrow a copy from a local library, and have since regarded it as one of the best biographies written about Burns. It made a very big impression on me and I was hooked on the poet from that time.

In the intervening years I have read many newspaper articles, booklets, pamphlets and biographies. James Barke's novels had a popular appeal but the biography written by David Daiches is excellent because it was written against the historical background of events between the Union with England in 1707 and the time of Burns. More recently, Dr. James Mackay's biography introduced some new and challenging material.

I got to know J. R. Campbell many years after hearing him in London. We were both members of the Communist Party and I had the privilege of assisting in the publication and distribution of
his excellent booklet *Burns the Democrat*. I can recall receiving requests for copies from far and wide. The National Library of New Zealand, for example, ordered several copies.

I never thought of myself as one who could do justice as a reader of the poems of Burns. Over many years, however, I have had invitations to give the address to the Immortal Memory at Burns Suppers. These I have enjoyed. My proudest memory, however, is that of the bi-centenary celebration event of 1959 which I helped to organise in St. Andrew’s Hall in Glasgow. By a happy coincidence January 25th fell on a Sunday, a day that was free of other distractions.

It should be noted that World War Two, and the years immediately following, had brought about a great surge of interest in the life and works of Robert Burns. This fact led the Scottish Committee of the Communist Party to plan a major event to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the poet’s birth. Three thousand people packed St. Andrew’s Hall that night and several hundred more had to be turned away.

The earlier part of the programme included a prologue spoken by the well known Scottish actor, Alex McCrindle. Hugh McDiarmid (Dr. Christopher Grieve) who also spoke, claimed that nowhere else in the world would there be a gathering so big and so representative of ordinary people. John Ross Campbell, at that time editor of the *Daily Worker*, spoke of Burns as the authentic voice of the Scottish people. Alex Clark chaired the proceedings and read messages which had come from many parts of the world.

Songs and readings were included in the programme but the closing item was The *Jolly Beggars Cantata* performed by members of the Young Communist League Choir directed by James Callan. The recitativo was spoken by David McDowall.

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**BURNS BICENTENARY — 1759-1959**

**SOUVENIR PROGRAMME**

Of the concert and tribute to his memory presented by the Scottish District of the Communist Party in the St. Andrew’s Hall, Glasgow, on 25th January 1959

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*Rennald Burns*

*Born 25th January 1759 — Died 21st July 1796*

“Burns remains the authentic and almost the only voice of Scotland in the world today. The reason for his unparalleled fame is not far to seek. It is based on his belief in the creative power of the broad masses of mankind. His glory lies in his stupendous faith in the common man and woman everywhere. No one who does not share and live by this faith is fit to join in commemorating Burns.”

Hugh MacDiarmid
James Sutherland, a presenter and producer with Scottish Television at that time, brought his expertise to the production of the Jolly Beggars. He created a memorable finale which was given excellent mentions in several newspapers. The audience reaction was remarkable. The ovation continued for several minutes and those of us who had been involved in planning the event knew that we had participated in a tribute to the memory of Robert Burns that surpassed anything done anywhere else in the world in that bi-centenary year.

The closing piece was photographed by several people. One photograph showed the performers backed by an impressive banner painted by Willie Stewart. This one was used by Willie to do a painting of the final scene which ensured that a permanent record would remind us of a very special celebration. The painting (see opposite) has recently been passed to the Mitchell Library in Glasgow.

Burns died in 1796 and the two hundredth commemoration of that event reminds us of the timeless, and extraordinary influence he had on the hearts and minds of the Scottish people. Edwin Muir made a sharp judgment when he wrote "...he is so deeply embedded in Scottish life that he cannot be detached from it, from what is best in it and what is worst in it". Muir also wrote that "... no other writer had said so fully and expressly what every man of his race wanted him to say; no other writer, consequently, had been taken so completely into the life of a people".

Extract from ROBERT BURNS & NEW CUMNOCK by CHRIS J. ROLLIE and Published by the author on behalf of New Cumnock Burns Club. Price £8.00 from 22 Main Street, Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire. DG7 3UW.

ISABEL OR TIBBIE PAGAN (1741-1821)

Born in New Cumnock parish, Isabel Pagan is sometimes credited with supplying Burns with the model for his well known song, 'Ca' the yowes', although her version was not included in her small volume: 'Songs and Poems on Several Occasions', which was published in 1803.

In his Contemporaries of Burns (1840), James Paterson describes how Tibbie was born in the vicinity of Nith Lodge in 1741, and includes her own description of her early years in a work entitled 'My Lifetime':

'I was born near four miles from Nithhead,  
Where fourteen years I got my bread;  
My learning it can soon be told,  
Ten weeks when I was seven years old,  
With a good old religious wife,  
Who lived a quiet and sober life;  
Indeed she took of me more pains  
Than some does now of forty bairns.  
With my attention, and her skill,  
I read the Bible no that ill;  
And when I grew a wee thought mair,'

I read when I had time to spare;  
But a' the whole tract of my time,  
I found myself inclined to rhyme;  
When I see merry company,  
I sing a song with mirth and glee,  
And sometimes I the whisky pree,  
But 'deed it's best to let it be.  
A' my faults I will not tell,  
I scarcely ken them a' mysel';  
I've come through various scenes of life,  
Yet never was a married wife.'
The only Isabel recorded in the New Cumnock OPR around that time was baptized on May 10, 1741, but she was born to William Muir and Margaret Park of Steelhead, which is also more than four miles from Nithhead. It would therefore appear that Isabel was born out of wedlock and probably wasn't baptized. William Pagan and Jean McMillan were living together at Creoch in 1743, and Tibbie may have been an illegitimate daughter to William by either Jean or some earlier liaison. However, probably the most likely possibility is that she was born to Janet Pagan in Righead. In August 1740 Janet had a son to John Brown, but by 1743 she was with John Shaw in Lethans, her husband probably having died in the interim. It is possible that between her two husbands, Janet had another affair which produced Isabel, who would take her mother's maiden name; and Righead fits the distance from Nithhead.

Whatever the case, after being brought up by the religious old wife, Isabel moved to Muirkirk in 1755 and in 1785 she set up home in an old brick store by the Garpel Burn, which became widely known as a howff for drinkers, singers and merrymakers from afar, as well as from the nearby coal pits and tar works. Tibbie was lame from infancy and was rather unkindly described as being of ‘a very unearthly appearance’, having a squint, a large tumour on her side and was so deformed in one foot so as to require crutches when walking (Paterson, 1840). It is difficult to read Burns’s ‘Willie Wastle’ (CW 459) without getting the strong impression that Tibbie could well have been yet another model for Mr Wastle’s poor wife. Although Burns left no explicit record of Tibbie, it is most likely that he at least heard of her through his poetic friend John Lapraik, who lived in Dalfram (Muirkirk) at the time. Indeed, in Burns’s ‘Third Epistle to Lapraik’ this may be implied: (CW 128)

'But let the kirk-folk ring their bells!  
Let's sing about our noble sel's:  
We'll cry nae jads frae heathen hills  
To help or roose us,  
But browster wives an whisky stills—  
They are the Muses!'

Tibbie was a marvellous singer and she entertained the numerous visitors to her howff by singing, reciting poems and selling whisky. She was famed for her quick, sarcastic wit and this, combined with her short temper and free use of her crutch, gained for her a sort of guarded respect from those who might otherwise poke fun. It is said that people came from great distances to enjoy nights of mirth in her company, especially in August when the Muirkirk moors attracted many gentlemen who took pleasure in killing grouse. Tibbie herself drank whisky with the best of them, and when intoxicated, as was often the case, she invariably kept up a mumbled conversation with herself, which now and then developed into a song or a piercing rebuke for anybody who got on her wrong side. She had a fine memory and could equally recite poems and protracted passages from the bible. Her own productions comprised songs, short poems and sharp epigrams, many of them beyond the border of those who regarded themselves as refined or polite company. For example, on being mocked by a neighbouring farmer, Tibbie retorted:

'Mr —— in the Kyle,  
Ca'd me a common ——;  
But if he had not tried himsel',  
He wadna been sae sure!'

There is a strong local tradition, endorsed by various writers such as ('honest') Allan Cunningham in the 19th century and more recently Maurice Lindsay (1959), that Tibbie in fact gave Burns his famous song, ‘Ca the Yowes’. Burns himself made several versions of it, though in a letter of September 1794 to George Thomson he credits a Mr Clunzie as the original singer. In
Paterson’s *Contemporaries of Burns* (1840) the following version of the song is given as Tibbie’s:

‘Ca’ the yowes to the knowes,
Ca’ them where the heather grows,
Ca’ them where the burnie rows,
My bonie dearie.

As I gae’d down the water side
There I met my shepherd lad;
He rowed me sweetly in his plaid
An’ he ca’d me his dearie.

Will ye gang down the water side
And see the waves sae sweetly glide,
Beneath the hazels spreading wide?
The moon it shines fu’ clearly.

Ye shall get gowns and ribbons meet,
Cauf-leather shoon to thy white feet;
And in my arms yese lie and sleep,
An’ ye shall be my dearie.

If ye’ll but stand to what ye’ve said,
Ise gang wi’ you my shepherd lad,
And ye may row me in your plaid,
An’ I shall be your dearie.

While water wimples to the sea,
While day blinks in the lift sae hie,
Till clay-cauld death shall blin’ my e’e,
Ye shall be my dearie.’

Tibbie, or *Pistol-Fit* as she called herself, despite being what one clergymen described as ‘*in her den, the most perfect realization of a witch or hag that I ever saw*’, was fondly respected by most who knew her. When she died in November 1821, crowds of every class flocked from all quarters to her funeral (Paterson, 1840). It would not be an overstatement to say that in death as in her life, Tibbie Pagan has attained a sort of cult status around the head-waters of the River Ayr. In recent years Muirkirk folk have rebuilt Tibbie’s Brig near her old howff, and so help to preserve the memory of this much-loved lady.

1 *Browster wives* was almost a generic term in Burns’s day, and Tibbie Pagan was certainly not alone in being a female involved in the supply of liquor to *drouthy neebors*. Indeed, Tibbie is more often connected with a *stronger potion* than ale, and perhaps she didn’t even brew the latter. Moreover, Burns would certainly be aware of Robert Fergusson’s use of *Browster wives* in *The Daft Days*:

‘Ye browster wives, now busk ye bra,
And fling your sorrows far awa’;
Then come an gies the tither blaw
Of reaming ale,
Mair precious than the well of Spa,
Our hearts to heal.’

Nonetheless, given Tibbie’s widespread repute, it is far more likely than not that Burns had at least heard of her.
More Love Than Liberty

Bicentennial Thoughts on the Jolly Beggars

By

John L. Clark

Written about 1785 The Jolly Beggars was published after Robert Burns's death and is, arguably, one of his great works. The cantata has an alternative title which is probably the original, Love and Liberty, and consists of eight recitations and eight songs. The recitations are mainly in the Scots dialect; the songs mainly in English with a scattering of Scots words. It was Burns's first excursion into this type of opera and it seems likely that he wrote it to be performed on stage. The action takes place in Poosie Nansies, a down-market public house in Mauchline, where the beggars sometimes eat, drink and lodge. The characters are thieves, rascals and vagrants; typical of those who wandered 18th century Scotland.

Along with others, who were perhaps not too familiar with the work, I had long accepted that its theme was love and liberty. While it's undeniable that an undercurrent of love runs strongly through some of the verses, after taking a renewed interest in the work, I have come to realise that the theme of liberty is barely present, appearing only briefly in the last song. Indeed, there is more emphasis on war: to be found in the references to the battles of the fledgling British Empire in the soldier's song. Surrounding the work is a set of peculiar circumstances which pose a number of interesting questions, namely:

1. Why did Burns never publish his cantata?
2. Why did he claim, in 1793, to have forgotten its existence?
3. Why did he not retain the original manuscript?
4. Who revealed the existence of the cantata to the publisher, George Thomson?
5. Why did Sir Walter Scott claim it contained nothing coarse when the opposite was true.
6. Were some of Burns's original verses removed?
7. Are some of the original beggars missing?

Taking these questions in turn; although we can only guess at the answers, for some we might get close to the truth. It seems Burns did attempt to have the cantata included in both the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of his poems. The reason for its rejection from the first is obscure but for the second he appears to have been advised that it was unsuitable, because it contained the theme of liberty. If that sounds strange it should be taken in the 18th century context of liberty and the French Revolution, as perceived by a worried and paranoid British political establishment. While Burns was not above sticking his neck out, he had limitations. It would not have served his purpose to be imprisoned, as had been the fate of others.

In 1793 Burns was asked about the cantata in a letter from the publisher, Thompson. Someone who had read a copy had obviously told Thomson of its existence, but who? It's unlikely we shall ever know but there is a suggestion implicit here that copies had circulated, perhaps widely, from 1785 and some were being held by individuals. Burns replied to Thomson that he had almost forgotten the cantata's existence; he could remember only two lines:

Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

He also claimed, that apart from the last song, it didn't particularly please him and he hadn't kept a copy. Strangely, in writing to Gavin Hamilton from Edinburgh in 1787 he had included the following verse from the song:

100
Their tricks an craft hae put me daft,
They’ve taen me in, an a’ that;
But clear your decks, an here’s the Sex!
I like the jads for a’ that.

The cantata was obviously clear in his memory at that time and given the retentive power of his memory it is difficult to believe that six years later it could all have been forgotten, but for a couple of lines. There had to be a compelling reason why Burns dismissed one of his great works in this way. The consensus seems to be that as he had just managed to survive a Board of Excise investigation into his conduct and loyalty to the Crown he would have been fearful of the consequences of the cantata, with its theme of liberty, being published.

But to what theme of liberty does the consensus refer: the only mention of liberty is in the chorus of the last song and ends in the two lines that Burns remembered in 1793. If what we read today is Burns’s complete and original cantata, then the consensus view doesn’t really stand up to examination. Shortly after writing the cantata Burns showed it to his friend, Richmond, who years later was to remember that it contained songs, among others, of a sailor, a sweep and Racer Jess (daughter of Poosie Nansie). There were no such songs in the version published in 1802, which is the version we know today. If we are to believe Richmond, and the 1802 version was published by a relative of his, what has become of those songs and from where had the manuscript used in the printing been obtained? Burns had claimed he no longer had a copy and it seems unlikely that Richmond had one, as he had to rely on memory for the sailor, the sweep and Racer Jess.

Sir Walter Scott wrote, ‘The Jolly Beggars is inferior to no poem of the same length in the whole range of English poetry,…, even in describing the movements of such a group, the native taste of the poet has never suffered his pen to slide into anything coarse or disgusting.’ I wonder which version of the cantata Scott read: was it the same version that we know today? It seems doubtful that it was, as one recitation contains a sexually explicit stanza that would have been considered coarse in Scott’s time, namely:

But hurchin cupid shot a shaft
That played a dame a shavie,
The fiddler raked her fore and aft,
Behint the chicken cavie.
Her lord, a wight o’ Homer’s craft,
Though limping wi’ the spavie,
He hirpled up, and lap like daft,
And shored them Dainty Davie
O’ boot that night.

The word raked has a double meaning. In the 18th and 19th century, words such as raked or ploughed were used by males in a sexual connotation. Dainty Davie was the name of a leading Covenanter, immortalised in an old song; his name was taken by Burns from the old song and used as the name for his own song, Dainty Davie. It also appeared in The Second Epistle to Davie, a brother poet. Burns appears to have had an affinity for the name:

Oh, how that name inspires my style!
The words come skelpin’, rank and file,
Amaist before I ken!

As he was not adverse to encoding extraneous meanings into some of his lines, I cannot but wonder if the name, Dainty Davie, is a reference to something other than the Covenanter.

Prior to the 1802 publication, in or around 1799, another version of the cantata had been published. It was subsequently claimed to have been imperfect, but without examining a copy it is impossible to say what the imperfection was. This earlier publication seems to have been replaced by the 1802 version. It follows therefore that the two versions could not have originated from the
same source. If, as Burns claimed, he had not retained the original and, as we know, had not published it himself there can be no guarantee that the 1802 publication was his complete and original cantata. We know that Burns was in the habit of sending copies of his work to various acquaintances for their opinions and it’s therefore a real possibility that two of those people were responsible for supplying separate manuscripts for the two publications. One or both, in their wisdom or lack of it, may have decided to edit the work to remove songs and suppress the theme of liberty, to make it more acceptable to the establishment. If this were so, it could mean that in existence around that time were Burns’s unpublished original version, at least two copies (holograph or otherwise) and two published edited versions. This might conceivably provide answers to questions 5, 6 and 7.

It was not uncommon for the well meaning to edit out what they considered offensive verses in Burns’s poetry. An example is the missing four lines from Tam O’ Shanter coming after, The gray hairs yet stack to the heft; namely:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Three lawyers’ tongues turned inside out,} \\
\text{Wi’ lies seamed like a beggar’s clout;} \\
\text{And priests’ hearts, rotten, black as muck,} \\
\text{Lay stinking, vile, in every neuk.}
\end{align*}
\]

Unless Burns’s original MSS, or a holograph copy, of The Jolly Beggars comes to light in the future, it seems unlikely that the missing beggars, if indeed they are missing; the watered-down theme of liberty and Burns’s reason for deciding not to publish one of his great works will ever be explained convincingly. Meanwhile, we should enjoy the cantata we know and keep an open mind on the peculiarities of its background.

A few weeks after writing the foregoing paragraph, which was intended to conclude this article, fate decided to intervene. I was browsing through Hans Hecht’s biography of Burns when I came across a comment that an original MSS of The Jolly Beggars had been handed down and was in the care of Edinburgh University. I contacted the University Librarian and arranged to see the MSS. When Making my preliminary examination of the papers I was surprised to find there were two MSS both entitled Love and Liberty. One was in Burns’s distinctive handwriting and the other an exact copy in handwriting unknown to me.

Burns’s MSS is not dated, but I would guess it’s a copy he made from his original working document. I base this on the fact that it shows no crossed out words or changes and is clearly earlier than the version published in 1802. It contains only seven recitations and seven songs while the 1802 version contains eight of each. Merry Andrew is missing and there are a number of other differences. One thing it does confirm is that John Richmond’s recollection that the cantata contained a song about a sailor is not far from the mark. In fact, the sailor appears in one of the recitations – not in a song. In the 1802 version the sailor has become a fiddler. There is no mention of either a sweep or Racer Jess to be found and there is no doubt in my mind that the 1802 version is an improvement on the MSS version. Unfortunately, the MSS hasn’t answered any of my original questions, but it has raised a new one: Where did Merry Andrew’s recitation and song come from?
You'd no' long sin been pit tae rest
When critics, at their ain behest
Set oot tae show whit pleased them best -
Your flaws an' faws
An' even worse, your words were dressed
Wi' their ain thoughts

Your 'ae we fawt' you'd never deny
You owned it a' (an' mair forbye!)
Withoot a plea or blackened lie
Tae try tae hide it
Throughoot it a', you stood yir grun'
And never shy'd it

As fine you ken't you'r no' yir lane
For them that liked tae tae yir name
Were aften, mair or less, the same
As you (or me!)
But hid their sins, an' hid their shame
Whaur nane could see.

You wrote o' truth an' honesty
An' criticised hypocrisy
For fellow man an' equality
You made a plea
An' thocht that a' men should be free
Whatever they be

Noo time has passed - twa hunner year!
Sin you cast e'en on 'prospects drear'
An' forward looked tae 'guess an'fear'
You wurnae wrang!
Injustice still remains, my fiere
Frae man - tae man

Your dream is still some wey away
That 'late or sin' there'll come a day
When every man has cause tae hae
Peace in his hert
For noo, hae faith, we'll see the day
'It's comin' yet!

Jim Hazlett
July 21, 1996

He wrocht hard at the Ayrshire grun
An inspiration there he fand;
The fowk, birds, beasts an' flooers aroun
A' mov'd his heart.
By Irwin, Lugar, Ayr and Doon
Men loved his art.

The ongauns in a cotter's house;
The plight o' a sair-trauchled mouse;
The tricks o' a determined louse;
His sheep; his horse;
They kitted up his hamley Muse
An shap'd his verse.

The words o' Burns are clear. He show'd
The ties that bind Mankind to God;
The duty by each human ow'd
To every creature;
An the great bounties that are strowed
On us by Nature.

Syne frae Kilmarnock came his beuk –
Weel-prized, weel-thoombed in mony a neuk.
Frae farmer, factor, doctor, duke
His works wan praise.
The road for Embro Toun he took
To see her ways.

When Ayrshire sang, Auld Reekie heard
An, fill'd wi joy, she met the Bard,
Took up his sang, an' sent his word
Across the nation;
Then Scotland sang, an' ithers heard
Wi' exultation.

Twa hunder years hae come an gone
But yet the ploughman's sang gaes on.
New hearts are charm'd, fresh voices won.
While this world turns,
Mankind is proud o' Scotland's Son,
Great Robert Burns.

Richard Fowler.
July 21, 1996.

The above poems were 1st equal in the Glasgow Maltman's Bicentenary Poetry Competition, 1996.
A big mistake in the first article of "THE SCOTS MAGAZINE" for January '96 prompted me to research and write this biographical sketch of the poets born in Scotland with the names JAMES THOMSON. I say "big mistake" advisedly, because the article (on the origins of "AULD LANG SYNE") was entitled "FOR THE SAKE O' ACCURACY". The inaccuracies which induced me to respond were contained in the following:-

"In a letter to his friend James Thomson, (1770-1748) (SIC) and writer of "Rule Britannia", Robert Burns wrote: It is the old song of the olden times..."

There are no less than three mistakes there. First, the James Thomson who did write "Rule Britannia" was born in 1700. Second, since he did die in 1748, he could not have been a correspondent of Burns. And, third, the Thomson to whom Burns did write about the origin of the song was in fact GEORGE THOMSON, the song collector, no relation.

Scarcely had I pointed out the mistakes to the Editor than yet another in similar vein appeared, regrettably, from my viewpoint, much closer to home. In the menu/programme sheet for my own Club (Colinton No. 398) Supper held on 20 January, there was a note under the words of "The Star o' Robbie Burns",

(words by James Thomson, the Scot who wrote the lyrics to "Rule Britannia").

Confusion worse confounded. The James Thomson who wrote "The Star..." lived in the latter half of the 19th century, as is evident from the line-"a hundred years are gane and mair..." The mistake here probably arose from the fact that both Thomsons were born in the Borders within a
dozen miles of each other, but as we shall see, 127 years apart.

Having done a short correcting biographical article on the five James Thomsons I had at that time come across, I was persuaded to go the second mile and write the results of a more detailed study. During the course of the research, I discovered another two, one of whom, James Hall Thomson is, unlike the others, a contemporary writer.

“SCOTIA’S SON”

JAMES THOMSON (1) (1700-48) - Ednam - Richmond The first James Thomson was born at Ednam, 2 miles from Kelso, Roxburghshire on 11 September, 1700 where his father was parish minister. He was educated at Jedburgh School and Edinburgh University. With the encouragement of his friend, the playwright David Malloch, he gave up divinity studies and went to London as a tutor. He wrote four poems in blank verse in a heavy ornate style later collected as “THE SEASONS” (1730). In a preface to a 1908 Edition of Thomson’s poems, the Editor, J. Logie Robertson wrote: “his personal mood when he chose as his first season, Winter, was very much like that of Burns when he sang, dolefully enough more than half a century later: - “Come, Winter, with thine angry howl...” Few scenes are more pathetic than Thomson’s lost shepherd perishing in the snow. The pathos is heightened by the sight of his youngsters at the cottage door and window:

... his little children peeping out
Into the mingling storm demand their sire
With tears of artless innocence. Alas!
Nor wife nor children more shall he behold,
Nor friends nor sacred home.
It could not, of course, have been of Burns, Thomson wrote when he describes:

A Bard here dwelt, more fat than bard beseems,
Who, void of envy, guile and lust of gain,
On virtue still, and nature’s pleasing themes,
Poured forth his unpremeditating strain.

The poet wrote extensively for the stage, collaborating with David Malloch on one such production - “THE MASQUE OF ALFRED”, which included the stirring, heroic song “Rule, Britannia”.

This was the charter, the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sang this strain:
“Rule, Britannia......”

Thomson wrote some shorter lyrical poems. In one of them, on Myra, a pseudonym for his amour Amanda Young, he writes in a way which bears comparison with Burns:

In pity then my lovely fair,
O turn those killing eyes away.
But what avails it to conceal,
One charm where nought but charms I see?
Their lustre then again reveal,
And let me, Myra, die of thee.

Thomson dedicated one of his works (“Liberty”) to the Prince of Wales who awarded him a pension and a sinecure post. He retired from public life at age 40 and died at Richmond in 1748.

Burns greatly admired Thomson’s works, in a way different from but equal that accorded to his native vernacular precursors Ramsay and Fergusson. As James Mackay states, he used
two lines from “Alfred” almost as his motto when faced with adversity:

What proves the hero truly great,
Is never, never to despair!

Burns’s admiration for James Thomson, as for Robert Fergusson, was translated into verse. Lord Buchan, the organiser of a ceremony at Ednam in September 1791 in honour of Thomson, sent Robert an invitation which, due to the distance involved and the rigours of the harvest at Ellisland, Burns declined. He did however, in response to His Lordship compose the “Address to the Shade of Thomson, on crowning his bust with a wreath of bays”, a five stanza effort linking the Seasons (Thomson’s best known Work) with scenes from Tweeddale which ends:-

So long, sweet Poet of the year!
Shall bloom that wreath thou well hast won;
While Scotia, with exulting tear,
Proclaims that THOMSON is her son.

The event never did in fact take place in the manner expected, the bust having been “bust” in a drunken frolic. Robert, on hearing the news, wrote, in his more robust style, echoing something of the sentiment expressed for Fergusson:-

They, wha about thee mak sic fuss
Now thou art but a name,
Wad seen thee damned ere they had spared
Ae plack to fill thy wame. (farthing/stomach)

“THE GALLANT WEAVER”

JAMES THOMSON (2) 1763-1832 – Currie, Midlothian. The second of the poets to bear the name is of particular personal interest, in respect that he spent nearly all of his life in the Parish of Currie within 3 miles of my present home: but I would have known nothing of Jamie Thomson, the weaver poet, but for the research done by members of Currie District History Society. He was born in Edinburgh on 10 September 1763 and brought up by maternal grandparents in Currie where grandfather was a weaver. As a herdboy, he would take with him books of poems and ballads including Burns and Ramsay. Indeed it is said that he committed Ramsay’s “The Gentle Shepherd” to memory. Not only did Thomson become a weaver, he augmented a meagre income by working as a barber, butcher and forester, learned the rudiments of the fiddle (like his illustrious contemporary) and, with the benefit of some later formal schooling, was soon composing rhymes.

After a brief spell in the neighbouring Parish of Colinton, he married Elizabeth Burns in November 1787 and settled back in Currie in a weaver’s cottage at Kinleith, (which still stands) at the head of a short glen leading south into the Pentlands, with a magnificent prospect north over the Forth.

In my bed I can view thirty miles to the north
The ships as they pass an’ repass on the Forth:
In my green I can stand and nine counties survey
Then where is the view that can match mine I pray?

Just decipherable above the door are the words MOUNT PARNASSUS and down in the Kinleith Glen (locally “the Poet’s Glen) a stone on the burnside with an inscription:- JAMIE TAMSON’S HELICON followed by four lines of the poet referring, as so often did Burns, to the Grecian Fount of poetic inspiration.

Like many of Robert Burns’s contemporary brother poets in Ayrshire who were so instrumental in whetting Burns’s lyric scythe, Jamie Thomson was never going to write verse of a standard worthy of national acclaim. He wrote of simple pastoral and rural working scenes and of the country folk he laboured with. There are, whiles, similarities with Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns in not only the subject matter but in the use of the “Standard Habbie” as in this extract from a poem on a local ale wife at or near to her allotted span:

Ye folks o’ Currie and Newmill
Balarney town and Curriehill (Balerno)
Lament and wail this grievous ill
And hang the heid:
Whaur will we noo get pint or gill
When Marion’s deid?

Rev. James Dick, then Minister of Currie Kirk (rebuilt in 1785 so just in time for Rob on
borrowed pony to see it as he cantered by en route to the Capital in November 1786) was so taken by Thomson's poetic efforts that he was largely instrumental in getting an edition of his poems published in 1801 with the Duke of Buccleuch, the Principal (Baird) of Edinburgh University and General Scott of Malleny three of the more prominent subscribers. General Scott gave Thomson the job of supervisor on his Estate, (on part of which Currie Rugby Football Club play nowadays). As with Burns's Excise post, this gave Thomson some relief from grinding poverty and security for a family of eight children. Not surprisingly, Thomson dedicated the second Edition of his Works to Scott. A third edition appeared in 1894. Jamie Thomson, who had lost two children in their teens and was predeceased by his wife, lived till age 68 and died at "Mount Parnassus" on 7 July 1832. Regrettably, although he is almost certain to have been buried in Currie Kirkyard, no trace of his grave can be found. Douglas Lowe, Balerno, an authority on the poet, is of the view that his poems achieved greater merit than might have been the case, in respect of the re-awakening of interest in verse in the years following the death of the National Bard. No doubt I could be accused of neighbourly bias, but weaver Jamie is lately a particular poetic favourite.

Having now entered the 19th century, the Tale of the James Thomsons continues with the poets of that name coming "thick and fast". The next three were born within one decade between the years 1825 and 1834. However, while James Thomson (3) and (4) were clearly in the same vernacular poet/versifier mould as James Thomson (2) from Currie, and that is no disrespect to the memory of any one of them, James Thomson (5) was of a different literary breed entirely, more akin to James Thomson (1) in regard to his national appeal and the fact that he lived all his adult life furth of his native Scotland.

"THE GARDENER LAD"

JAMES THOMSON (3) (1825-18?) – Rothes, Moray and Shawdon, Northumbria. The next on my list was born at Rothes, in Strathspey in 1825 where his father was a crofter. Educated at Aberlour School, he was as early as 13 herding, with an upbringing remarkably similar to that of Jamie Tamson of Currie. Indoors, one of his favourite loves seems to have been a small stool and, since a small stool in ecclesiastical rather than domestic surroundings is an important feature in the Burns story, interesting to give an excerpt of James Thomson’s poem, written in later years on "MY WEE CREEPIE STOOL":

And strange tales I’ve heard on my wee creepie stool,
So strange and unearthy they made my blood cool;
Of ghosts and of fairies and dead candlelights
And of the vile spirits that ride on dark nights.

What my research so far has not elicited is whether there was another “Betty Davidson” in the Thomson household to evoke, as he sat on his stool, tales of witchcraft which so fascinated the young Burns.

Anxious to become a gardener, he was apprenticed to the Laird of Elchies, and later was in the employ of Lord Cockburn of Bonaly in the Parish of Colinton, but settled finally in Shawdon, some miles over the Border in the vale of Whittingham, Northumbria. There, in his no doubt brief leisure time, he continued his boyhood interest in verse and eventually had his poems published called "NORTHUMBRIA AND OTHER POEMS". A second edition appeared in 1871 dedicated to Lady Fairfax, whose father and grandfather he had served over a long period. It was entitled "The Captive Chief - a Tale of Flodden Field and other Poems". One of these - "Lines written on the Field of Culloden" is of interest this year, the 250th anniversary of the battle:-

Oh! need I tell how chieftains led,
And for their Prince like martyrs bled?

............... 

Oh! here let Scotia drop a tear
For those brave sons she held so dear,
Dear to their country is their name,
They long shall be her minstrel’s theme.

The Editor of a collection of Modern
Scottish Poets in 1881, said of him: “He writes... with a rare skill and a forcible expression of sentiment... his subjects are various and excellent in tone...” My own favourite in what, admittedly, was a brief resume, must be “The Kail-brose o Auld Scotland”, the last verse of which runs, (and clearly, may be sung to a familiar tune):-

Let Frenchmen eat their frogs an’ mice,
Their nasty stews an’ a’ that;
And Paddy boast his tatties nice,
Wi’ buttermilk an’ a’ that;
And Johnnie Bull may eat his full
Of beef and pork an’ a’ that;
A heapit bicker o kail-brose
Is Scotland’s yet, for a’ that.

So far, I have been unable to find out the date and place of his death. Can any reader supply these?

“THE BORDER KNIGHT”

JAMES THOMSON (4) (1827-88) - Bowden, Selkirk and Hawick. We now come to a JAMES THOMSON one of whose songs is as often sung at Burns Suppers the world o’er, as those of the National Bard himself. “The Star o’ Robbie Burns” neither needs introduction nor repetition. But what of the songwriter? James Thomson (4) was born at Bowden, Selkirk on 4 July 1827. Yet again another young JT is to be found herding kye – this time with a battered copy of The Kilmarnock Edition and a volume of “Whistle Binkie” (a collection of songs?) in his pocket. Yet again a young Jamie Tamson is to draw poetic inspiration from these.

Apprenticed to a cabinet-maker in Selkirk, he came to Hawick when his apprenticeship was completed and lived among the “Teris” till his death. The Hawick Advertiser records that, in conversation, once started on a literary topic, the versatility of the man was soon displayed. Three Volumes of his poems and songs were published; the first “Doric Lays and Lilts” in 1876, the second in 1884 and the third, in 1914. Among the many are two which are still sung relating to an event which has this year made the headlines – the Annual Hawick Common Riding. These are “Up Wi’ The Banner” and “The Border Queen”, one verse and chorus of which evoke the couthy rivalry and male boisterousness of that part of the nation:-

And up wi’ Hawick three times three,
The loon that winna chorus’t
May hand upon a soor ploom tree
And sleep in Ettrick Forest.

CHORUS
What though our lads are wild a wee,
And ill to keep in order;
’Mang ither toons, she bears the gree,
The Queen o’ a’ the Border.

Thomson a bachelor was also a keen Freemason and Bard of the Hawick St. James Lodge No. 424. He was largely instrumental in the formation of The Hawick Burns Club and to honour the 120th Anniversary Supper in 1879, composed a song to be sung on the occasion by local stockingmaker Tom Strathearn. “The Star o’ Robbie Burns” has been universally popular ever since, as much, it must be said, for the stirring tune by James Booth, as for the words. He wrote other poems clearly with Burns in mind e.g. “Hairst” (compare “Robin shure in Hairst”) and Lines on the Unveiling of the Statue at Dumfries in April 1882.

He died in late 1888 and his grave in Wellogate Cemetery is marked by a suitably inscribed tombstone and commemorative seat nearby. Last year, a plaque on the wall of 54 High Street denoting his Hawick home was put up by Hawick Burns Club. (A fuller pen-portrait by Andrew E. Beattie appears in the Chronicle for 1987).

“THE MAN THAT WAS MADE TO MOURN”

JAMES THOMSON (5) (1834-1882) - Port Glasgow and London given the poor circumstances and obscurity of the birth and the adversity of the early life of JAMES (“B.V.”) THOMSON, one would have perhaps expected a vernacular rhymster typefied by the James Thomsons Nos. 2, 3 and 4. But no, if this James Thomson’s life and works bears any comparison, it is with No. 1 in respect that he lived and worked in England and is very much a poet of the English romantic upbringing.

James Thomson (5) was born in Port
Glasgow on 23 November, 1834 of a seaman father. His mother was a deeply religious follower of Edward Irving (there are certain parallels with Thomas Carlyle, a contemporary writer). After the premature deaths of both parents, the family having moved to London, Thomson was educated in the Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea where he trained to become an army schoolmaster. He served in the Army in various places including Ireland, where it is thought that the sudden death of a girl of whom Thomson was fond, may have contributed to his removal from the service on account of alcoholism. He subsequently had a number of careers - in journalism, and business and contributed to a large number of periodicals (including an essay on Burns in 1859).

In his early poetic writings, he adopted the pseudonym “Bythe Vanollis” – the former being the middle name of Percy B. Shelley and the latter the surname of a German poet, both of whose works he admired. He gradually moved in poetic terms from being a romantic to a realist; from optimist to pessimist; from a believer to atheism. His life’s work is well summed up by the modern Scottish poet, Edwin Morgan in a preface to Thomson’s best known work, “The City of Dreadful Night”:-

...What made him an alcoholic, an atheist and a pessimist, and are these three quite separate conditions? His early biographer, Bertram Dobell called him “the Laureate of Pessimism” and certainly, his life was not short of disappointment, frustration and grief. But Thomson was far from being a gloomy or dull man.

Some of his early poems are light lyrical tributes to the open air, as in this extract from “Sunday up the River”:-

Let my voice ring out and over the earth Through all the grief and strife, With a golden joy in a silver mirth, Thank God for Life!

In his literary criticisms, he praised Burns, Blake, Rabelais, Browning, Shelley and the American, Walt Whitman, all writers who either have a fine sense of comedy or a positive, enjoying, forward-looking attitude to life. He did have his own “darker” favourites, Heine and Leopardi, both of whose works he translated. He was a man of unusually wide culture, a man of many accomplishments, a prolific writer of prose, but it is as a poet, moving from the romantic to the realist that he will be chiefly remembered”.

No more so than in his principal work, the powerful though pessimistic long poem “THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT”. The 19th century city of Thomson’s imagination becomes the symbol of man’s isolation from God, a city
in which man in his nightmare sees only despair and horror. The poem flows freely in language stark and awesome, as in this early excerpt:-

_The city is of Night but not of Sleep,
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless Hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moment’s stupor but increases,
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane._

Sadly, continued alcoholism and drug abuse led to his untimely death at University College Hospital, London on 3 June 1882 at the age of 48. The first Book of his Poems was published two years before with a second volume within months.

**“THE PATRIOT BARD”**

JAMES THOMSON (6) (1888-1971)
Lewis, Outer Hebrides. Spanning the years between the four James Thomsons of the Victorian era and our own is JAMES THOMSON (or, to give him his Gaelic patronymic - Seamus Dhomhnuill Tamsoin). Thomson, born at Tong, Lewis in 1888, was Gaelic master at Nicolson Institute, Stornoway before becoming, in 1921, Headmaster at Bayble School, also in Lewis. (Bayble is remarkable in respect of the number of poets which it has produced out of all proportion to its size including Ian Crichton Smith). Thomson was the first Crowned Bard of the National Mod in 1923.

As well as pioneering the development of Gaelic teaching in Secondary Schools over a long period of years, he was to the forefront of literary progress, editing AN DILEAB (Gaelic poems for schools), co-editing EILEAN FRAOICH (a collection of Lewis songs) and contributing articles to Gaelic publications viz:- AN ROSARNACH, GAIMM, etc. He was editor of AN GAIDHEAL from 1958 to 62. His own collected poems, many of them on philosophical and religious themes, were published in 1953, the year he retired from Bayble School. The book is entitled FASGNADH - (THE WINNOWING). One excerpt will suffice to reflect Thomson’s talent, no doubt the meaning and poignancy of the Gaelic losing much in the translation:-

**AN IUCHAIR**

_Tha iuchair nam chridhe,
Nach glacar le làimh,
Nach fhaisear le sùilean
‘S nach diultlar le dàimh,
a dh’ fhosglas an seomar
Tha dùinte gu teann
air usgràichean luachmhor
Nach cualas bhith ann._

_Tha cheannnaich an t-òr i,
S’cha chaith i le aois,
ha bhrisear le ordi,
Dun òrais gun ghaoid,
I seasmhach gu stiorraidh,
Gun fhaillinn gu bràth,
Le h-àirdheirceas uile
Si i’n iuchair - sa Gràdh._

**THE KEY**

_There is a key in my heart
Which no hand can grasp,
Which eyes cannot see
Nor friends refuse.
It can open the room
Locked on valuable gems
Which were not known
To be within._

_Gold will not buy it
And age will not destroy it;
Hammer will not break it,
With no noise, with no fault;
Lasting for ever
And without blemish;
This Key is Love._

James Thomson is a descendant of a Lowland Scot who came to the Outer Hebrides a century and more before to impart English to the monolingual Gaelic speaking children there. It is one of those strange sociological ironies that both he and his equally distinguished son
Derick (Professor of Celtic Studies at Glasgow University and a gifted poet also) should have contributed so much to the furtherance of Gaelic learning and literature far beyond the confines of their native Hebrides.

"BONNIE DUNDEE"

JAMES H. THOMSON (7) (1937-) Dundee - And finally, to the last of the seven poets to bear the name JAMES HALL THOMSON (to give him his full name) is very much alive. As a member of The Scots Language Society, I stumbled upon him purely by accident. James Hall Thomson is a regular contributor to "Lallans", the Magazine for Writing in Scots. He was born in 1937 in Dundee (we have covered the length and breadth of the land in birthplaces of James Thomsons) and is clearly a man of many accomplishments.

First employed by D. C. Thomson, Dundee, he tells me that he is, by profession an artist, specializing in caricatures, is also an abstract painter, designer and plays jazz on the clarinet. But it is in the literary field that he has already made his name, his poems appearing in many contemporary periodicals, e.g. Lallans as well as the recent Scots Language anthology "Mak it New". Thomson won the Willie Graham Award in 1994 for writing in Scots.

He says "Most of my poems are written in English but I use the virtues of Scots to express ideas which cannot be done in straight English. I may even introduce French into them". The following is an example of his Scots humour laced with French in "Portrait of Conveyance":-

Ken thae fowr-on-ae-strip photie booths?
Fowr likenesses tae choisez ane
for a passport or a passe l'omnibus?
Weel then-nummer ane's like an advertisement
for a bowel evacuant.
Nummer twa's a scarce haufwey toothie
smile o'fromage.
Three has a forcit plaisir aboot the een
but an awfy strain on the chowks.
Fowr - catchit aff guard-like wi een ticht fermees
agin the last blindin flash.

Thae gross mechanisms
turn oot ill-like images - distortions
o some gowk I'd raither no meet.
Twa poonds for fowr ewarters. Choisez
gin ye daur. lang's it's near eneach yersel
tae fool the douanier (customs officer)
or get ye on a nummer eleven bus.

And, since the writer is no longer employed in local Government, he can quote this, the shortest ever poem, without fear:- CRASSITUDE

The cooncillors gaithered. A Fiddler's Rally o sorts.

In summary, they say "WE'RE A' JOCK TAMSON'S BAIRNS". But, of a certainty, of seven of us down nearly 300 years of time, we can say - "THEY'RE A' JAMES THOMSON - POETS".

BURNSIAN POSTSCRIPT

There is a P.S. By one of those strange coincidences, Betty Burns, daughter of the poet by Anna Park, married a John Thomson, whose second and third sons were ROBERT BURNS THOMSON and JAMES GLENCAIRN THOMSON respectively. It was the elder, bearing, appropriately his grandfather's name, who was the only descendant of the poet to venture into rhyme (contributing to several periodicals and having his own memorial verses inscribed on his parents' tombstone in Glasgow). Regrettably, yet another JAMES THOMSON was "nae poet in a sense" or "just a rhymer like by chance."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & REFERENCES


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JAMES THOMSON - the Kinleith Poet - Mr. Douglas Lowe for Currie District History Society
WHY DID SCOTS COME TO AUSTRALIA?

by

Charles Murray
Patron, Scottish Society and Burns Club of Australia

This talk arose from a conversation among a group of friends, all of whom had emigrated from Scotland to Australia in the 1920s. During our discussion we unwittingly revealed a strong and abiding love for the country we had abandoned.

A young, Australian-born listener asked the obvious question. “If all of you loved Scotland as much as you claim, why did you leave?”

My own fairly prompt reply was, “Poverty and hunger,” I was surprised that I was the only one who gave this hasty and possibly ill-considered answer. The others had a variety of reasons for emigrating so I decided it was worth a little research to find out just why so many loyal and patriotic Scots had chosen to make a home on the other side of the world.

The reasons were fairly complex, often painful and sometimes tragic. And poverty and hunger did play a large part in the migration.

The first Scots to arrive in Australia were in the crews of Captain Cook and could hardly be described as settlers. Although one to be left behind was the boy seaman Forbes Sutherland who lies in a marked grave at Kurnell. He was the first who was never to see his native land again.

In Captain Philip’s First Fleet there were no Scots among the convicts but several among the soldiers and crews. Later convict transports carried a small percentage of Scots and most had been sentenced for fairly serious crimes. The Scots didn’t sentence first offenders or those guilty of misdemeanours to a term at Botany Bay, they simply banished them from their own district or out of the country to England or Ireland. To some Scots that might have been just as bad as a term in N.S.W.

The convicted Scots who came here were guilty of fraud, forgery, long-term thievery, crimes of violence or like Palmer and Muir – where there is some Hunter Hill connection - for inciting farm-labourers to seek better living conditions.

Their numbers included Lennox the bridge-builder, Watling the artist and many more who made a success of life in Australia. There were some like Frank McCallum of Perthshire who promoted himself to being Captain Melville and pursued a career of bush-ranging in Victoria.

While this trickle of Scottish convicts was arriving, there was a steadily increasing flow of free settlers, mainly merchants and farmers. Their names abound in some of the inner suburbs of...
Sydney and in many country areas. They named the towns after the towns they had left. Scone, Aberdeen, Balgownie, Cumnock, Dundee, Kelso and many others.

Their properties were given – and still bear – the beloved names that haunted their memories. The notorious Highland Clearances gave impetus to early nineteenth century migration, plus the encouragement of two N.S.W. Governors, Lachlan MacQuarie and Thomas Brisbane.

If any one man could claim to be the prime motivator in heading Scots towards Australia, that man would be John Dunmore Lang, founding minister of Scots’ Church in Sydney. He arrived in this country in 1823, already an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland. He was a ball of energy and filled with public spirit.

His secular interests were at least as consuming as his religious convictions and he saw the influx of Scottish migrants as a healthy balance to the large number of Irish Catholics who were already here.

Rightly or wrongly he regarded the effete Anglican majority as irrelevant to his own ideas of an egalitarian society.

His brother George had preceded him to Sydney, his mother and his brother Andrew arrived later so he wasn’t burdened with the breaking of family ties. Something which caused heartbreak, nostalgia and distraction among so many migrants.

He broke his national bonds with the United Kingdom with remarkable ease and promptitude and was pleading the cause of sepaeratism and a republic a century and a half before Donald Horne, Patrick White, Manning Clarke and Paul Keating even thought of it. He served a term in goal for his subversive views.

He saw Australia as a land with a nationhood of its own and had an aversion to seeing it bristling with place names from the old country. It was on his insistence that the nearby Parramatta River was so named, forestalling a move to name it after a river in Britain.

He made many visits to his homeland where he toured rural and industrial areas preaching, lecturing and hectoring on the attractions of life in Australia.

He came across a favourable circumstance in the case of 4,000 Highlanders who had been starved off their crofts by the famine of 1837. They had intended to emigrate to Canada but the arrangements had fallen through. Lang used all of his powers of persuasion, rhetoric and string-pulling to divert the Highlanders to Australia.

By now his influence extended far beyond his own church and a continuous flow of worthy migrants to N.S.W. was set in motion.

In 1854 almost the entire population of the Hebridean island of Raasay were evicted from their crofts and decided to seek a new life in Australia. Their final act of defiance was to dance a reel on the stone pier before embarking on a voyage that would be rife with pestilence and hunger.

The last act of the authorities was the arrival of the sheriff and his men, to claim from the voyagers the cost of their own evictions. They paid - and left Raasay, free of debt and with their heads held high. The minister of the parish later testified that most of them would have preferred to stay on the island but they had no choice. Scotland’s loss was Australia’s gain.

About the same time a family of MacDonalds sailed from the Isle of Skye. They were experienced farmers, took up land near Goulburn which they farmed quite successfully. The patriarch was a man of vision and after hearing stories of greener pastures in the Kimberley in West Australia, he persuaded his three sons to set out on one of the epic cattle drives of history. If this had happened in America it would have become the subject of books, films, television and part of national folklore.

With one thousand head of cattle and one hundred horses the MacDonalds set out for West Australia. The choice of route was governed by the availability of water and grazing. No doubt scouts went on ahead to observe the lay of the land. They travelled first north-east to Parramatta, west and north-west to Bourke, across the Queensland border then into the Northern Territory as
far as Arnhem Land, over the border into Western Australia and the Ord River and finally to the grazing lands of the Margaret and Fitzroy Rivers.

The journey took three-and-a-half years and only half the herd survived but it was sufficient to start the huge cattle station of Fossil Downs, which until very recent years, was still controlled by MacDonalds.

The magnitude of the operation is matched by the vision of a Scottish farmer from the Isle of Skye.

There were others like him. Men and women of courage and foresight who challenged the unknown. Their names linger on in many Australian companies. Immigrants who brought their skills and know-how with them. They built factories, started new industries, launched ships, built bridges, taught school, founded universities and hospitals. They made a significant contribution to their adopted country.

The influx of migrants from Scotland ultimately consisted mainly of people who were simply looking for jobs and a better way of life. Many of them encountered the depression years of the 1890s but the flow continued until the outbreak of World War I.

This war played a major part in the migratory pattern. In the years prior to the war, large number of adventurous young men had decided to try their luck in Australia and when war broke out in Europe, there was a rush to the colours. The Official History of the First A.I.F. recorded that 51% of the enlisted men were British born. Many of them were Scots.

For some it was an opportunity to do their bit for the homeland. For others, who hadn't met with much success in Australia, it was a trip home at government expense. In between military misadventures in Gallipoli and France they usually managed to get a short leave to their hometowns. They laid claim to childhood sweethearts or found new girlfriends who were willing to make the long voyage out to Australia. The resultant exodus far exceeded any such movement in World War Two and indirectly influenced the decision of my own parents to emigrate to this country.

All the waves of immigration have been fairly well documented except this one. Malcolm Prentis wrote an excellent book, Scots In Australia but it only took us to the year 1900. In the 1920s – it actually started with the war brides of 1919 – there was a huge increase in the number of settlers from Britain. By sheer weight of numbers we must have had some effect on the country but there is little in recorded history to indicate that we made any impact.

A major influence in the settlement of Scots in Gladesville was James Park, a stonemason and master builder from Rutherglen, near Glasgow. With a young family he arrived in Australia in the late 1870s. He lived in Glebe for five years before moving out so Gladesville where he played a major part in the development of the suburb.

He had seven sons and one daughter, built many houses in the district and operated a stone quarry in Pittwater Road. The dressed stone from this quarry was used in construction work around the district. It was a favoured medium for churches and can be seen in the Presbyterian Church on the corner of Victoria and Pittwater Roads.

Stone from the quarry was used in the construction of St. Joseph's College, the Sydney G.P.O., St. Mary's Cathedral, the Queen Victoria Market and other structures. At high tide the cut and dressed blocks were loaded on to barges at Kitty’s Creek and ferried down the Lane Cove river to the city.

James Park prospered and became a noted local figure. He returned to Scotland several times to encourage and sponsor young married couples to settle in Australia. He also met migrant ships as they arrived in Sydney Harbour and persuaded total strangers – providing they were Scots – to make Gladesville their home town.

Another family with a similar influence was the Ralston family. In the late 1800s they ran a dairy farm on what is now Brookvale Oval. Above the Oval, on Allambie Heights, there is a fair expanse of rock with Aboriginal carvings. A few years before he died at the age of ninety-seven,
Graham Ralston took me to the area and showed me his initials carved into the sandstone by his father. The date was 1896, the year of his birth.

The Ralstons opened a produce store in Gladesville and persuaded many of their Scottish friends and relations to settle in the district.

By the time of the tidal wave of migrants in the 1920s, there was already a healthy nucleus of a Scottish community established in the district.

With hindsight, the British government seemed a little too anxious to get rid of us in those days. We were bombarded with brochures depicting life in Sunny N.S.W. Racing at Randwick, surfing at Manly, playing tennis with the squatter’s daughter at Gulargambone.

It was all very enticing and the medical profession compounded the conspiracy with assurances that no matter what ailed us, we would all become remarkably fit and healthy in the beneficial climate of Australia.

We saw the Promised Land as a sort of Down Under Lourdes with touches of a Sybaritic, hedonistic life-style.

So we arrived in our thousands, not to find the promised land of our dreams but for many to find steady employment in places like Balmain coalmine, Cockatoo Island, the shipyards of Mort’s Dock, Morrison and Sinclair, Storey and Keers and on the construction of the Harbour Bridge.

Those places provided employment for thousands of workers and all were handy to Balmain, which until that time had been the Scottish ghetto. By the 1920s the Balmain Scots were looking for a less crowded environment in which to bring up their families and they too looked towards the quarter acre blocks of Gladesville.

Oddly enough, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren are now moving back to Balmain. Established families became extended families as more migrants arrived, nominated by earlier arrivals. Nominators had to take full responsibility for their nominees for one full year. Provide accommodation, food and look after their general welfare during that time.

There was no dole and sometimes this imposed grinding hardship on two families when one breadwinner was providing for ten or twelve dependants, but somehow we survived.

The local electoral rolls became peppered with Scottish names. McLeans, MacFarlanes, McIntoshes, Frasers, MacDonalds, Borlands, Kethels, Hains, Shaws, Russells, and many, many more. There were at least three families in the district whose first language was Gaelic.

We, the Murrays, arrived in 1926. Many Murrays opted to emigrate to America rather than Australia. They were as fecund as the Australian lot and an American once informed me that in Australia you had rabbits and in America we had Murrays. (President Roosevelt had some Murray ancestry).

I corrected my American friend’s misapprehension. In Australia we have rabbits and Murrays. There is an old story that says when the English settle in a new country they don’t speak to each other until they have been introduced. The Welsh in the same circumstances start choirs, the Irish start fights and the Scots start Caledonian Societies.

Like all generalisations it has a strong core of truth and in 1921 in the Wallace Park Memorial Hall, at the Gladesville Presbyterian Church, the Ryde-Gladesville Caledonian Society was formed.

The first chief was the Honourable D. M. Anderson, sometime Mayor of Ryde and later a member of the N.S.W. Parliament. And incidentally, uncle of the internationally admired actress, Judith Anderson who stayed with him in the early days of her career.

The Caledonian Society became the focal point of social life for all Scots and descendant Scots in the district.

A favourite parting gift for those leaving Scotland was a bible and a volume of the works of Robert Burns. So we brought with us not only our work skills but our culture and traditions, our music and our dances, our Burns Suppers and St. Andrew’s nights and grafted them on to our adopted country. For many a homesick Scot yet another corner of a foreign field became forever Aberdeen, Edinburgh or Auchtermuchty.
In the 1920s there was no thought of ever returning to Scotland. Emigration to Australia was an irreversible decision. Those who struck hard times pointed out that the convicts were sentenced to seven or fourteen years transportation. For the migrant, Australia was a life sentence. The fact that there was no going back may have been a blessing in disguise. There was nothing for it but to knuckle down and get on with establishing ourselves in our new homeland. And establish ourselves we did. I am now looking at fourth and fifth generations of those 1920s settlers. They have become an integral and valuable part of Australian society, playing major parts in education, politics and industry.

The art of golf club making was unknown in Australia until the McIntosh family arrived in Gladesville in 1927. They had been sponsored by a small sporting goods firm who needed their knowledge and skills. The new industry started in a small factory in Surrey Hills.

It grew into a major undertaking, flourished for forty years, was eventually taken over by a multi-national company who transferred the entire industry to Korea. It was a blessing the original McIntosh wasn’t around to see it happen.

The Scottish invasion continued until 1929 when the Great Depression caused the flow to dry up. If anything the Scottish Societies found reserves of strength and flourished in adversity. They stuck together and helped each other through the hard times.

The same applied during the war years. The skills of women from Scottish fishing villages were invaluable in the making of camouflage nets. All their work was voluntary and unpaid. The men worked in essential industries and served with all branches of Australia’s defence forces in the Middle East and the South Pacific.

Every Scot who managed to reach Sydney with the British services was given accommodation and a welcome into a Scottish-Australian home.

A new wave of Scots swept in after World War 2 but the pattern had changed a little. Ex-servicemen who never had the opportunity to exercise their skills in Scotland, sought self-determination in the expanding economy of Australia.

Tradesmen who would normally have gone into the heavy industries of the Clyde, technicians from the new industry of electronics, farmers from Ayrshire, coalminers from Fife, crofters from the Western Isles, building workers from all parts, academics from the universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and St. Andrew’s.

Once again Scotland’s loss was Australia’s gain.

Poverty and hunger were no longer underlying causes. The journey was no longer a one-way trip. They could go back if they didn’t like us. Some of them did but most of them stayed.

In the two hundred years of white Australia’s history the Scots came and they contributed. We provided two Scottish-born Prime Ministers, Sir George Reid of Johnstone and Andrew Fisher of Crosshouse, Kilmarnock. There were men like Scott Skirving – for many years the guiding light at Sydney Hospital. Mungo MacCallum and Professor Anderson of Sydney University. Professor Walter Murdoch – probably Australia’s most distinguished essayist and the founder of West Australia’s first university. The second one is called after him. And he never forgot his childhood in Rosehearty in Scotland’s north-east.

The list is a long and sparkling one and it includes Charles O’Neill, the Scottish engineer who founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Australia – the Australian most likely to become a saint – Sister Mary McKillop.

Last but not least there were the thousands of Scots who brought nothing with them but their skills and resourcefulness, their courage and determination. They blended into the population and became part of the fabric of Australian society.
BURNS INTO ESPERANTO

By

Henryk Minc

I. INTRODUCTION

The works of Robert Burns have been translated into many languages. In 1896 William Jacks [4] published a study of translations of Burns into German, Swiss German, Danish and Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch and Flemish, African Dutch, Frisian, Bohemian or Czech, Hungarian, Russian, French, Italian, Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic, Welsh and Latin. The present work is the first of three planned studies of translations of Burns into languages not discussed by Jacks: Esperanto, Hebrew and Polish. In his book Jacks admits [idid. p. viii] that:

"It would be hypocritical pendency to leave it to be assumed that I knew all the various languages which appear here, sufficiently well to enable me to criticize these translations as I have done; indeed some of them I do not know at all. In such cases I had each retranslated literally into a language which I did understand, and the retranslation was sent to a native of the particular country for confirmation and comment, and in this way I was able to make my remarks."

This procedure is not acceptable. If a critical study of a translation of a poem into another language is to be meaningful, the critic must be fluent in both languages. A "literal retranslation" of a poem may be used as a subsidiary tool for finding errors and discrepancies in a translation but it is useless for determining the quality of the translation. It is not possible to determine how much of the original is lost in the translation and how much in the retranslation.

Opinions may vary as to what constitutes a good translation of a poem or a song. Some writers believe that is is not relevant how closely a translation follows the original so long as it results in a good poem or a good song in its own right, since the readers are not likely to be able to compare the translation with the original poem. We shall not get involved here in discussing universal rules for translating poetry. In this study we try to determine whether a translator of a poem or a song of Burns renders the meaning and the imagery of the work closely, and whether he/she successfully reproduces the beauty of the original. Translations of poetry into prose, or loose translations or other kind of imitations and paraphrases may be of some value but will not be considered here. In any case, all translators of Burns into Esperanto, Hebrew or Polish seem to agree with our point of view.

For the purpose of this study we adopt the following criteria:

1. the ideas and the imagery in the original must be rendered as closely as possible; (2) every translation must be as literal as possible; (3) the original metre and rhyme structure should be preserved; (4) translators must not attempt to "improve" on Burns: they must not omit anything essential, nor should they add notions, ideas or concepts of their own; in particular, they must not resort to verbal padding in order to achieve a rhyme or the required metre.

II. ESPERANTO.

The international language Esperanto was created by Ludwik Lazar Zamenhof ("Doktoro Esperanto") and published in 1887. It is based on an international root-word vocabulary, a small number of standard affixes, and a grammar consisting of 16 rules. Esperanto vowels a, e, i, o, u are pure sounds pronounced always as in lass, glen, breaeks, yonder, doon, respectively. Most consonants are pronounced as the corresponding single consonants in Scots. The consonants c, g, j are always pronounced as ts in Scots, g in gleg, and y in yestreen, respectively. Letters with diacritical marks ĉ, ĝ, ĥ, ĵ, ŝ, ū are pronounced as ch in chiel, g in Geordie, ch in loch, g in mirage, sh in shoon, and w in wee, respectively. Letters q, w, x, y are not used in Esperanto.

The definite article in Esperanto is la. There
is no indefinite article. All nouns in the
nominate singular end in suffix o. An adjective
in the nominative singular takes the suffix a,
whereas an adverb ends in e. Plurals end in j
(always pronounced like y in Roy; never like j
in Jock). Thus “the incomparable Scots”
translates into Esperanto as “la senkomparaj
Skotoj.” The suffixes -is, -as and -os indicate
the past, the present and the future tenses, in
singular as well as in plural, respectively.

In Esperanto every vowel determines a
syllable. The stress in polysyllabic words falls
always on the penultimate syllable. In verses
the noun ending -o may be elided (the stress
than remains unchanged; that is, on the last
syllable of the shortened word), and the ending
-a may be elided in the article la. For example,
“of the young chevalier” in a poem may be
translated into Esperanto as “de l’juna kavalir”
instead of “de la juna kavaliro”.

III. TRANSLATING INTO ESPERANTO.

It has been suggested that Esperanto being
an artificial language cannot be used
successfully for translating literature from other
languages. In fact, numerous literary works
have been successfully translated into
Esperanto, from the Bible to Agatha Christie’s
mysteries. There are many fine translations of
poetry into Esperanto. One of the best
translations of Pan Tadeusz, the epic written by
the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz, is
the Esperanto translation by Antoni Grabowski.
However, there are inherent difficulties in
translating English or Scots poetry into
Esperanto. The most common metre in English
or Scottish verse is iambic, and iambs can be
formed in Esperanto only by the use of
monosyllabic words or of nouns with elided
final -o. Unfortunately there are not many
monosyllabic words in Esperanto (some
pronouns, numerals, prepositions, interjections,
a few adverbs, and names). Moreover, an
excessive use of elision of the nounal final -o
produces artificiality, since -o is never elided
in speech or in prose. Lastly, most Esperanto
words have more syllables than the
corresponding words in Scots. To illustrate
the problem we note that Burns’s beautiful love
song ‘My luve’s like a red, red rose” consists
of 106 words, and fully 99 of them are
monosyllabic. The rendition into Esperanto of
the same song (see below) consists of 65 words,
only 34 of which are monosyllabic, including 4
bisyllabic nouns with elided final -o. In a
translation of “Scots wha hae” fully 16 lines,
out of the total of 24, end in nouns with elided
suffix -o.

Some writers suggest that English or Scots
verses in iambic metres should be translated into
Esperanto as verses in trochaic metre, or at least
with feminine rhymes. But the introduction of
trochees or feminine endings in a rendering of
an iambic song would change the metre and
the translated song may not fit the original tune.

An Esperanto word consists of a root
possibly preceded by a prefix or two, and
followed by a suffix or two. Rhymes between
words with identical suffix endings (suffixal
rhymes) are considered improper. The same is
ture of rhymes between participles.

An Esperanto postcard from the Editor’s collection
illustrating top right Ludwik Lazar Zamenhof
creator of the Esperanto language. Top left features
Gutenberg the inventor of printing from moveable
type.
Most Esperantists proficient in the language must have tried their hand at translating poetry into Esperanto. In particular, many Scots and possibly English Esperantists must have attempted to translate Burns’s poems and songs. Not many of these translations have been preserved in print, and very few of these are available in libraries. In this paper we shall study Esperanto translations of Burns’s songs published in the Esperanta Kantaro [1] which contains twenty of them. This appears to be the total corpus of preserved translations of Burns into Esperanto.

The translators of the 20 songs are:-

Agnes B. Deans:
“Of a’ the airts the wind can blaw”;
“Afton Water”;
“My heart’s in the Highlands”;
“The banks o’ Doon”;
“The bonny wee thing”;
“The Lea-rig”;
“Duncan Gray”;
“My Nanie’s awa.”

Agnes B. Deans & W. M. Page:
“A man’s a man for a’ that.”

John Gourley:
“Scots wha hae.”

William Harvey:
“There was a lad”;
“John Anderson my jo, John.”

“Open the door to me Oh.”

J. F. Lochhead:
“My luve is like a red, red rose.”

A. Motteau:
“Auld lang syne.”

W. M. Page:
“My Nanie, O” “Green grow the rashes O”;
“Ae fond kiss”; “For the sake o’ somebody.”

Adela Šefer:
“O, wert thou in the cauld blast.”

We shall review the translations in alphabetical order of the translators’ surnames. Translations by the same person are arranged in order of their publication.

IV. SONGS TRANSLATED BY AGNES B. DEANS.

OF A’ THE AIRTS THE WIND CAN BLAW
(MIA BELA JEAN)

Burns wrote this fine love song “out of compliment to Mrs Burns” during their honeymoon, that is, in summer 1788. It consists of two octaves with alternating iambic tetrameters and iambic trimeters, with rhyming pattern x\textsuperscript{a}a\textsuperscript{b}x\textsuperscript{a}a\textsuperscript{b}x\textsuperscript{b} (where x denotes, as usually, non-rhyming lines). Thus each stanza is composed of two ballad quatrains. On the other hand, the translation is set in two 16-line stanzas in the same metre as the original. In addition to the two stanzas Deans also translates into Esperanto two octaves written by John Hamilton (1761-1814) which are often printed with Burns’s song. They will not be reviewed here.

The first quatrains of the first stanza is fairly well translated although there is some weakness in the first couplet. Not only the translator misses the poetry of the original,

“Of a’ the airts the wind can blaw,
I dearly like the west,”

which she renders

“Ho, vento el la okcident’,
Al mi plej plaeas vi,” but she misses also the meaning. It is not the western wind that pleases Burns. It is the “airt” where the lassie that he lo’ es best lives. The second line of the translation contains an awkward, and apparently accidental, alliteration: “Al mi plej plačas vi.” On the other hand, the alliteration in lines 3 and 4 of the original:

“For there the bonie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo’ e best.”

is not reproduced. Nor is the translator able to match the very effective internal rhymes and alliterations (denoted here by italics and underlining, respectively) in lines 5 and 7:

“Montaroj staras inter mi
Kaj mi karulin’,
Sed eiam mi revadas pri
Amata mia Jean.”

The translator misses the internal rhyme in line 5. The caesura created by this rhyme corresponds to a natural pause in the tune. In the Esperanto version it lands awkwardly in the middle of word “staras.” The internal rhyme in line 7 is reproduced in Esperanto but it creates an unpleasant enjambment. Incidentally, the hills between Mauchline and Ellisland are of
modest size, and Burns who travelled this road many times, would have hardly described them as “montaroj” (mountain ranges.) Indeed he calls them “hills”.

The first quatrain of the last octave in the Esperanto version contains a disagreeable enjambment at the end of line 9:

“En rospolenaj floroj ŝin
Revante vidas mi,
Kaj ŝia voĉo ravas min
En birda melodi.”

Deans handicaps herself by introducing an additional rhyme in lines 9 and 11, ŝin/min. This she does at the cost of departing from the original. The translation loses the symmetry of “I see her... in flowers” in line 9, and “I hear her... in birds” in line 11. Deans could have achieved most of the effect by translating line 11 as

“Kaj ŝian voĉon audas mi”

The last quatrain is weak. The translator struggles to make lines 13 and 15 rhyme as in the original, by sacrificing line 14 and adding her own sugary line 14:

“Pri iu kara al la kor”

The translator catches some of the mood of the original love song in her translation but the rendering is not close enough to the original.

AFTON WATER (FLUADU AFTONO)

“Afton Water” was written before February 5, 1789, when Burns sent a copy of it to Mrs. Dunlop. The song consists of six quatrains of four anapestic tetrameters each, the first foot in each line being an iamb. The rhyming scheme is aabb.

Deans reproduces the metre skillfully enough but the double rhyme seems to cause difficulties which she solves by taking all kind of liberties with the original song and indeed with the Esperanto grammar.

The opening couplet

“Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, I’ll sing thee a song in thy praise,”

is rendered:

“Fluadu Altono laŭ verda kampar’!
Fluadu trankvile al vasta la mar’!”

In the first line “Flow gently, sweet Afton” is shortened to “Flow Afton,” and “braes” (here in the sense of “banks”) becomes “a countryside.” However, it is the translation of the second line that is objectionable. Deans deletes the invocatory “I’ll sing thee a song in thy praise” and pads the line with “to the vast sea!” This radical surgery is performed in order to achieve the rhyme Kampar’/mar’. The line is meaningless and it is not related in any way to Burns or, for that matter, to geography: the 10 mile long Afton empties into River Nith which in turn flows to Solway Firth, hardly “vasta la mar.”

In the second stanza Burns charges a noisy dove, blackbirds and a lapwing not to disturb his “slumbering Fair.” The translator has a problem here. She intends to use elisions to achieve the double rhyme. But elision is applicable only to nouns in the nominative, and so she had to use intransitive forms of verbs in order to avoid accusatives and feminine endings. Thus she does not ask the birds not to make noisy sounds but addresses herself to the sounds themselves. This produces awkward constructions:

“Kolombo, ne sonu nun via vokad’;
Ho merlo, silentu la fajfa trilad’;
Vanelo verdkresta, ĉesigu la kri’;
Ne veku, mi petas, al mia Mari’.”

The rhyme vokad’/tri/ad’ is improper, since it involves two suffixes -ad. The verb “veku” in the last line of the stanza is transitive and thus the object should be in the accusative; the line should read “Ne veku... mian Marion,” and not “Ne veku... al mia Mari’.” Of course, with “mian Marion” the last two lines would not rhyme, and the metre would change in the last line.

The next three stanzas are nicely done, except for the bad suffixal rhymes valar’/rivetar’ and domet’/ondet’.

In the last stanza Deans again disregards the original, where the first and the last stanzas are identical except for their second lines. The second line of the opening stanza is given above. In the last stanza it is replaced by a slight variation:

“Flow gently, sweet river, the theme of my lays!”

The translator ignores this line, just as she
did in the first stanza, and replaces it with.

"Fluadu trankvile, kun lula plaŭdar!" 9

Actually this line is less objectionable than the corresponding line in the first stanza with its "al vasta la mar’" (see above), and it is somewhat related to the "murmuring stream" that the translator was unable to insert in the third line. The last lines in the two stanzas of the original are identical. For some unknown reason Deans decided to change the last line of the first stanza,

"Ne rompu, Aftono, la songon al ĝi." 10

to

"Ne genu, Aftono, la songon al ĝi." 11

in the last stanza. There is no excuse for it. The difference may be slight but the change is quite unwarranted.

In the first two lines of the last stanza Deans persists in using suffixal rhymes: kampar’/plaŭdar’. As a matter of fact, the rhymes are bad in five out of the twelve rhyming couplets of the song.

All in all the translation has some merit, and the translated lyrics fit the original air perfectly.

MY HEART’S IN THE HIGHLANDS (ADIAŬ MONTLANDO)

The song “My Heart’s in the Highlands” appeared in [5] in 1790. According to Burns: “The first half-stanza of this song is old; the rest is mine.” The song is set in four stanzas in rhyming scheme aabb 4 , each stanza consisting of two anapestic rhyming couplets. The fourth stanza is a copy of the first (in [7] it is designated “Chorus.”)

Deans reproduces the meter, the rhymes and even the caesuras very well, with just a slight wobble in line 7 and an omitted caesura in line 9. Alas, in order to achieve this technical success she allows herself to stray far away from the original. The first stanza,

“My heart’s in the Highlands, my heart is not here;
My heart’s in the Highlands, a chasing the deer;
A-chasing the wild deer, and following the roe;
My heart’s in the Highlands wherever I go” is rendered

“Amata montlando, mi revas pri vi,
Eriko kaj cervoj min vokas al si;
En kiu ĉi montlando sopiras la kor’.” 12

Now, “My heart’s in the Highlands, my heart is not here,” is the title and the refrain of the original song. In Burns’s first stanza three of the four lines begin with “My heart’s in the Highlands”. In the Esperanto version, however, the refrain is conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, in the first two lines only one word, “montlando”, relates to anything in the corresponding lines in the original. Nor is there much similarity between the second couplet and the original. Moreover, if “Amata montlando” in the first line is to be the rendering of “My heart’s in the Highlands”, then why does the translator change it to “kara montlando” in the fourth line? The second line, except for “cervoj” is invented by the translator. The third line of the original song is left out of the translation. The fourth line is spread over the last couplet, and the Esperanto word “for” (away) is thrown in just to achieve a rhyme with “kor’” (heart).

This is not a translation in the accepted sense of the word but an imitation. Its weakness is obvious when compared with Bartsch’s fine translation [4] of the same chorus into German:

“Mein Herz ist im Hochland, mein Herz ist nicht hier!
Mein Herz ist im Hochland und jagt im Revier;
Da jagd es den Hirsch und das flüchtige Reh
Mein Herz ist im Hochland, wo immer ich geh’.” 13

The second stanza in the Esperanto version is translated well, except for the first line:

“Farewell to the Highland, farewell to the north,” which is rendered “Adiau nordlando de dolca menor” 14. Again, “de dolca menor” is just padding. Nothing similar is to be found in the original. “Adiau, montlando” which happens to be the title of the Esperanto version is left out. The translator should have tried something along the line:

“Adiaŭ montlando, adiaŭ, nordland’,
La land’ de kurag’, la lando de ind’” 15

Here the caesuras are preserved and the meaning is very close to the original, at the cost of an off-rhyme.
The last couplet of the second stanza and the third stanza are well translated, except for the suffixal rhyme *montar'lvalar’in* lines 9-10.

**THE BANKS O’ DOON (VI BORDOJ DE LA BELA DUN’)**

“The Banks o’ Doon”, translated by Deans into Esperanto, is the third version of a song by the same name which Burns sent on 11 March 1791 to Alexander Cunningham.

The song is set in two iambic octaves, each in the form xaxaxbxb4, where each line is a tetrameter and the even-numbered lines rhyme as indicated. The first quatrain is well translated although the translator is apparently forced to drop descriptive material from each line: “and braes” from the first line, “sae fresh and fair” from the second, “ye little” from the third, and “sae weary” from the fourth line. Line 6 is left out, and the structure of lines 7 and 8 is changed. Line 10 of the original is omitted. Lines 11-12 come fairly close to the original except that Deans misses the point of Burns’s “ilka bird sang o’ its Luve, And foundly sae did I o’ mine;” (the italics are mine). Also, it is a pity that the translator could not incorporate the key word “fause” in her translation of “fause Luver” in line 15.

All in all this is one of the better translations in the collection.

**THE BONNY WEE THING (BELULINO, ETULINO)**

The song was composed in honour of Deborah Duff-Davies, a petite and beautiful woman. It is set in a 4-line chorus and two quatrain stanzas. Each line is a trochaic tetrameter. The rhyme scheme in the chorus is xxbxb4 and abab4 in both stanzas. The rhyme is feminine in lines a, and masculine in lines b. The translation preserves the form and the spirit of the Burns original, though in several places it departs from it.

The rendition of the chorus is weak. Deans realized that it is nigh impossible to produce a close equivalent to Burns’s chorus:

“Bonie wee thing, cannie wee thing,
Lovely wee thing, was thou mine,
I wad wear thee in my bosom
Least my jewel it should tine.”

Indeed a literal prose rendition of the first two lines into Esperanto would be:

Bela eta estajo, afabla eta estajo,
Aminda eta estajo, se vi estus mia,
and it seems nigh impossible to render it, as it stands, into the metre. The translator skips the “wee” and uses the suffixal structure of Esperanto words to render the first line:

“Belulino, Etulino,”

reproducing the trochaic tetrameter, the caesura, the light tone of the original, and even the internal quasi-rhyme. Unfortunately Deans is unable to continue the second line in the same vein. She omits the first half of the second line altogether, and in the remaining half she inserts and unwarranted unpleasant proposition:

Se al mi vi donus vin,”16

which certainly is not equivalent to the “was thou mine” in the original. A similar line in the following stanza (“Least my wee thing be na mine”) is also replaced by a banal line:

“Eble si ne amas min.”17

The remaining couplet of the chorus is only vaguely related to the original.

There is another problem with Deans’s translation of the second line of the chorus. In the original poem there is a definite caesura after “Lovely wee thing,” which is reflected in the tune as a slight pause on the crotchet at the end of the third measure (“Lovely wee thing.”) followed by a breath.

In the translation the pause in the second line lands on “vi” in “Se al mi vi” creating a clumsy enjambment “Se al mi vi donus vin.”

The other two stanzas of the song are well rendered. The only objectionable part of the translation are the first two lines of stanza 2:

“Viajn ĉarmojn en la revo
Sentas mi en ĉiu hor’;”18

This sounds rather trite, and is unrelated to the corresponding lines in the original:

“Wit, and Grace, and Love, and Beauty,
In ae constellations shine;” 10

The translated song fits the original tune “Bonie wee thing” well.

**THE LEA-RIG (MIA PROPRA KARA, O!)**

Burns completed “The lea-rig” on 1 December 1792. The song is set in three octaves, each consisting of six iambic tetrameters followed by a refrain, two iambic
trimeters the first of which has feminine ending. The translator uses tetrameters for the refrain as well.

It is surprising that in the Esperanto version there is no attempt to translate the words “lea­rig” which appear in the title of the song and in the refrain at the end of each stanza. The refrain in the last two lines of each stanza of the original song is

“I’ll meet thee on the lea­rig,
My ain kind dearie O”

with a slight variation in the penultimate line of the poem where “I’ll meet” is changed to “To meet”. In the first stanza of the Esperanto version the first line of the refrain is rendered “La­v­r­da­vo­j­o­ir­os­mi”, in the second stanza it is “Kun­go­j­oi­rus­mi­al­vi” and in the last stanza it becomes “Ĉar­tiam­iras­valen­mi.”

The second line of the refrain is rendered “Al­mia­propra­kara, O!” We note that the original two lines of the refrain contain seven and six syllables respectively. In the Esperanto version both lines are iambic tetrameters and contain eight syllables each. They just do not fit the tune in [5, #49].

The translation of the first stanza departs somewhat from the original but on the whole it is quite good.

Crawford [2] considers the song to be the “best of all Burns’s songs of this type” (that is, songs featuring rustic courtship, and especially evening walks and meetings) and the following two couplets as “two of the finest couplets anywhere in Burns”:

“At midnight hour in mirkest glen
I’d rove and ne’er be irie I,”

“The hunter lo’es the morning sun,
To rouse the mountain deer, my job;”

The translator is not very successful in rendering these couplets into Esperanto. In the second stanza she manages to reproduce the general idea of the first couplet but she spreads it over the first lines of the stanza, and thus in line 12 she has to omit “My ain kind dearie O”. In the first two lines of the last stanza Deans renders the second of “the finest couplets” as follows:

“Ĉasisto gojas en maten’,
La­montoj­lin­altiras, O!”

The second line is unrelated to Burns. It was invented by Deans in order to produce a rhyme with the fourth line “La­fi­skaptis­to­iras, O!” The couplet should be rendered “Matenon­amas­la­ĉa­is­t’”.

But then it is hard to find an appropriate rhyme in the fourth line.

**DUNCAN GRAY**

Burns sent this song to Thomson on 4th December 1792 with a note [6; #523]: “Duncan Gray is that kind of light-horse gallop of an air, which precludes sentiment. – The ludicrous is its ruling feature.” The song is set in five octaves of trochaic tetrameters. The rhyme scheme is ararbbbr, where r denotes the refrain “Ha, ha, the wooing o’it.”

Deans catches some of the “galloping” spirit of the song but she cannot quite match the staccato of monosyllabic words in the original. For example, the translation of the rhythmic sequence “sli­t­hted­love­is­sair­to­bide” in line 19 is quite difficult to pronounce in the stuttering Esperanto version: “Meg­ek­kolerigi­s­lin.” However, the main trouble for the translator are, as always, the metre and the rhyme. Indeed “Meg­ek­kolerigi­s­lin” is hardly a translation of “sli­t­hted­love­is­sair­to­bide.” Its function is to provide a trochaic tetrameter that would rhyme with “turnas­sin” in line 17.

The translation into Esperanto is very loose. There are many omissions: “to­woo” in line 1; “On­bly­the­Yule­night” in line 3; “Duncan­sigh’d­baith­out­and­in,­grat­his­een­baith­blear’t­an’­blin’” in lines 13-14; “sli­t­hted­love­is­sair­to­bide” in line 23; “how­i­t­comes­let­doctors­tell,” in line 25; “Something­in­her­bosom­wrings” in line 29; “Duncan­could­na­be­her­death,­sw­ell­Ing­Pity­smoor’d­his­Wrath” in lines 36-37; “Now­they’re­crouse­and­cancy­baith” in line 39. On the other hand, many lines in the Esperanto version are not related to the original: “Estis­Meg­kok­t­elin” in line 5; “Diris­li­al­la­vir’in,­ke­li­tiel­amas­sin” in lines 13-14; “Meg­ek­kolerigi­s­lin” in line 19; “Sin­ne­ply­atento­s­mi” in line 23; “Ridoj­šia­mort­tis­for” in line 29; “Lin­regardis­en­dolor” in line 31; “Dol­če­li­konsoli­s­sin” in line 37; and above
It seems that Deans’s main purpose in writing the Esperanto version of the song was to provide Esperanto lyrics that fit the “light-horse gallop of an air” well and render Burns’s song more or less accurately. She produced a translation which fits the music. However, a faithful translation it is not.

**MY NANIE’S AWA (NAN ESTAS FOR)**

Burns sent the song “My Nanie’s Awa” to Thomson on 9th December, 1794. The song consists of four quatrains, each of which contains four anapestic tetrameters. The first foot in each quatrain is iambic and the remaining three are anapestic. The lines are 11-syllabic and that gives the translator more scope than she would have with the usual iambic tetrameters. However, there are two rhyming couplets in each stanza putting additional restraints on the translator, and forcing her to improvise. In the very first couplet,

“Now in her green mantle blythe Nature arrays,
And listens the lambkins that bleat o’er the braes”,

the first line should be rendered (using Deans’s own translation)

*Vestigas en verda mantelo Natur*”35

But apparently the translator is unable to find an appropriate rhyme to for “Natur” and changes it to “kampar” (= countryside). But this in turn requires a change in the second line. After all, countryside, unlike a personified Nature, cannot “listen the lambkins that bleat”, and therefore instead of the lambkins are made to jump:

“Kaj gaje saltadas la safidetar’.”36

The purpose of this desperate maneuver is to make the two lines rhyme and to preserve the metre. This is achieved (not perfectly: the rhyme is suffixal) at the cost of a substantial change in the imagery.

The second couplet of the opening stanza and the second stanza are well translated, except for lines 7-8:

“They pain my sad bosom, sae sweetly they blow,
They mind me o’ Nanie — and Nanie’s awa”

which Deans renders

“Sed ili profunde min vundas en kor’,
Spirante pri Nanjo, kaj ŝi estas for.”37

In the original version woodlands and flowers pain the main’s sad bosom because they blow sweetly, and they remind him of Nanie. In the Esperanto version they deeply wound him, breathing (sic!) about Nanie. Perhaps Deans gives “spirante” the meaning of the Scots word “speirin”, and then “spirante pir Nanjo” would mean “speirin aboot Nanie.”

In the third stanza Burns addresses himself to a lark and a mavis, in a manner reminiscent of the second stanza of “Afton Water.”

“Thou lav’rock that springs frae the dews of the lawn,
The shepherd to warn o’ the grey-breaking dawn, 10
And thou mellow mavis that hails the nigh-fa’,
Give over for pity – my Nanie’s awa.”

The translator changes the image completely:

“Ata loido, heroldo de griza tagiĝ’,
Fluganta cielen en gaja levig’!
Vi merlo, kantanta pro gojo de l’kor’
Silentu kompare, ĉar Nan estas for.”38

Nothing in the original is remotely similar to lines 10 - 11 in the Esperanto version.

The translation of the last stanza expresses approximately the ideas in the original but it is not close enough to it.

There are improper suffixal rhymes in lines 1/2 and 9/10.

V. TRANSLATED BY AGNES B. DEANS AND W. M. PAGE

**A MAN’S A MAN FOR A’ THAT (LA HOMO VERA)**

The song was sent to Thompson in a letter of January 1795. Burns comments [3, #651]: “A great critic, Aikin on songs, says, that love and wine are the exclusive themes for song-writing. – The following is on neither subject, and consequently is no Song; but will be allowed, I think, to be two or three pretty good prose thoughts, inverted into rhyme.” Nowadays the song is often recited, but it is also sung to the original air.

The song is set in five iambic octaves; the odd-numbered lines are tetrameters, except that the fifth line in each octave is the refrain “For
a' that, and a' that", and the even-numbered lines are trimeters with feminine endings. The even-numbered lines rhyme and a' that/for a' that, or and a' that/at a' that, or and a' that/than a' that. Lines 1 and 3 in stanzas 2, 3, 4 also rhyme, and there are internal rhymes in lines 1 and 3 of the last stanza.

The translation into Esperanto is a pale imitation of Bums's stirring revolutionary fanfare. The refrain "For a' that, and a' that" is completely ignored. The rhymes and a' that/ for a' that, etc., are reproduced only in lines 6/8 of the third and the fourth stanzas, but cio/tio has hardly the drumlike impact of and a' that/ for a' that, etc. Lastly, the rhyme in lines 38/40 is suffixal.

The translators enjoy here more freedom in their task, since the refrain and most of the "a' that" are omitted, and they manage to produce a fairly full translation. However, the translation of the climactic last stanza is disappointing. The lines

"En kiuj, al la inda hom' 35
La venko apertenos"39
are weak and nearly unrelated to
"That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth
Shall bear the gree an a' that."

The concluding quatrain
"Venonta estas flora tag',
En kiuj la homaro
Fariĝos, ĉie sur la ter',
Feliĉa kunfrataro"40
is padded and is not really close to the original:

"For a' that, and a' that,
It's comin yet for a' that,
That Man to Man the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that." 40

The weakness of the Esperanto version can be clearly seen by comparing it to the much superior German translation by Ruete [3; p. 83]:

"Trotz alledem und alledem,
Es kommt der Tag trotz alledem,
Da Mann und Man allüberall
Nur Brüder sind trotz alledem."41

VI. TRANSLATED BY JOHN GOURLEY
SCOTS WHA HAE (SKOTOJ! KIES HISTORI')

Burns sent the song "Robert Bruce's march to BANNOCKBURN" (mostly known as "Scots wha hae") to George Thomson at the end of August, 1793. The song is set in six quatrains, each consisting of three trochaic tetrameters and a trochaic trimeter. In each quatrain the tetrameters rhyme, and the last lines in all six stanzas rhyme. There are also alliterations in each stanza either in the second or the third lines. The Esperanto version is set in three trochaic octaves in rhyming scheme a'â'â'â'â'â'â'â'.

The rendering of the famous opening quatrain,

"Skotoj! kies histori'
Patriotoj traktas pri,
Al venkado pašu vi
Aǔ kruela mort"42,
is disappointing. The first two lines are unrelated to the original and meaningless. Surely every people's history treats of patriots, among other things. The last two lines of the first stanza are a poor substitute for

"Welcome to your gory bed,—
Or to victorie."

The next quatrain is rendered
"Jam la tago, nun la hor';
Venas la batala glor',
Aǔ sub angla diktator'
Nia sklava sort'."43

Now, the opening line of the second stanza in the original reads

"Now's the day, and now's the hour;" 5

There is no good reason why Gourley should try to "improve" on Burns by changing the first "nun" (= now) into "jam" (= already). The line should be translated literally:

"Nun la tag', kaj nun la hor';"

In the remaining three lines of the stanza one may forgive the translator the "batala glor" (which is not equivalent to "front of battle lour") and even "nia sklava sort'" (which is not a close rendition of "chains and slaverie"), but "sub la angla diktator'" is just too much. It does not sound like Robert Bruce, nor for that matter like Robert Burns.

The third stanza is weak. For example, Burns's rhetorical question "Wha can fill a coward's grave?" is rendered as a response to the question: "Honteginda malbravul"44. The
triple suffixal rhyme *perfidul'/malbravul'/*
*volontul'* does not improve matters.

The dramatic lines in the fourth stanza
"Wha for Scotland's King and Law,
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand, or Freeman fa',
Let him follow me"
are rendered lamely
"Kiu al patruja ter'  
Al la rego, land', liber',  
Amon havas, kun esper'  
Tiu sekvu min.'" 45
There is no "law", no "Freedom's sword", and above all, no "Freeman stand, or Freeman fa'."

The last two quatrains are loosely rendered. The stirring calls "We will drain our dearest veins, but they shall be free!" and "Let us Do -- or DIE!!!"

VII. TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM HARVEY
THERE WAS A LAD (EN KYLE NASKIĜIS KNABO)

It is possible, according to Kinsley [6], that Burns wrote the song in jocular celebration of his birthday, in late January 1787. It consists of six stanzas and a chorus. In each stanza the first three lines are rhyming iambic tetrameters, and the last line is an iambic trimeter ending in "Robin". In the chorus the first three lines are trochaic tetrameters, lines 1 and 3 being identical, and the last line is a trochaic trimeter. Lines 2 and 4 have feminine endings. There are alliterated r's galore throughout the chorus producing a remarkable ratatat effect, particularly if the r's are rolled.

In the Esperanto version there is a superfluous "Ho" in the opening line of the chorus. Also, lines 2 and 4 of the chorus open with a supermetrical unaccented syllable and have feminine endings. This necessitates a change in the tune by adding notes at the beginning of the chorus, at the end of the second measure and at the end of the sixth measure. The translator does not even attempt to use alliteration in the chorus. In spite of all that the chorus is rendered fairly well. However, the same cannot be said about the first stanza:
"En Kyle naskiĝis knabo: pri  
La tago ne parolos mi;

Surfiĉas diri nun al vi,  
Ke ja naskiĝis Robin.'46

There is an unpleasant enjambment in the opening lines, accentuated in the tune by the corresponding quaver at the end of the second measure. The next line just vaguely corresponds to the original, but the last two lines are the translator's own invention.

In the second stanza Harvey tries to improve on Burns by rendering "our monarch's" (which in Esperanto should read "de nia reĝ") in a more patriotic, more pro-Union way as "de brita reĝ." Then he leaves out "was five-and-twenty days begun" and "a blast o' Janwar' win" altogether.

The third stanza is not close enough to the original. "Gossip" means just a "neighbour", certainly not a "sorĉistin'" (= "witch"). Harvey ignores the first half of the stanza:
"The gossip keekit in his loof,  
Quo' scho Wha lives will see the proof,"  
which in English means:  
The gossip looked at his palm,  
Said she: who lives will see the proof.  
It may be that the translator did not understand these lines. He certainly did not understand the fifth stanza:
"But sure as three times three mak nine,  
I see by ilka score and line,  
This chap will dearly like our kin',  
So leeze me on thee, Robin"  
which he rendered  
"La fakto, ke trifoje tri  
Ja faras naii, ne estas pli  
Certega, ol ke amos li  
La tuthomaron, Robin.'47

Harvey misunderstands Burns's humorous admission in the third line, "This chap will dearly like our kin'", which, of course, means "This chap will dearly like our sex", and not "the entire mankind."

Either the translator did not know how to translate the last stanza, or perhaps his modesty was offended by the second line: "The Bonie Lasses lie aspar.” In any case he left out the sixth stanza without any comment.

JOHN ANDERSON, MY JO, JOHN  
(JOHANO ANDERSON)

In his letter to George Thomson of April 1793, Burns writes that the song "is my
composition, and I think is not my worst.” In truth it is one of his best loved songs.

The song consists of two octaves of iambic trimeters with a few variations, the most important of which are the tetrameters, instead of trimeters, in the penultimate line of each stanza. The Esperanto version adheres to the metre except for the tetramer in line 3 which for some reason is trochaic.

The Esperanto version sounds quite pedestrian. It lacks the beauty and the nostalgia of Burns’s song. It leaves lines out and, what is worse, it includes lines that are not by Burns. For example, the second octave,

“John Anderson my jo, John, We clamb the hill thegither; 10 And mony a canty day, John, We’ve had wi’ ane anither: Now we maun totter down, John, And hand in hand we’ll go; And sleep thegither at the foot, 15 John Anderson my Jo”

is rendered

“Ni kune supren marsis Dum tagoj de junec’ La vivovojon nian Kun rava felīcč; Nun ni malforte iras Al lito sub tombston’ Kaj kune tie dormos ni, Johano Anderson.”

Lines 9, 11, 12 and 14 in the original song are left out. On the other hand, the lines about “tagoj de junec’”, “kun rava felīcč’”, and “lito sub tombston’” are invented by Harvey; there is nothing similar to them in the original.

The Esperanto version is at best just a variation on Burns’s lovely song, and a weak variation at that.

OH, OPEN THE DOOR TO ME (MALFERMU LA PORDON)

This ballad originated in Corri’s Scots Songs (1783) and was revised and scotticized by Robert Burns. It is made up of four mostly anapestic quatrains. The rhyme scheme is a\(^4\)b\(^4\)a\(^3\)b\(^1\) in stanzas 1 and 4, and a\(^1\)b\(^1\)a\(^3\)b\(^4\) in stanzas 2 and 3. The Esperanto version is set in two octaves, and only the latter rhyming scheme is used.

On the whole the ballad is fairly well rendered. It catches the mysterious and grisly atmosphere of the original. However, the omission of the key phrases weakens the narrative in places. The second line of the opening couplet,

“Oh, open the door, some pity to shew, If love it may na be Oh;”

increases the pathos of the desperate cry in the first line. In the Esperanto version, however, line 2 is rendered “Malfermu la pordon al mi” (= Open the door to me), a mere repetition of the first part of the opening line.

The first couplet of the second stanza

“Cauld is the blast upon my pale cheek, 5 But cauldter thy love for me, Oh:”

is rendered

“Blovegas la vento malvarme sur min, Pli frosta vi estas al mi, O!”

Here again the key words “thy love for me” are left out of the translation, and it is not clear who is cold and why.

The third stanza is rendered well although it is marred by the omission of “false love” in line 11. The concluding stanza is very well rendered:

“Si large malfermis la pordon, kaj jen! Mortinto sur ter’ kušas li, O! “Karulo!” si kriis, kaj falis kun gem’, Leviĝis neniam plu ši, O!”

except for the line endings “kaj jen” and “kun gem’” which have no equivalents in the original. Perhaps the translator wanted to reproduce at least an off-rhyme in lines 1 and 3 of the stanza.

VIII. TRANSLATED BY J. F. LOCHHEAD A RED RED ROSE (AMATA, KIEL RUĞA ROZ’)

This, the most popular of Burns’s love songs, was first published in April 1794. It is set in four quatrains in ballad metre: x\(^4\)a\(^3\)x\(^a\)3. The Esperanto version is set in two octaves. The first quatrain

“Amata, kiel ruğa roz’ Junia estas vi; Plačega, kiel rava son’ De dolća melodi,”

scarcely conveys the beauty of “O my Luve’s like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune."

The first couplet is too matter-of-factly. It misses the poetic feeling of the original. It is also ambiguous since “amata” is not a noun but an adjective. The corresponding noun, “amatino”, would not fit the meter. The second couplet is not better. It is just a poor imitation of the original. Only “melodie” and “sweet” remain from Burns’s lyrics.

In the second stanza the translator introduces a spurious second line in order to create a rhyme for “mar”:

“Kaj amo mia, kiel vi,
Ja estas sen kompar’
Kaj certe mi amados vin,
Gis malaperos mar’.”

The Esperanto version sounds here like a parody of Burns’s beautiful lines:

“As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I,
And I will love thee still, my Dear,
Till a’ the seas gang dry.”

The main difficulty in translating the first two lines of this stanza into Esperanto is the “As... So...” structure. It translates normally into “Kiel..., Tiel...”, where both words are bisyllabic with the stress, as always in Esperanto, on their respective penultimate syllables, and it simply does not fit the metre.

The second octave in the Esperanto version is even weaker:

“Ĝis malaperso maro, kaj
La rokoj, pro la sun’,
Mi ĉiam kare zorgos vin,
Kaj amos kiel nun.
Do, Ĝis revid!’ sed fidu min,
Mi revizitos vin;
Eĉ ne la dekamilmejla bar’
Apartigados nin.”

The enjambed stressed “kaj” in the first line is grating. Lines 11-12 are a poor, a barely recognizable echo of Burns’s:

“O, I will love thee still, my Dear,
While the sands o’ life shall run.”

Line 13 is a travesty of Burns’s “And fare thee weel, my only Luve! And fare thee weel awhile!”

Lochhead’s translation fits quite well the tune “Major Graham” to which Burns wrote the lyrics. However, it can scarcely be called a translation. It is just an uninspired imitation of one of the most beautiful love songs.

IX. TRANSLATED BY A. MOTTEAU

AULD LANG SYNE (PASINTAJ TAGOJ)

This most famous of all songs was published in 1796 in [5]. It consists of five iambic stanzas and a chorus. The rhyming scheme in each stanza is x 4 a 3 x 4 a 2 · and in the chorus it is x 4 a 2 x 4 a 2 ·. The Esperanto version consists of only four iambic stanzas and a chorus. The structure of each stanza, including the chorus, is a 4 b 3 a 4 b 3 ·. In the original song all tetrameters have masculine endings whereas in the Esperanto version they have feminine endings. All rhymes in the original are masculine. In the translation the rhymes between tetrameters are feminine, and all trimeters, except in the last line of the chorus, end in a stressed “ni” (= “we”). It is not clear how the additional syllables in the Esperanto version are supposed to fit the tune. In fact they do not; neither the original air nor the tune to which the song is sung nowadays.

I have avoided calling the Esperanto version “a translation” since it is merely a poor imitation. Motteau finds it even difficult to translate “Auld lang syne”, the Scots phrase that Burns found “exceedingly expressive”, the refrain that appears in every stanza of this famous song and three times in the chorus. Motteau’s solution is to omit the phrase. In the title and in the first and the last stanzas he translates it as “pasintaj tagoj”, that is, “bygone days.” In the first line of the chorus the phrase becomes “tempon la malnovan” (that is, “the old time”, in the accusative), but it is omitted in the second and the fourth lines. In the remaining stanzas “auld lang syne” does not appear at all. The whole Esperanto version is
ineffective, but the chorus is particularly feeble. For example.

“We’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet
For auld land syne.”

is rendered

“Ni kune trinku tason ravan
Al fratharmoni’.”

Why “tason ravan”? Why not “bonan tason” or “bonvolan tason”? Where did Motteau find “al fratharmoni”? In “A man’s a man for a’ that”?

The second stanza describing present conviviality is left out. The other stanzas are only vaguely related to the original song. For example, in the Esperanto version the last stanza becomes

“La manojn, do, ni interprenos,
Ronde kantos ni;
Pasintaj tagoj ne revenos,
Sed memoros, ni!”

The first two lines seem to describe the conventional way of singing “Auld lang syne” in our days, at the conclusion of Scottish parties or other gatherings. These lines are quite different from the original opening couplet where the speaker merely invites his “trusty fiere” to clasp hands. The last three lines are Motteau’s invention.

X. TRANSLATED BY W. M. PAGE

MY NANIE, O (MIA NANI, O!)

This is a very early song of Burns. It appears in the First Commonplace Book (April, 1784). It is set in eight quatrains, each line being an iambic tetrameter. Burns uses the rhyming scheme abab⁴ and mostly off-rhymes: flows.clos’d, many/Nanie, shill/steal, rainy/Nanie, young/tongue, etc. The Esperanto version of the song is divided into four 8-line stanzas instead of eight quatrains, and it is not rhymed. Using the freedom of an unrhymed translation Page manages to render the song fairly close to the original. But the unrhymed Esperanto version cannot be considered a proper translation.

Already the opening line causes Page trouble: he leaves out the second line and uses both lines to render the first line. Similarly, line 6

“The night’s baith mirk and rainy, O”

is apparently too long to fit into a single line. Page cuts it down to

“Malluma estas nokto, O!”

The omission of “baith” and “and rainy” is bad enough (after all it is not the darkness of the night that causes the man to get his plaid) but leaving out the definite article obscures the meaning. The translation should read

“Malluma i’ nokto estas, O!”

or even better

“La nokto estas pluva, O!”

A similar problem is encountered in the opening couplet of stanza 4, which Page solves by eliminating the second line of the couplet (i.e., line 14). The second couplet of the same stanza

“The op’ning gowan, wat wi’ dew,
Nae purer is than Nanie, O.”

is mistranslated

“La rostrempita lekantet’
Aspektas kiel Nani, O!”

This does not make much sense. To look like “a daisy soaked in dew” is hardly a compliment. The following rendering would at least preserve the original meaning:

Ne estas rosa lekantet’
Pli pura ol si, Nani, O!

The seventh stanza

“Our auld Guidman delights to view
His sheep an’ kye thrive bonie, O;
But I’m as blythe that hauds his pleugh,
An’ has nae care but Nanie, O.”

is rendered feebly

“La mastro ġuas vidi nur
Ṣafaron kaj bovaron, O!
Sed mia ġuo, krom la plug’,
Nur estas mia Nani, O!”

The words are there but the meaning is muddled. The master would be happy to see his sheep and cows thriving but he would hardly enjoy himself just looking at them.

GREEN GROW THE RASHES, O (VERDAJ LA PINOJ)

This is a fine rollicking, exhuberant, early song which was entered, without the last stanza, in the First Commonplace Book (August 1784). The song is set in five iambic quatrains rhyming xbxb⁴ or abab⁴, and a chorus in which each of the first two lines begins with a spondee. In the
Esperanto version the metre is the same and rhyme is xbxvb throughout, except in the chorus where the first two lines start with an iamb, and the third line has a feminine ending which just does not fit the air.

On the whole the Esperanto version is well rendered except for the chorus and a few other weak spots which are mostly caused by difficulties involving the metre or in finding suitable rhymes. For example, the word “rashes” in the title and in the chorus is translated as “pinoj” (= “pines”):

“Verdaj pinoj, O!
Verdaj pinoj, O!
Pasigis mi plej dolĉajn horojn,
Inter la knabinoj, O!”

The Esperanto word for “rush” is “junko.” Apparently the translator could not find an appropriate word rhyming with “junkoj,” hence “pinoj”.

The third stanza
“But gie me a canny hour at e’en,
My arms about my Dearie, O; 10
An’ war’ly cares, an’ war’ly men,
May a’ gae tapsalteerie, O!

is rendered
“Se amatinon en vesper’
Mi povas ĉirkaŭbraki, O! 10
La mondo zorg’ kaj mondumul’
Por ĉiam povas kraki, O!”

The first couplet is weak. The second is not acceptable. The translator needs a word rhyming with “ĉirkaŭbraki” and meaning “gae tapsalteerie”, and he invents ad hoc a new meaning for the Esperanto word “kraki”. But “kraki” means “to make a cracking noise” and is virtually unrelated to “going topsy-turvy.” Furthermore, line 11 does not make sense in the singular. It should be rendered in the plural… “La mondaj zorgoj kaj mondumuloj.” But this, of course, would upset the meter.

Stanza 4 is well translated, and the last stanza is acceptable.

**AE FOND KISS (UNO KISON)**

Burns sent this beautiful love song to “Clarinda”, Mrs. Nancy M’Lehose, on 27 December 1791, shortly after their last meeting. The song is set in five quatrains of trochaic tetrameters, aabb. The song appears to be difficult to translate. Indeed no translation of it into any language appears in [4], nor is there a translation into Hebrew, or into Polish.

There are some fair lines in Page’s translation of the song, but many more weak lines, or lines invented by the translator. Nothing is more uninspired than the translation of the opening stanza,

“Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I’ll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I’ll wage thee”

which is translated

“Unu kison! Ve, por ĉiam!
Mi revenos plu nenia!
Unu kison! kaj irante
Mi vin tostos ploradante.”

None of the above lines renders even approximately the corresponding line in the original. In the first line “Unu kison!” misses the meaning and the feeling of “Ae fond kiss.” Perhaps “Aman kison!” (A fond kiss) would be better. The all important “then we sever” is left out. Page replaces it with “Alas, for ever” from line 22. The last two lines of the stanza are Page’s invention. Furthermore, in the original the last two lines of the first stanza are exactly the same as the concluding two lines of the last stanza. For some reason Page changes the last line of the song to: “Tostos mi al vi plorante.” A small but very inappropriate change.

Lines 11-12
“But to see her, was to love her;
Love but her, and love for ever.”

(very similar to lines 5-6 of “O saw ye bonie Lesley”) are rendered

“Ke, vidinite ŝin, de tiam
Enamigis mi fro ĉiam”

and are nearly unrecognizable.

This is a poor effort. It may be that the necessity of finding two rhymes in each stanza puts too much strain on the translator. On the other hand, the trochaic metre and the feminine line ending should have given Page enough freedom to produce a closer and more inspired translation. The Esperanto version fits the tune well.

**FOR THE SAKE O’ SOMEBODY (DOLORAS MI KORO)**
This song appeared in [5]. It was probably meant to be a Jacobite song, “somebody” being a synonym for Prince Charles Edward. It is set in two rhymeless, mostly trochaic octaves, five lines in each stanza ending in “Somebody.” The Esperanto version has a similar metrical structure. Unfortunately, it does not fit the air. The lines of each stanza in the original consist of 8, 8, 7, 6, 6, 7, 7 syllables, respectively, whereas in the Esperanto version the corresponding numbers are 9, 6, 8, 6, 5, 5, 7, 6. They just do not fit the tune.

The word “Somebody” in lines 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16 is rendered “amata iu.” 67 Even if Esperanto existed in the eighteenth century it is not likely that the Prince would be referred to by his supporters as “iu”, which in Esperanto has the connotation of “anybody.”

Here Burns’s “misfortunes bitter storms around thee blow” is changed to “mizero kaj dolor’ turmentus vin”, a quite different and less violent imagery. Possibly Sefer adds “dolor’” and changes the meaning in order to produce a superfluous rhyme dolor’/kor’ between lines 5 and 7. Surely the following would be a closer translation:

Aii se ventegoj de mizer’
Blovadus vin, blovadus vin,
Šild’ via estus mia brust’
Por sirnmi vin, por sirnmi vin. 71

In the second stanza Sefer does more surgery: she cuts out lines 10 and 14 and tries to squeeze the remaining lines into the available space. This time there is too much space in the last line to form an iambic tetrameter and she appends the suffix “ad” to pad the metre. The correct word here is “estus” (= would be) whereas “estadus” (= would continue to be) is just de trop.

On the whole Sefer’s translation is one of the more successful in this collection.

XI. TRANSLATED BY AELA ŠEFER.

**OH WERT THOU IN THE CAULD BLAST**

(HO, SE SUR VASTA ERIEKJ’)

This wistful song was written for Jessy Lewars. It is one of the finest of Burns’s songs and one of his last. It is set in two octaves of iambic tetrameters with the rhyming scheme xaxaxbbx. All the even numbered lines consist of repeated dimeters. In the Esperanto version the dimeters are printed only once per line but there is no doubt that they are meant to be repeated. All the rhymes in the first stanza are identical vin/vin, and in the second stanza both rhymes are mi/vi/.

The translator catches some of the tender, protective feeling of the song but she departs from the original too often. In the first line “in the cold blast” is omitted. The second quatrain of the first stanza

“Or did misfortune’s bitter storms 5
Around thee blow, around thee blow,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a’, to share it a’.

is rendered

“Aii se mizero kaj dolor’
“Turmentus vin, turmentus vin,
Mi premus vin al mia kor’,
Gardante vin, gardante vin.”70

Here Burns’s “misfortunes bitter storms around thee blow” is changed to “mizero kaj dolor’ turmentus vin”, a quite different and less violent imagery. Possibly Sefer adds “dolor’” and changes the meaning in order to produce a superfluous rhyme dolor’/kor’ between lines 5 and 7. Surely the following would be a closer translation

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On the whole Sefer’s translation is one of the more successful in this collection.

XII. CONCLUSIONS

There are great difficulties in translating Burns songs into Esperanto, particularly if the lines are rhyming and are set in an iambic or anapaestic metre, as most of them are. There are many reasons for this. In the first place nearly all Esperanto words are polysyllabic. No Esperanto word can produce a masculine rhyme
unless it is monosyllabic or it is a noun with elided suffix -0. Rhymes between suffixes are considered bad. Since all feminine nouns end in -ino or -inoj, and feminine adjectives end in -ina or -inaj, with the stress on the i (and similarly for other suffixes), problems of preserving the rhyme and the metre (particularly iambic or anapestic) in Esperanto renditions are nigh insolvable. Indeed not one of the twenty translations studied in this paper escapes unscathed: in each of them words and lines are left out, lines are invented, lines are padded, rhymes are faulty, etc. Indeed it is rather surprising that so many lines and stanzas have been well and faithfully translated.

I am not aware of any poems of Burns, other than songs, that have been rendered into Esperanto. It seems that translators of Burns into Esperanto were compelled because of inherent technical difficulties to set for themselves more modest goals than their colleagues rendering Burns into German or other languages cognate to Scots. Their main purpose may have been to make available to Esperantists some of the most beautiful songs ever written. The translators have endeavoured to produce lyrics for these songs that fit the original tunes and render Burns's lyrics as faithfully as they could. These translations were meant to be sung and enjoyed at Esperantist gatherings, and not to be critically studied in minute detail.

XIII. REFERENCES


FOOTNOTES

1 Excluding two translations of "Robin Adair" which is incorrectly attributed to Burns. In fact, the words were written by Lady Caroline Keppel. 2 O, wind from the west, You please me the most. 3 Mountain chains stand between me And my dear one, But I always dream of My beloved Jean. 4 In dewy flowers her Dreamingly I see, And her voice captivates me In birds' melody. 5 And her voice I hear 6 Of someone dear to the heart 7 Flow Afton along green countryside! Flow calmly to the vast sea! 8 Dove, let not your call now sound; O blackbird, let the whistling trill be silent; Green-crested lapwing, let the cry be stopped: Do not wake, I beg, my Mary. 9 Flow gently, with soothing splashes! 10 Do not cut short, Afton, the dream to her. 11 Do not disturb, Afton, the dream to her. 12 Beloved Highlands, I dream about you, Heather and deers call me to them; In whichever place I travel away, For the dear Highlands longs the heart. 13 My heart is in the highland, my heart is not here! My heart is in the highland and hunts in the hunting ground There it hunts the deer and the swift roe – My heart is in the highland, where always I go. 14 Farewell northland of sweet memory, 15 Farewell Highland, farewell northland, The land of courage, the land of worth; 16 If to me thou wouldst give thee, 17 Perhaps she does not love me 18 Thy charms in the dream I feel in every hour; 19 Along a green parth I will go 20 With joy I would go to thee 21 For then downhill I go 22 To my own dear 23 A hunter rejoices in the morning The mountains attract him, O! 24 The fisherman, goes, O! 25 The hunter loves a morning For sun wakes a deer, O! 26 Meg angered him 27 Meg was a coquette 28 said he to the woman that he so loves her 29 Meg angered him 30 I shall not heed her any more 31 her laughs died away 32 looked at him in pain 33 sweetly he comforted her 34 were husband and wife 35 Nature dresses in a green mantle 36 And gaily jump the lambkins 37 But they deeply wound me in heart, Breathing about Nanie, and she is away. 38 Lark, a herald of a gray dawn, Flying to sky in a gay rise! Thou blackbird, singing for joy of the heart, Be silent for pity, for my Nan is away. 39 In which, to the worthy man The victory will belong. 40 A glorious day is coming, In which the mankind Will become, everywhere on the earth, A happy brotherhood. 41 For all that and all that, There comes the day for all that, When man and man everywhere Only brothers are for all that, 42 Scots!
whose history Treats of patriots, To victory stride Or cruel death. 43 Already the day, now the hour; Comes the battle glory, Or under English dictator Our servile fate. 44 A shameful coward 45 Who to native land, To the king, land, freedom, Has love, with hope Let that one follow me. 46 In Kyle was born a boy: about The day I will not speak; Suffices to say now to you That indeed was born Robin. 47 The fact that three times three Do make nine, is not more Certain than that he will love, The entire mankind, Robin. 48 We walked upwards together During days of youth Our life path With ravishing hapiness; Now we weakly go To bed under a tombstone And together there we 'll sleep, John Anderson. 49 Blows the wind coldly on mi, Frostier thou art to me, O! 50 She widely opened the door and lo! A dead body lies on the ground, O! "Beloved!" she cried and fell with a groan, Never rose again she, O! 51 Loved, like a red rose Of June art thou; Charming, like a ravishing sound Of a sweet melody. 52 O, my Love is like a rose Red, red in June; O, she is like a melody, Sweet sounding in tune. 53 And my love, like thou, Indeed is incomparable; And certainly I will love thee, Till disappears a sea. 54 Till disappears a sea, and The rocks, for the sun, I will always dearly care for thee, And I will love like now. Well, 'Au revoir!' but trust me, I will revisit thee; Not even the ten thousand mile obstacle Will keep us apart. 55 Let us drink together a delightful cup To brotherly harmony. 56 So we shall interlace the hands, In circle we shall sing, Bygone days will not return, But remember we will!! 57 Dark is a night, O! 58 Dark the night is, O! 59 The night is rainy, O! 60 The dew-soaked little daisy Looks like Nani, O! 61 Dewy little daisy is not Purer than she, Nani, O! 62 The master delights to see only Sheep and Cattle, O! But my delight, apart for the plough, Is only my Nani, O! 63 The green pines, O! The green pines, O! I spent the sweetest hours, Among the lasses, O! 64 If a sweetheart in the evening I can embrace, O! The worldly care and worldly man For ever can crack, O! 65 One kiss! Alas, for ever! I shall return no more! One kiss! and going I will toast you crying. 66 That, having seen her, from then I fell in love for ever. 67 loved someone 68 Prosperity give, good God, To loved somebody. 69 And safely bring him To loved somebody. 70 Or if misfortune and pain Would torment thee, would torment thee, I would press you to my heart, Guarding thee, guarding thee. 71 Or if misfortune's storm Would blow thee, would blow thee, Thy shield would be my bosom To protect thee, to protect thee.

PETER HILL

by

James L. Hempstead

(HON. PRESIDENT THE BURNS FEDERATION)

On 29 November, 1786, Burns rode into Edinburgh. The main purpose of his visit was to try and secure a new edition of his poems. Within two weeks he had been introduced to the noted Edinburgh publisher, William Creech, whose bookshop was at the east end of the luckenbooths and immediately below the flat where Allan Ramsay had opened the first circulating library in Scotland. Both in his shop and in his house in Craig's Close, which was nearby, Creech entertained all the literary figures and notable Edinburgh personalities of his day. Those meetings, which came to be known as Creech's levees, were usually held in his house in the morning and in his shop in the afternoon. Lord Cockburn described Creech's shop as:

the natural resort of lawyers, authors and all sorts of literary idlers, who were always buzzing about the convenient hive. All who wished to see a poet or a stranger, or to hear the public news, the last joke by Erskine, or yesterday's occurrence in the Parliament House, or to get the publications of the day, congregated there. 2

Creech seems to have spent most of his time presiding over those gatherings, with the result that the day-to-day running of the business was entrusted to his chief clerk, Peter Hill. An Edinburgh
bookseller, who for a time was in Creech’s employment, supplied Robert Chambers with the following note on the publisher’s business habits:

My friend, Mr. Creech, was rather a tardy man of business, and paid little attention to it. Previous to my becoming his clerk, he had my friend Mr. Miller, and several other respectable young men, to take care of his business. Being so much occupied with literary people, he seldom handled his own money. His clerk balanced the cash every night, and carried on that to next day. He had a levee in his house till twelve every day, attended by literary men and printers. Between twelve and one he came to the shop, where the same flow of company lasted till four, and then he left us, and we saw no more of him till next day.3

After reaching agreement with Creech to publish his poems, it would appear that Burns dealt mainly with Peter Hill, who handled much of the innumerable business matters relating to the Edinburgh edition. A warm friendship developed, which continued unabated until shortly before the poet’s death.

Peter Hill was the eldest son of James Hill and his wife Margaret Russell and was born at Dysart, Fife on 20 November, 1754. James Hill was collector of shore dues at Dysart and was accidentally drowned in 1770. His widow was left with three sons and three daughters, and shortly after her husband’s death she removed to Leith with her family. Young Peter Hill’s first job was in the nursery and seed shop of Messrs Eagle and Henderson in Edinburgh’s High Street.4 When next we hear of him he had become principal clerk to William Creech. He was in charge of the business when Creech was in London in the summer of 1787, and it was during this period that Burns started corresponding with him. Indeed, as the friendship developed, Hill acted as Burns’s business agent in Edinburgh, carrying out all sorts of financial transactions on his behalf. One writer has suggested that there was no love lost between Hill and Creech,5 and it was probably the principal reason why Hill left Creech in 1788 and set up in business on his own account. His first shop was in Parliament Close (Square), with a distinctive signboard bearing a representation of the head of James Thomson, the poet of The Seasons.6 Lockhart described it as ‘a long and dreary shop, where it is impossible to imagine any group of fine ladies or gentlemen could assemble’.7 On the other hand. Archibald Constable, who served his apprenticeship with Hill, stated that the ‘most respectable persons in Edinburgh’ and the ‘most remarkable strangers’ foregathered in Hill’s shop. One of the remarkable strangers was Captain Grose, the antiquary, who inspired Burns to write ‘Tam o’ Shanter’. It is interesting to note that Constable lived with Hill and was responsible for arranging the stock, studying catalogues and attendance at book sales.8 In 1795 he began business on his own account and went on to become the foremost publisher in Scotland, but in 1826 he was brought down in the financial crash which involved Sir Walter Scott and the printer, James Ballantyne.

Nineteen letters of Burns to Hill have survived covering a period from May, 1787, to the end of January, 1796. Fifteen letters of Hill to Burns were included among three hundred letters addressed to the poet and found among his papers at the time of his death. These were passed to Dr. James Currie, his first biographer. Their ultimate fate is unknown, but Currie prepared a summary of each letter in a manuscript running to 56 pages. Unfortunately the document has been so badly damaged by damp, that what is left of the summary relating to Hill’s letters adds very little of interest to the correspondence.9

The poet’s earlier letters to Hill are mainly concerned with business and orders for books. As the friendship ripened, however, his letters became more intimate and were interspersed with broad humour and ‘hearty blasts of execration’ on his pet subjects of frugality, poverty and selfishness.

It is rather significant that when Hill established his own business Burns passed all his orders for books to him. Chambers states that ‘having no similar affection for Creech, Burns resolved to
send to Hill for any books he might henceforth have occasion for'. The poet and his friend, Robert Riddell of Friar's Case, had been instrumental in forming the Monkland Friendly Society, which had for its chief object the establishment of a circulating library. Exactly when it was founded is uncertain, but Burns mentions it in a letter to Hill dated 2 April, 1789 (CL313):

The Library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun, under the direction of Captain Riddell and ME! There is another in emulation of it, going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr. Menteith of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours; I have likewise secured it for you. Captain R -- gave his infant society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but one of these days I shall trouble you with a Commission for “the Monkland friendly Society”.

At the beginning of the letter, Burns apologises for writing on Excise Paper and with a rich touch of humour concludes:

When I grow richer I will write to you on gilt-post, to make amends for this sheet. At present every guinea has a five-guinea errand with, my dear sir, you faithful, poor, but honest friend.

About the end of 1789 and the beginning of 1790, Burns had become interested in the dramatic plays being performed by George Sutherland's company in the Assembly Rooms, Dumfries (the Theatre Royal had not then been built).

Perhaps it was because of this interest that he ordered the following books from Hill on 2 March, 1790 (CL316):

I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed, or anyway cheap copies of Otway’s dramatic works, Ben Johnson’s, Dryden’s, Congreve’s, Wycherly’s, Vanbrugh’s, Cibbers, or any Dramatic works of the more Moderns, Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman or Sheridan’s - A good Copy too of Moliere in French I much want - any other good Dramatic Authors, in their native language I want them; I mean Comic Authors chiefly, tho’ I should wish Racine, Corneille and Voltaire too –

Burns’s request for ‘comic authors chiefly’ suggests that he may have contemplated another tale similar to ‘Tam o’ Shanter’, or was a study of the playwrights a preparation for his declared intention to write ‘something in the rural way of the Drama-kind’? We shall never know, but what is certain is that Burns was intent on becoming familiar with the works of the leading dramatists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The last paragraph of the letter is given over to some observations on the prevalence of selfishness.

I am out of all patience with this vile world for one thing. - Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly instances, I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have is born with us; but we are placed here amid so much Nakedness, and Hunger, and Poverty and Want, that we are under a damning necessity of studying Selfishness, in order that we may Exist! Still there are, in every age, a few souls, that all the Wants and Woes of life cannot debase to Selfishness, or even give the necessary alloy of Caution and Prudence. - If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no Saint; I have a whole host of Follies and Sins to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes. Even the knaves who have injured me, I would oblige them, tho’ to tell the truth, it would be more out of vengeance to shew them that I was independent of, and above them, than out of the overflowings of my benevolence. Sometime in 1790, Hill had rendered his account to Burns, which amounted to £6.7.5. On 17 January 1791, the poet sent £3 as partial payment and his inability to discharge the whole amount produced a hearty blast on the curse of poverty (CL317):

Poverty! Thou half-sister of Death, thou cousin-german of Hell, where shall I find force of execution equal to thy demerits! - By thee, the venerable Ancient, though in thy
invidious obscurity, grown hoary in the practice of every virtue under Heaven, now laden
with years and wretchedness, implores from a stony-hearted son of Mammon whose sun
of prosperity never knew a cloud, a little, little aid to support his very existence, and is by
him denied and insulted. - By thee, the Man of Sentiment whose heart glows with
Independence and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhe under the contumely,
of soul under the contumely, of arrogant, unfeeling Wealth. - By thee the Man of Genius
whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the Fashionable and Polite, must see
in suffering silence his remark neglected and his person despised, while shallow Greatness
in his idiot attempts at wit shall meet with countenance and applause.

Nor is it only the family of worth that have reason to complain of thee: the children of
Folly and Vice, tho’ in common with thee the offspring of Evil, smart equally under thy
rod. - Owing to thee, the Man of unfortunate dispositions and neglected education, is
condemned as a fool for his dissipation; despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when
his follies as usual have brought him to want; and when his unprinciplled necessities drive
him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his
country. - But far otherwise is the lot of the Man of Family and Fortune. - His early
extravagance and folly, are fire and spirit; his consequent wants, are the embarrassments
of an Honest Fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he sets out with a legal commission
to plunder distant provinces and massacre peaceful nations, he returns laden with the
spoils of rapine and murder, lives wicked and respected, and dies a Villain and a Lord. -
Nay, worst of all - Alas for hapless Woman! - the needy creature who was shivering at the
corner of the street, waiting to earn the wage of casual prostitution, is ridden down by the
chariot wheels of the CORONETED REP, hurrying on to the adulterous assignation; she,
who without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade!!!

Well, divines may say what they please, but I maintain that a hearty blast of execration
is to the mind, what breathing a vein is to the body: the overloaded sluices of both are
wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations. - I feel myself vastly easier then
[sic] when I began my letter, and can now go on to business.

During his West Highland Tour in June 1787, Burns rode down Loch Lomondside and spent a
day sailing on the Loch. He was, therefore, familiar with its beauty and it must have come as a
pleasant surprise when he received Hill’s letter of 1 October, 1788, enclosing a copy of the ‘Address
to Loch Lomond’. In his reply sent from Mauchline (CL311) he wrote:

I have been here in this country, about three days, and all that time, my chief reading
has been the Address to Loch Lomond you were so oblidging as to send me. Were I
impanelled, one of the Author’s Jury to determine his criminality respecting the sin of
Poesy, my verdict should be “Guilty! A Poet of Nature’s making!”

At the end of the letter he wrote, ‘I should like to know who the author is, but whoever he be,
please present him with my grateful thanks for the entertainment he has afforded me’. The author
who gave Burns so much entertainment was James Cririe who at one period, was Latin Secretary
to the Society of Scottish Antiquaries, In 1788 he became Rector of the High School at Leith and
in 1795 succeeded William Cruickshank as Classical Master in the High School of Edinburgh. He
resigned in 1801 on being presented to the parish of Dalton in Dumfriesshire. The degree of
Doctor of Divinity was conferred on him by Edinburgh University in 1802.\(^{13}\) It seems obvious
from Burns’s letter that he had not met Cririe during his visits to the Capital.

Burns was always eager for news of the Capital. In a long letter of 2 February, 1790 (CL315)
he enquired, ‘What has become of Borough Reform or how is the fate o my poor namesake,
Mademoiselle Burns, decided?”' The young woman referred to was Margaret Burns, a prostitute,
whose beauty, fine figure and fashionable attire had attracted much attention. Her real name was
Matthews and she was a native of Durham. She had come to Edinburgh in 1789, accompanied by
a Miss Sally Sanderson, with whom she had set up a house of ill repute in Rose Street. As a result of complaints by neighbours the two ‘madames’ were brought before the magistrates, presided over by William Creech, Burns’s publisher. They were convicted of the offences with which they were charged and ‘banished forth of the city and liberties forever.’ The sentence was later overturned by the Court of Session. The case created considerable interest and amusement and set tongues wagging. Needless to say Creech was extremely annoyed at the decision and he became the butt of various squibs circulated at his expense. The unkindest cut of all, however, was when a London paper reported that ‘Bailie Creech, of literary celebrity in Edinburgh, was about to lead, the beautiful and accomplished Miss Burns to the hymeneal altar.’ Creech was furious and only abandoned legal action on the promise of a retraction being printed in the next publication of the paper. A retraction duly appeared but certainly not the one he expected. It ran thus; ‘In a former number we noticed the intended marriage between Bailie Creech of Edinburgh, and the beautiful Miss Burns of the same place. We have now the authority of that gentleman to say that the proposed marriage is not to take place, matters having been otherwise arranged to the mutual satisfaction of both parties and their respective friends’. How Burns must have laughed at this amusing situation.

Did Burns suspect that some of Edinburgh’s prominent citizens had ‘visited’ Rose Street, when he continued in the same letter:

Which of their grave lordships can lay his hand on his heart and say that he has not taken advantage of such frailty? Nay, if we may judge by near 6000 years’ experience, can this world do without such frailty? O Man! but for thee and thy selfish appetites and dishonest artifices, that beauteous form and that once innocent and still ingenuous mind might have shone conspicuous and lovely in the faithful wife and the affectionate mother; and shall the unfortunate sacrifice to thy pleasures have no claim on thy humanity?

Burns took a swipe at Margaret Burns’s detractors in a neat little quatrain:

Cease ye prudes, your envious railing!
Lovely Burns has charms - confess
True it is, she had one failing:
Had a woman ever less? (CW375)

In the spring of 1791, Hill sent Burns a present of books which the poet acknowledged by the gift of a ewe-milk cheese. In a lengthy letter (CL318), he recommends the cheese as a cure for indigestion which has plagued him for the past week. He humorously suggests that Hill might pass a slice of the cheese to some of his Edinburgh friends whose digestions may suffer from various causes. In particular he mentions William Smellie, who printed the Edinburgh edition of
The poems James Candlish, a friend of his schooldays, David Ramsay, proprietor of the Edinburgh Courant, Colonel Dunbar of the Crochallan Fencibles and Alexander Cunningham, an intimate Edinburgh friend.

After a lapse of six months Burns wrote to Hill from Ellisland in October, 1791 (CL320). He was in sombre mood:

My dear Friend,

I was never more unfit for writing. - A poor devil nailed to an elbow chair, writhing in anguish with a bruised leg, laid on a stool before him, is in a fine situation truly for saying bright things.

He informs Hill that he has sold the lease of his farm to his landlord, Patrick Miller and expresses his hopes and prospects in the Excise:

I have not been so lucky in my farming. - Mr. Miller’s kindness has been just such another as Creech’s was; but this for your private ear. -
“His meddling vanity, a busy friend,
Still making work his selfish craft must mend”

During Burns’s first visit to Edinburgh he found that the poet, Robert Fergusson, who died in 1774, was buried in an unmarked grave. Burns had been greatly influenced by Fergusson’s poems, and to acknowledge his debt to his brother poet, he petitioned the managers of the Canongate Kirk for permission to erect a headstone over Fergusson’s grave. His petition was granted and the work was given to Robert Burn, an Edinburgh architect, who designed the stone and supervised its erection. In a letter to Peter Hill on 5 February, 1792 (CL321) Burns remitted the sum of £5.10- and requested him to pay Burn’s account. In the letter the poet wryly observes:

He was two years in erecting it, after I commissioned him for it; and I have been two years paying him, after he sent me his account; so he and I are quits. - He had the hardiesse to ask me interest on the sum; but considering that the money was due by one Poet, for putting a tomb-stone over another, he may, with grateful surprise, thank Heaven that ever he saw a farthing of it.

Burns was not the only person whose livelihood had been adversely affected as a result of the war with France. A number of businesses in Edinburgh had gone to the wall. Writing to Hill in April 1793 (CL321), the poet expressed his concern:

I hope and trust that this unlucky blast which has overturned so many, and many worthy characters who four months ago little dreaded any such thing - will spare my Friend.

O! May the wrath and curse of all mankind, haunt and harass these turbulent, unprincipled musc [reants] who have involved a People in this ruinous business.

During the summer of 1794, Hill accompanied by David Ramsay of the Edinburgh Courant and a Mr. Cameron, who was a wholesale stationer and paper manufacturer, visited Burns in Dumfries. Following their visit Burns sent Hill a kippered salmon (smoked salmon) in October and advised him:

Front of a ‘Free’ letter to Peter Hill, note the enclosure of a kipper salmon!
If you have the confidence to say that there is anything of the kind in all your great City, superior to this in true Kipper relish and flavour, I will be avenged of your slander by not sending you another next season. - In return, the first party of Friends that dine with you (provided that your fellow-travellers and my trusty and well-beloved veterans in intimacy, Messrs Ramsay and Cameron be of the party) about that time in the afternoon when a relish, or devil, becomes grateful; give them two or three slices of the Kipper, and drink a bumper to your friends in Dumfries (CL323).

The poet’s next letter to Hill (CL324-5) was written while suffering the pangs of toothache. With the letter he enclosed a batch of epigrams, which seems to have been prompted by ‘the hell o’ a’ diseases’. He wrote:

I do not pretend that there is much merit in these Morceaux, but I have two reasons for sending them; primo, they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings while fifty troops of infernal Spirits are riding post from ear to ear along my jaw-bones; and secondly, they are so short, that you cannot leave off in the middle, and so hurt my pride in the idea that you found any Work of mine too heavy to get through.

It was probably this bout of toothache which prompted Burns to write his humorous ‘Address to the Toothache’ (CW553):

My curse on your envenom’d stang,
That shoots my tortur’d gums alang,
An’ thro’ my lugs gies mony a bang
Wi’ gnawin’ vengeance;
Tearing my nerves wi’ bitter twang
Like racking engines.

The final brief letter which Hill received from Burns was dated 29 January 1796, (CL325) and accompanied a gift of the annual kipper. It was sent with the express condition ‘that you do not, like a fool as you were last year, put yourself to five-times the value in expence of a return’. The letter closed with a promise to write again in a week or ten days. Unfortunately this promise was never fulfilled as the poet’s health was by then in ominous decline.

Peter Hill married Elizabeth Lindsay in 1780. She was the daughter of Sir John Lindsay and was considered to be Hill’s social superior. In several of his letters Burns asks to be remembered to her and in one (CL316), he expresses the hope that she is ‘as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever’. We learn from her grandson, however, that Mrs. Hill did not have a very high opinion of Burns. She looked with disfavour on the evenings he spent in the company of her husband and regarded his visits to Edinburgh with a certain amount of aversion. Hill was a member of the Crochallan Fencibles ‘with Bohemian likings and leanings’ and with a strong relish for the humorous aspect of things’. He probably needed little persuasion to spend an evening in Burns’s company. Of the marriage there were seven sons and seven daughter. Their eldest son, Peter, followed in his father’s business.

In 1805 Hill was appointed City Treasurer; and from 1809 to 1813, during Creech’s provostship, he acted as Treasurer of George Heriot’s Hospital. In 1814 he was appointed Chief Collector of Burgh taxes, which post he discharged till near the close of his life. He died on 17 February, 1837, having reached the advanced age of eightythree. It has been recorded that ‘he was prosperous through life till near the close, when he lost his means through over confidence in others’, but this statement has never been amplified.

In May, 1794, Burns sent a letter (CL322) to Hill by the hand of Alexander Findlater, his Supervisor of Excise at Dumfries. In it he wrote, - ‘Many of my letters to you, you were pleased to think well of, but writing to you was always the ready business of my heart, and I scarcely ever scrolled a line’. Burns took an artistic pride in his letters and would write them out in draft - or as he puts it, he ‘scrolled’ them - before committing them to the final letter. He adapted many of his
letters to suit his correspondents, but in his letters to Hill there is a freshness and spontaneity which indicates that he was writing to one with whom he enjoyed such a close friendship that placed no restraint upon his pen. It was a friendship that lasted almost to the end of Burns's life.

NOTES

6 Lord Cockburn, *op cit*, p104 n
8 *Ibid*
11 Letter to Robert Graham of Fintry (CL426)
12 Revelation, Chapter 7, verse 17
17 George Wilson, *op cit*, p2


Extract from **ROBERT BURNS The Tinder Heart** by HUGH DOUGLAS,
Published by Sutton Publishing Limited Phoenix Mill, Stroud,
Gloucestershire. Price £19.99

**THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN**

The frailties that cast their shade over the splendour of superior merit are more conspicuously glaring than where they are the attendants of mere mediocrity. It is only on the gem we are disturbed to see the dust; the pebble may be soiled, and we do not regard it.

‘Memoir concerning Burns’ written by Maria Riddell for the *Dumfries Journal*'

The three volleys fired by Volunteer colleagues over the coffin as Robert Burns was lowered into his grave were also a salute for the birth of his new child, the last fruit of the love which had followed him all the way from that first encounter with Jean Armour on the bleaching green at Mauchline. Marriage had proved no easier for Jean than courting, but she was still as deeply in love with the National Bard, now being given an honoured burial, as she had been with wild Rab Mossiegel all those years before. As his wife Jean had worked hard to make a home fit for a poet, although she knew nothing about poets or poetry.
Jean, from beginning to end, had always been willing to give herself totally to Burns in spite of everything; young Robert, nearly ten, and Maxwell, who now lay in her arms, were proof of this. He had left her with a fine crop of boys, but she had known the sorrow of losing every daughter she had borne him—all four of them. Lizzie Paton’s daughter was growing up at Mossgiel and Ann Park’s child was the only one of Rab’s girls still with her and she would continue to rear this little Elizabeth because she was Robert’s.

On 25 July 1796, as they buried her husband, Jean’s mind was not on the past, but on the future, the bleak outlook of rearing her children with little or no money. She need not have feared, for in death, Burns still had many friends, none more faithful than John Syme in Dumfries and Alexander Cunningham in Edinburgh, who both worked tirelessly to ensure that Jean and the children would never be in need.

Two days before the Poet’s death Syme had written to Cunningham suggesting they should do something for the family of the dying poet, and the following day, 20 July, unaware of Syme’s action, Cunningham sent off a similar letter to him: ‘We must think on what can be done for his [Burns’] family. I fear they are in a pitiable condition,’ Syme told the Edinburgh lawyer, who had remained a faithful friend to the Poet right to the end. ‘All that can be done shall be done by me,’ Cunningham said in his letter. ‘We must do the thing instantaneously and while the pulse of the Public will beat at the name of Burns.’ Cunningham proposed a subscription for Jean and the children, and that the Poet’s works, letters and songs should be sold to a London bookseller to raise more money. He felt sure that Burns could not have disposed of the copyright of his later work to Creech, and suggested they investigate the position, but without letting the wily Creech know. ‘Creech must not be consulted or dealt with,’ he warned.

Within a week seventy guineas had been subscribed in the Dumfries district, but further afield the plan met with less enthusiasm, especially in Edinburgh, where Cunningham said people offered him only ‘cold civility and humiliating advice’. Unfortunately, rumours were circulating in the city to the effect that the Excise and government were looking after Jean, so many felt they need do no more than take a guinea out of their pocket for the fund.

Ayrshire was no more generous: the parsimony of Burns’ native county angered Syme. ‘Col, Fullarton etc. in Ayrshire have as yet done nothing. Nay, those friends in Ayr etc. whom the Bard has immortalized have not contributed a sou!!! By Heavens, they should be immortally d—d, and a list of the d—d should be made out.’

In England the response was better, thanks mainly to two men, James Currie, a Dumfriesshire-born doctor now living in Liverpool, and James Shaw in London. But even so, by the following spring, Syme had raised no more than £500 with a promise of a few hundred more. However, thanks to the unflagging work of Syme and his little band, Jean was never in want for a day. The government never gave Burns’ widow a grant of any kind, but small annuities were paid later to some of the Poet’s sons and grandchildren.

Jean lived on comfortably in Dumfries until her death in 1834, having outlived her husband by thirty-eight years. She did make a number of journeys to visit members of the family around Scotland and in 1828 George Thomson persuaded her to come to Edinburgh, where she not only saw many of her husband’s friends, but also met Sir Walter Scott and ‘Clarinda’. What Agnes McLehose and Jean Burns had to say to one another was never disclosed, but they could have had little in common except the love of Robert Burns, and neither would be prepared to let any secrets about that out.

Jean’s son, Maxwell, died in 1799 at the age of three, and Francis just four years later, in 1803. Robert, her first born, had a career in the Stamp Office in London, but retired to Dumfries in 1833, the year before his mother’s death. He died in 1857. William Nicol and James Glencairn both joined the East India Company and eventually retired to Cheltenham, where James died in 1865, and William, the longest-lived of all Jean’s children, in 1872.
Betty, Lizzie Paton's child, who grew up at Mossgiel, married John Bishop, factor at Polkemmet, East Lothian, and they had seven children. She died in 1817, some said in childbirth. The other Elizabeth, Ann Park's child, who Jean mothered, married a private in the Stirlingshire Militia, who became a handloom weaver after he left the service. She was the longest-surviving of all Burns' children, dying in 1873.

Burns' reputation fared worse than his family's finance. Maria Riddell, with acute womanly intuition, knew there were some who would savage the Poet's reputation, so she immediately wrote a 'Memoir Concerning Burns' for the Dumfries Journal, which described his character in the warmest terms, yet did not flinch from the truth, and summed up his failings with her remark about being disturbed by the dust on the gem, but not noticing that the pebble is soiled.

Maria was right: Thomson, for whom Burns had written so many songs for little or no payment, rewarded the Poet with that obituary notice for the Edinburgh and Glasgow newspapers that spoke of the Poet's 'failures, which rendered them (his extraordinary endowments) useless to himself and his family.' This set the pattern for other writers, including Robert Heron, who had been the target of Burns' satire, and now took his revenge. Heron's 'Memoir' appeared in the Monthly Magazine during the first half of 1797, and was reprinted elsewhere. Although it gave a shrewd assessment of the Poet's work, the 'Memoir' damned him as a drunkard, a fornicator and a boor. It belittled his work as a farmer and exciseman and said he preferred the company he found in taverns and brothels to that of the rich and great. Nothing could have been more carefully calculated to alienate those best able to help Jean and her children.

Syme struggled against this tide of lies and half-truths to ensure Jean's financial security and to preserve the poet's good name by producing a book of Burns' work, which would raise money for the fund and record the true facts of his life. Syme was no expert and was uncertain as to what kind of book should be published, but he felt it ought to be more than simply a volume of Burns' poetry. Dr. Currie in Liverpool agreed, and became so enthusiastic that he volunteered to write a life of the Poet, which could be included with the poems. No sooner had Currie made his offer than he realized that he was not qualified for such an undertaking, so he wrote to Syme suggesting that some scholar such as Dugald Stewart should undertake the work. No volunteer came forward, so Currie was pressed to write the Life, and the result was a much-criticized first full biography of the Poet.

Currie produced his work from a disorganized mass of papers (the sweepings of the Poet's desk, he called them) and his aim, it must be remembered, was to raise money for Jean. Currie bowdlerized or cut letters or poems, which he thought not quite decent, and he repeated some of the criticisms of the Poet's character. Currie was obsessed by the drinking and sexual side of Burns' life and peppered his work with innuendo, which attracted the worst possible interpretation.

He who suffers the pollution of inebriation, how shall he escape other pollutions? But let us refrain from the mention of errors over which delicacy and humanity draw the veil. Ignoring this side of Burns' life might have done him little harm had Currie not been so careless as to lose many of the papers, or so prudish as to destroy others and thus deny future biographers the opportunity of presenting a truer portrait of the Poet. As a result of Currie's actions, and correspondents who were so sensitive about their own characters that they destroyed their letters, much material which might have shed light on the Poet's life was lost. Currie's work raised nearly £2,000 for the Poet's family, but future generation have thought the cost to his reputation too high.

It is easy enough to judge the poetry of Robert Burns after two hundred years because its quality and content have made his immortal. His songs continue to spread his reputation not just across Scotland but around the world. The songs which filled the latter part of his life were Burns' crowning achievement and amounted to nothing short of a miraculous rescue of Scottish folksong and the re-establishment of it as an element of the nation's vital cultural life. Burns was self-
taught but his command of Scottish folk-song was breath-takingly broad: having mastered it, he fused his own genius to it to turn it into a collection beyond price. For that alone, he deserves immortality.

Love was the most vital single element in Burns' folk-song writing. His love songs are a legend and Burns was a legendary lover, but others had to pay the price for the inspiration that took him to the mountain peaks of lyric-writing.

Every generation has set Robert Burns’ love life against the mores of its own time, rather than the century in which he lived. The most blatant exercise of such censorship can be found in Henley and Henderson’s centenary ‘life’ of Burns, where they described the ‘scalade’ letter as in some parts ‘too curious for a Victorian page.’ Quoting the part about the actual ‘scalade of horse-litter’ they could not bring themselves to finish the sentence. ‘She did all this like a good girl and...’ – ‘The rest is unquotable,’ they wrote, ending the matter there just as surely as Currie had ended it nearly a century before.5

In Scotland attitudes to illegitimacy in Burns’ time were probably closer to those of the present day than any time in between, with sexual intercourse outside marriage a widely accepted fact of life. In the eighteenth century country girls had no rights or aspirations, and consequently were docile and accepted what life brought, and if that was a love-child into the house, then so be it. The Kirk might rail and summon transgressors to stand on the cutty stool, but there was little it could do to alter the situation especially in Burns’ West of Scotland, where folk had minds of their own. Every Kirk Session minute book in Ayrshire at that time solemnly records men and women who had fallen foul of the church by committing the sins of fornication or adultery, but that did not curb either.

So far as we know, after the Kirk and community had their say, life went on very much as usual for most girls who had a child by Robert Burns. Only poor Jenny Clow seems to have suffered, and the Poet tried to put matters right for her.

Burns’s approach to sex was aggressive, as was his approach to every situation in his life, and it was well in tune with the military metaphors through which he described each sexual campaign – the infantry and the big guns went into battle together, and too often they conquered easily. Yet he could show profound tenderness towards the female sex, and he dearly loved the children they gave him, whether in or out of marriage. Shortly after Jean Armour’s first set to twins was born he expressed his feelings to his friend John Kennedy. “’Tis there, Man in blest,’ he told Kennedy:

’Tis there, my Friend, man feels a consciousness of something within him, above the trodden clod! The grateful reverence to the hoary, earthly Authors of his being – The burning glow when he clasps the Woman of his Soul to his bosom – the tender yearnings of heart for the little Angels to whom he has given existence – These, Nature has pour’d in milky streams about the human heart: and the Man who never rouses them into action by the inspiring influences of their proper objects, loses by far the most pleasurable [sic] part of his existence.6

He respected women, too, as he demonstrated when he wrote an address for the actress Louisa Fontenelle’s benefit night at Dumfries Theatre on 26 November 1792. For the actress, whom he admired greatly, he chose the theme, ‘The Rights of Woman,’ and opened his address grandly:

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;
Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.
The Right of Woman was inspired by Tom Paine's recent Rights of Man, of course, and it may not have taken the women’s liberation movement, as we know it, very far forward, but it was a recognition that women have rights at a time when they enjoyed very few. Even a woman’s property belonged to her husband.

Burns’ faltering step along the women’s liberation road, spoken by Mrs. Fontenelle, listed three rights only – protection, care and admiration. Some of the sentiments expressed must have sounded strange to her audience who would have been aware that they came from the pen of the man who, only the year before, had fathered one child by his wife and another by the Globe Inn barmaid within a fortnight.

There was, indeed, in far less polished days,
A time, when rough rude Man had naughty ways:
Would swagger, swear, get drunk, kick up a riot,
Nay, even thus invade a lady’s quiet!

At the end Burns could not resist drawing in his political opinions, by quoting the cry of the French revolutionaries, ‘Ça ira!’

Let Majesty your first attention summon,
Ah! Ça ira! THE MAJESTY OF WOMAN!

In the real world outside Dumfries Theatre Royal, Robert Burns was well aware of the rights of women and respected them. He accepted the women he met on their merits and treated them as equals, which few other men of his time were prepared to. When he met an intelligent, intellectual woman such as Peggy Chalmers or Maria Riddell, he enjoyed their company, wit and conversation as freely as he would have done that of his intellectual male friends.

From Robert’s earliest days, when Nell Kilpatrick interrupted his harvest-work at Mount Oliphant and Peggy Thompson upset his trigonometry at Kirkoswald, his tinder heart was easily ignited by the girl who was currently in his life. His boundless passion led to extreme pain when she or he moved on, or in the case of ‘Highland Mary’ Campbell, years of remorse after she died.

Jean, the ever faithful wife, accepted all this with equanimity, although Catherine Carswell suggests that Jean might not have been as complaisant as history suggests. She must have been a very docile woman, however, to accept her husband’s way of life, for she never stood in the way of his friendships which took him out to dine and drink with important people around Dumfries, and she certainly never hankered after being a part of that life. Jean was content to make a home for him, and provide the background against which he could write. Why did she accept all this so meekly?

The answer may simply have been that she understood her husband’s passion, after all she had joyed in it many times herself, and she loved him enough to accept him for what he was rather than for what she would have liked him to be. Jean’s contribution to her husband’s work was more than to hum over a few tunes to him: by her quiet, constant support she made his song-writing possible.

Robert Burns never ceased to write songs from boyhood in the fields at Mount Oliphant until his final days in Mill Hole Brae in Dumfries. From beginning to end, love fired his muse. Like the Stewart dynasty, Burns’ song-writing came with a lass and it went with a lass. He began with handsome Nell Kilpatrick, and when Jessy Lewars, sister of his Excise colleague, nursed him as he was dying, Burns wrote one of his simplest, yet tenderest songs for her. His strength had already ebbed away and he knew his heart could not hold out much longer; even the fires of passion had all but burned themselves up at last. All too aware of his own vulnerability and the
financial worries which filled his thoughts, he hummed over an old tune *Lennoxlove to Blantyre*, until he had composed one of the very best songs he ever wrote to fit the air. It was the touching song of comfort and devotion, *O, Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast*.11 No song could have provided a more fitting end to Robert Burns’ career as a singer of songs, not just for Scotland, but for the whole of humanity:

*O, waer thou in the cauld blast*

*Or were I in the wildest waist,*

*On yonder lea, on yonder lea,*

*Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,*

*My plaidie to the angry airt,*

*The desert were a Paradise,*

*I’d shelter thee, I’d shelter thee.*

*If thou waert there, if thou waert there.*

*Or did Misfortune’s bitter storms*

*Or were I monarch o the globe,*

*Around thee blow, around thee blow,*

*Wi thee to reign, wi thee to reign,*

*Thy bield should be my bosom,*

*The brightest jewel in my crown*

*To share it a’, to share it a’.*

*Wad be my queen, wad be my queen.*

Notes:

3 *Edinburgh Evening Courant* and *Glasgow Mercury*, 23 July 1796

**ROBERT BURNS and the Rev. JOHN SKINNER**

During Robert Burns tour of the Highlands in 1787 and visit to Aberdeen he called on Mr. Chalmers, the printer and publisher of the *Aberdeen Journal*. Whatever interest he may have had in him, while he was there a man came into the office who excited his interest still more. This was no less than Rev. John Skinner, Bishop of Aberdeen. Burns’s interest in that gentleman will best be explained by a letter which the Bishop wrote to his father about the meeting:—

“Calling at the printing-office the other day, whom should I meet but the famous Burns, the Ayrshire Bard, and on Mr. Chalmers telling him that I was the son of ‘Tullochgorum’ there was no help but I must step into the inn hard by and drink a glass with him and the printer. Our time was short, as he was just setting off for the south, but we had fifty ‘Auld Sangs’ through hand, and spent an hour or so most agreeably.

‘Did your father write ‘The Ewie wi’ the Crookit Horn?’ he asked.

‘Ye,’ I replied.

‘On an’ I had the loon that did it!’ said he in a rapture of praise. ‘But tell him how I love and esteem and venerate his truly Scottish muse.’
"On my mentioning his 'Ewie,' and how you were delighted with it, he said it was all owing to yours, which had started the thought.

"He had been at Gordon Castle, and had come by Peterhead. ‘Then,’ said I, ‘you were (on the road to P. you passed) within four Scots miles of ‘Tullochgorum’s’ dwelling.’

"Had you seen the look he gave, and how expressive of vexation. Had he been your own son you could not have wished a better proof and affection.

"’Well,’ said he at parting — and shaking my hand as if he had really been my brother — ‘I am happy in having seen you, and thereby conveying my long-harboured sentiments of regard for your worthy sire. Assure him of it in the heartiest manner, and that never did a devotee of the Virgin Mary go to Loretto with more fervour than I would have approached his dwelling, and worshipped at his shrine.’

"He was collecting on his tour all the ‘Auld Scots Sangs’ he had not heard of before, with the tunes.

"‘Perhaps,’ said he, ‘Your father might assist me in making this collection, but, if not, I should be proud in any way to rank him among my correspondents.’

"‘Then,’ said I, ‘give me your direction, and it is probable you may hear from him sometime or other.’

"On this he wrote his direction on a slip of paper, which I enclose, that you may see it under his own hand."

An attempt must now be made to give the setting of the above communication. The intensity of Burns’s admiration for the Rev. John Skinner cannot be understood without some indication, however brief, of the manner of man he was. In particular, the full significance and telling appropriateness of his famous song, “Tullochgorum,” cannot be appreciated without knowing his circumstances at the time. Skinner’s father was schoolmaster first in the parish of Birse, on Deeside, and then at Echt, nearer Aberdeen; and was noted for sending more young men to the Northern University than almost any other schoolmaster. The son was an apt pupil of such a teacher, gained a bursary at Marischal College, and ever after practised Latin composition in the most difficult form, namely, Latin verse.

When he had finished his Arts Course, while teaching at Monimusk, and intending to return to the Divinity Hall the following winter, he was so taken with the services of the Episcopal Church, that he made up his mind to join it. Being a young man of talent and highly educated, he was ordained Priest at the age of twenty-one and was immediately instituted to the charge at Longside, near Peterhead (1742), the chapel being at a hamlet called Linshart. The fact that this was only three years before the Jacobite rising of 1745 will at once suggest that his position soon became difficult and dangerous. The Episcopalians were all suspected of a leaning to Jacobitism, and perhaps not unjustly or unjustifiably; it was as natural for them to be loyal to the Stuarts as for the Presbyterians to be loyal to the Hanoverians.

At the rising in 1745-6 Aberdeen was under martial law for three months. Parties of soldiers scourd the country with a kind of licence to burn, wreck, and destroy everything pertaining to the public worship of the Episcopal Church. In this connection, of the two bodies of troops employed, the Campbells were not a whit behind what the Highland Host had been in Ayrshire, and Lord Mark Ker’s dragoons were not a whit behind those of Clavers in the thoroughness with which they did their work. Mr. Skinner’s chapel was burned: his manse was searched, not excepting the bedroom in which his wife was lying unwell; everything portable was carried off, including all his papers.

In the end of 1746 a Toleration Act was passed, by which the clergy were allowed to minister to their people on condition of taking the Oath of Allegiance and praying for King George by name.

Well, one way and another, Mr. Skinner complied with the conditions: but when that was done
he was almost in a worse position than before. He now found himself between the Devil and the deep sea. The Church regarded compliance with the Act as sin: the complying clergy, of whom there were only five in the whole country, were therefore subjected to Church Discipline. To have had the advantage on either side would have been some comfort; but it was surely a trying position to be in, to be punished by the Government as Jacobites and censured by the Church as Hanoverians.

"TULLOCHGORUM,"

It is easy to imagine what arguments there had been between the complying clergy and the determined Jacobites. On one occasion there was a meeting at Ellon of the clergy of the diocese of Aberdeen, in the house of Mr. Montgomery, the Excise officer, when the usual argument was being carried on. In order to change the subject, Mrs. Montgomery remarked to Mr. Skinner that it was a pity that some of the old Scots airs were lost for want of words to sing to them, mentioning in particular the tune of "Tullochgorum,." That Skinner wrote the song, as we now have it, complete on the spot is scarcely credible; probably he seized the pretext, went and wrote several verses, and finished the song afterwards.

In 1748 a penal Act was passed against the Episcopalians more sever than the former. The clergy were forbidden to perform public worship; all they were permitted to do was to conduct family worship in their own house, with not more than four outsiders present. The penalty for infringing this law was, for the first offence, six months' imprisonment; for the second, banishment to one of his Majesty's plantations.

Various devices were adopted for evading the law: for example, Skinner used to stand just inside the door of his cottage when preaching to his people, who filled both rooms, while a number
'that greatest of benevolent institutions established in honour of Robert Burns'. - *Glasgow Herald*.

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stood outside the door, so that he was not in the same room with more than four. One day, while delivering his sermon, a hen that had been in the house when the congregation assembled wanted to get out; and, as the manner of hens is, instead of walking quietly out she had to fly, making as much noise as possible. Flying past the minister’s head then, she scattered to the winds the leaves of his sermon, and there was difficulty in collecting them. With or without them, he proceeded with his discourse, merely remarking, “That’s the last time at a fool ‘ll stop my mou’.” And ever after he discarded manuscripts when preaching.

But the lady informer who got the chapel burned was on the watch. Skinner had written a lampoon in which she was highly praised by Jezebel for the former job, and her revenge was that in 1753 he spent six months in Aberdeen Prison. He suffered no extraordinary privations, however. His friends supplied him with necessaries; his little boy (afterwards Bishop of Aberdeen) was allowed to keep him company; and he spent his leisure in reading Hebrew and in applying the Hutchinsonian interpretation to the Bible.

Returning to Linshart at the end of his six months, he remained unmolested till 1807, the year of his death. His home was a thatched cottage of three rooms, visible from a long, straight stretch of the Peterhead road; and his lamp, burning regularly till after twelve o’clock, was a beacon to many a belated traveller. His library was a closet five feet square. That he was an accomplished and cultured scholar is proved by the fact that he could write real poetry in English, Scots and Latin. His ready wit is attested by many anecdotes, and the voucher for his unbounded humour, his song “The Ewie wi” the Crookit Horn.”

CORRESPONDENCE WITH BURNS.

At the meeting in Aberdeen Burns had expressed a strong desire to have Mr. Skinner for a correspondent, at last. Accordingly, on October 25th, he received the following familiar epistle:

TO ROBIE BURNS, THE PLOUGHMAN POET

O happy hour for evermair,
That led my chil’ up Chalmers’ stair,
An’ gae him, what he values sair,
Sae braw a skance
O’Ayrshire’s dainty Poet there,
By lucky chance.

Wae’s my auld heart I wasna wi” ye,
Tho’ whorth your while I cudna gie ye;
But sin I hadna hap to see ye
When ye was north,
I’m baudo to send my service tae ye,
Hyne o’er the Forth.

Sae proud’s I am that ye hae heard
O’my attempt to be a Bard,
An’ think my muse nae that ill-faured;
Seal o’ your face,
I wadna wish for mair reward
Than your guid grace.

Your bonnie beukie, line by line,
I’ve read, an’ think it freely fine;
Indeed I winna ca’ divine,
As ithermicht,

For that, ye ken, frae pen like mine,
Wad no be richt.

But, by my sang, I dinna won’er;
That ye’ve admirers mony hun’er;
Lat gowkit fleeps preten’ to skunner
An’ tak’ offence,
Ye’ve naething said that leuks like blun’er
Tae fowk o’ sense.

Your pawky “Dream” has humour in’t;
I never saw the like in print.
The Birthday Laurat dursna mint
As ye hae dane;
Asn’ yet there’s nae a single hint
Can be ill-ta’en.

Your “Mailie” an’your guid “Auld Mare”
An” “Halloweven’s” funny cheer;
There’s nane that reads them far or near,
But reezes Robie,
An’thinks them as divertin’ gear
As Yorick”s Tobie.

But, O, the weel-tauld “Cottar’s Night”
Is what gies me the maist delight –
A piece sae finished an’ sae tight,
   There’s nane o’s a’
Could preachment timmer clëaner dight
In Kirk or ha’.

But what needs this or that to name?
It’s owned by a’ there’s nae a theme
Ye tak’ in hand, but’s a’ the same;
An’ nae ane o’ them
But weel may challenge a’ the fame
‘At we can gie them.

For me, I heartily allow ye
The warl’ o’ praise sae justly due ye;
An’ but a Plowman! Shall I trow ye,
Gi’en it be sae,
A miracle I will avow ye,
Deny’t wha may.

Sae what avails a leash o’ learn
Through seven lang years, an’ some guid mair,
Whan Plowman lad, wi’ Nature bare,
Sae far surpasses
A’ we can do wi’ study sair
To climb Parnassus.

But, thanks to praise, ye’re i’ your prime,
An’ may chant on this lang, lang time;
For lat me tell ye, ‘twere a crime
To ha’d your tongue
Wi’ sic a knack’s ye hae at rhyme,
An’ you sae young.

Ye ken it’s nae for ane like me
To be sae droll as ye can be,
But ony help ‘at I can gie,
Tho’ be but sma,
Your least command, I se lat ye see,
Sall gar me draw.

An hour or twa, by hook or crook,
An’ maybe twa some orra ouk,
That I can spare frae Haly Book,
For that’s my hobby,
I’ll slip my wa’s to some bye nook
An’ crack wi’ Robie.

Wad ye but only crack again,
Just what ye like, in ony strain,
I’ll tak’ it kind; for to be plain
I do expec’ it;
An’ mair than that, I’ll no be fain
Gi’en ye neglec’ it.

To Linshart, gi’en my hame ye speir,
Where I hae heft near fifty year;
’Twill come in coorse, ye needna fear –
The pairt’s weel kent;
An’ postage, be it cheap or dear,
I’ll pay content

Sae, cantsy Plowman, fare ye weel,
Lord bless ye lang wi’ hae an heil,
An’ keep ye ay the honest chiel
‘At ye hae been;
Syne lift ye till a better beil
Whan this is dane.

This Auld Scots muse I’ve coorted lang,
An’ spared nae pains tae win her;
Dowf tho’ I be in rustic sang,
I’m no a raw beginner.
But now auld age tak’s dowie turns,
Yet, troth, as I’m a sinner,
I’ll aye be fond o’ Robie Burns
While I can sign   JOHN SKINNER

BURNS TO SKINNER

The very night on which he received the above epistle Burns sat down and wrote the following reply:–

“Edinburgh, October 25th, 1787”

“Reverend and venerable Sir,— Accept in plain, dull prose my most sincere thanks for the best poetical compliment I ever received. I assure you, Sir, as a poet you have conjured up an airy demon of vanity in my fancy which the best abilities in your other capacity would be ill able to lay.
"I regret, and while I live I shall regret that when I was in the north, I had not the pleasure of paying a younger brother’s dutiful respect to the author of the best Scotch song ever Scotland saw — ‘Tullochgorum’s my delight.’ The world may think slightingly of the craft of song-making if they please; but as Job says ‘O that mine adversary had written a book’ — let them try. There is a certain something in the old Scotch songs which peculiarly marks them, not only from English songs but also from the modern efforts of song-wrights in our native manner and language. The only remains of this enchantment — these spells of the imagination — rests with you.

There is a work going on in Edinburgh just now which claims your best assistance. An engraver in this town has set about collecting and publishing all the Scotch songs, with the music, that can be found (Johnson’s Musical Museum)...... Your three songs — ‘Tullochgorum,’ ‘John of Badenyon,’ and ‘The Ewie wi’ the Crookit Horn’ — go in this second number...... One half of Scotland already give your songs to other authors.

"Paper is done. I beg to hear from you, the sooner the better. I am, with the warmest sincerity, your obliged humble servant,

R. Burns.”

ADAM BURNES (1832-1876):
DISTANT RELATIVE OF THE BARD

James Mackay produced a definitive biography of Robert Burns in 1992. This contains an extremely useful appraisal of earlier biographers and examination of their sources. In addition, it includes a study of the lives of those whom the poet came in contact. In the latter regard I was particularly interested in the poet’s family tree, especially the comment on page 22: “Adam Burnes (1832-1876) the eldest son of Dr. Burnes, founded the first bank of Australia.” This later fact was derived from a paper by K. G. Burns on the bard’s genealogy published in 1921. In this paper Adam Burnes, who was born at Montrose on the 12th June 1832, and who died at Sydney, New South Wales on 9th June 1876, is claimed to have founded the Australia Oriental Banking Company, the first bank to be established in the colony. I have been unable to identify this company in any Australian reference. The most famous Scot in Australian history with the name Burns was a James (1846-1923) born in Polmont near Edinburgh, and to my knowledge no relative of the poet, and who established the Queensland Steam Shipping Company with another Scot, a Glaswegian, Robert Philip (1851-1922). The first bank in Australia, founded with the encouragement of the Scottish Highland Governor, Lachlan Macquarrie (1810-1821), of Ulva (9, 10), was the Bank of New South Wales in 1817 (4, 6, 7, 8). Governor Macquarrie invited 13 of the Colony’s leading citizens to meet and help form the bank. Adam Burnes’ name does not appear on the list, nor on the lists of any subsequent meetings, according to Judy Macarthur, Archivist of the Westpac Banking Corporation in Homebush Bay, New South Wales (personal communication). Ms. Macarthur has also reassured me that Adam Burnes’ name is not listed as an early director or shareholder. The first bank tokens and notes in Australia were issued by the Bank of New South Wales in 1817, and the first savings bank was opened in Sydney in 1819. Adam Burnes, it should
be pointed out, was born much later in 1832.

However, in RF. Holder’s two volume *Bank of New South Wales: A History* makes mention of “A. Burnes” of the London-based National Bank of New Zealand! Further research by Ms. Macarthur unearthed a book entitled *Banking in New Zealand* written by B. A. Moore and J. S. Barton, published in 1935. The chapter on “the National Bank of New Zealand, Ltd.” describes the bank as “the last created of the Anglo-Australian banks, having their head office in London”, and mentions Mr. Adam Burnes as the first Inspector and General Manager to be appointed, arriving in New Zealand in February, 1873. He is reported as having resigned from the Bank in 1881. This may well have been the said Adam Burnes, although the date of his resignation is some five years after his death!

Finally, the genealogical chart published in 1921 indicates that Adam Burnes (1832-1876) was not the son of James Burnes (1801-1862), Physician General of the Bombay Army, but of his brother Adam Burnes, Notary Public of Montrose, and his first wife Horatio Gordon who died in 1834 at the early age of 28.

The reader should tak tent: I dinna seek tae fin faut wi James Mackay”’s wunnerfu muckle buik: anerly tae correck a wee mistak.

W. Watson Buchanan, Emeritus Professor of Medicine
McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario Canada

References

2 Ibid. page 22.

**ADAM BURNES**

The following notes have been extracted from an article in “Arawata”, the staff magazine of the Nation Bank of New Zealand, Ltd., October. 1963, by Ross Gore:- “When the National Bank of New Zealand, Ltd. was formed in London in 1872, one of the first tasks of the Board of Directors was the selection of a suitable man to take charge of the colonial business. The choice fell on Adam Burnes, a Scotsman with considerable experience of banking in both
Australia and New Zealand. Adam Burnes was born at Montrose on 12 June 1832. Exactly when Burnes sailed for the colonies is not known, possibly while still in his teens, but it is known that he joined the service of the Oriental Bank Corporation, the first of the Anglo-Indian banks to receive a Royal Charter, and which had branches in Australia and throughout the East. It is thought that Adam Burnes served in at least one of the Eastern branches before going to Australia.

When in 1857 the Oriental extended its operations to New Zealand, Burnes was sent over to the Wellington branch. In the following year, on 14 January 1858, he married a niece of the Hon. John Johnston, founder of the old-established Wellington merchant firm of Johnston & Co., Ltd. He was then 26 years of age. In 1863 the New Zealand business of the Oriental Bank Corporation was taken over by the Bank of New South Wales and Burnes went back to Australia where he joined the staff of the Colonial Bank of Australasia in Melbourne, in what capacity we do not know, but by 1867, when only 35 years of age, he was General Manager.

Burnes left the service of the Colonial Bank at the end of October, 1871, and went to England, presumably at the invitation of the board of the newly-formed National Bank of New Zealand. He spent ten months in London with the directors, and then, with the title of Inspector and General Manager, sailed for New Zealand, arriving on 15 February, 1873. He opened the first branch of the Bank on the corner of Featherston and Panama Street, Wellington, on 25 March, 1873, in leased premises. Adam Burnes was then 41 years of age, a giant of a man, of striking good looks and pleasing personality. A brief description of him may be found in Geoffrey Blainey's "Gold and Paper", a history of the National Bank of Australasia. Blainey writes: "Adam Burnes, handsome, jolly, accustomed to flopping his eighteen stone on the couch of his office after the usual lion-sized lunch, is said to have had the easy-going manners of a man who was reared in a bank of the East". Easy-going in manner Burnes may have been, but he was also energetic and from the start pursued a policy of expansion. In opening for business in New Zealand, the National had acquired the business of the Bank of Otago with its 13 branches, all within the provinces of Otago and Southland. Within two years Burnes had increased the number of branches throughout New Zealand to 31.

At the end of 1874 one of the directors, John Bridges, arrived in New Zealand to tour the country and to make a report on the business generally. It is obvious from these reports and Burnes's comments on them that these two did not hit it off. Burnes's appointment had been for three years but he resigned his position at the end of April, eight months before his term expired. He was paid his full salary up until the end of the year. Burnes sailed for Australia, leaving his wife and family in Wellington. Apparently he had intended either returning for them or sending for them after he had settled in some new position in Australia and had he done so it would have been interesting to have followed his subsequent career. However, Adam Burnes died almost immediately after his arrival in Australia at the early age of 43. From some remarks of the chairman at a subsequent meeting it seems that he was a sick man even before he left New Zealand. Burnes's family remained in New Zealand and one of his sons was for some time in the service of the National Bank.

"Some of the details of the history of the National Bank's first general manager were obtained from the Bank's archives, others from Australian historian, Geoffrey Blainey, and further additional
information, the date and place of his birth, his service with the Oriental Bank Corporation, his marriage in Wellington, and his early death, together with the photograph here reproduced were supplied by Mrs. John Spiers of Wellington, a grand-daughter of Adam Burnes.

Burnes is an interesting and colourful figure in the history of Colonial banking. Whatever the rights and wrongs of his differences of opinion with the board, it must be admitted that he was a personality and a man of energy and initiative. To have attained the position of general manager of an Australian bank at the age of 35 was in itself an achievement and it is interesting to speculate on his future had he lived the normal span. No matter what course it had taken, one feels that his life would never have lacked interest.”

Extract from A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS The Natural World of Robert Burns by JOHN YOUNG, 11 Restenneth Place, Lunanhead, Forfar, Angus. DD8 3NF. Price £14.95 (350 pages).

ROBERT BURNS AND NATURE CONSERVATION

By
John G. Young

"Mark the winds, and mark the skies,
Ocean's ebb and ocean's flow.
Sun and Moon but set to rise,
Round and round the seasons go.

Why then ask of silly man
To oppose great Nature's plan."

Some six years after his death in 1796, there commenced in Greenock, the first of the commemorative suppers which are now held traditionally each year on 25th January, his birthday, although the Burns “season” now extends until March. From such humble beginnings, Burns is now revered and celebrated all over the world. There are for example some 200 memorials to him in different parts of the globe and he is now translated into some 41 languages, Portuguese, Finnish and the Gaelic being the latest.

Intellectuals have often attempted to suppress the Burns cult which so effectively and comprehensively overshadows the rest of Scottish literature. But Burns remains celebrated and popular even some 200 years after his death, quite simply by the will of the people, not only in Scotland or where expatriate Scots have been literally forced to emigrate to - in Canada, Australia or New Zealand - but also now in such diverse locations as Alaska, Argentina, Bangladesh, Botswana, South Pole Base, Russia and China. Suffice it to say, he is honoured wherever his tender, moving, humanitarian philosophies find fertile ground among intelligent people. No other European poet or writer in modern times has enjoyed such international acclaim.

Nonetheless it remains unusual to attend a properly structured Burns Supper anywhere, without at least one of the principal speakers referring to either his love of, or inspiration by “nature”, and with some 2,943 references to it in his works who can deny that! Nature in turn, is invariably
either rarely defined or more commonly, inaccurately quoted, the raison d'etre of course for this article. Burns' loving naturalists do remain rather scarce on the ground.

He was described and adopted officially as Scotland’s National Bard. Burns has also been variously titled at The People’s Poet or The Ploughman Poet. He himself obliquely suggested another very appropriate title, that of Poet of Nature, to which he ascribed admirably in his “Epistle to William Simpson” in which he quite deliberately surrenders the fierce competitive city-based ground, of the then current literature sources to other. In obvious preference to what he interpreted as nature.

_O Nature! a’ thy shews an forms_
To feeling, pensive hearts hae charms!
Whether the summer kindly warms,
Wi life an light;
Or winter howls, in gusty storms,
The lang, dark night!

_The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,_
_Til by himsel he learn’d to wander,_
_Adown some trotting burn’s meander,_
_An no think lang:_
_O sweet to stray, an pensive ponder_
_A heart-felt sang!_

_The warly race may drudge an drive,_
_Hot-shouther, jundie, stretch, an strive,_
_Let me fair Nature’s face descree,_
_An I, wi pleasure,_
_Shall let the busy, grumbling hive_
_Bum owre their treasure._

He thus demonstrated in my view, his astute philosophical knowledge and genuine love of all things natural that springs only to the born and bred countryman and gained of a deep sincere respect, an enquiring mind and most importantly, and often missing, humility! These are aspects that no amount of training can instill for “the cit”.

Burns’ writings encompassed the whole scene, the broad canvas of landscape in season, the plants, trees and animals that lived within it; what we now call ecological systems. He especially did not exclude the people working in the countryside as part of nature, but rather he recognised and indeed emphasised the interdependence of both from a practical and humanitarian point of view. He and his family, principally as farmers, were very much part of the struggle to simply survive in the harsh, demanding, unrelenting but nonetheless beautiful, interesting and artistically inspiring rural environment of the mid-18th century.

Poet Burns was, as most of us are today, privileged to work, live in, or at least visit, what, in my view, can only be described as the magnificence of Scotland’s landscape, whether one’s personal needs are simply to enjoy the scenery, study, conserve or sport with the associated wildlife, or socialise with and serve the people.

ACCESS

Scotland’s landscape, although modified during the past two centuries, especially by agriculture, forestry and industrial revolution, has now reached a crisis point where much conservation and communicative interpretation work requires to be done. Scotland remains truly unique but people must continue to live off the produce the land can provide and on it to maintain viable settlements in the most remote areas.

Although undoubtedly, a large, sensitive and, at times, extremely controversial issue, the demands for greater access to the countryside by the 80% of the population who are now urban-based is real enough and understandable.

To them, the open space providing a wilderness experience is a necessary release from the stress and pressures of city life. In turn they must appreciate that the land they tend to regard as a play or recreation area is indeed someone else’s workplace, vital to the economy of Scotland and they too demand very careful consideration.

It is now surely obvious to all, that unplanned and unrestricted access can only lead to the rapid demise of this precious resource.

Basically, the problem remains that, on an island with obviously a fixed area of land, the demands of an increasing human population for multi-land use simply cannot now be ignored
and solutions to accommodate the inevitable increase and demand for countryside access must be put in hand sooner rather than later. In Scotland, fortunately, we seem to have a limited degree of time in our favour, to resolve our town and countryside planning. Time, at least when compared with some of the rather frantic developments experienced in the more affluent south.

At a basic level of philosophy such problems are indeed only for solving. In this case, in my view, all can be compatible given a vehicle for discussion and the sincere goodwill of the various countryside users to sit down at the proverbial table.

Clearly the vehicle must be the new Scottish Natural Heritage agency, financed from the Scottish Office at St. Andrew’s House and launched on 1st April, 1992. The new, enthusiastic and capable directorship deserves the support of the people. They simply must be assisted by the people of Scotland to succeed, it is not just landscape, plants and animals which are at risk now. Indeed it is the total rich diverse natural sphere, affecting the very fabric of society; the countryside scenario, the essence of which can either both soothe or stimulate and provide the artistic and the sensitive with the essential and valuable ‘quality of life’ that has made Scotland the envy of the world.

HISTORY

I had originally planned to prepare a potted history of nature conservation in Britain but on reflection, not only have other authors already done so in greater detail than I would care to inflict on readers, but more importantly my personal philosophy is that in a dynamic nature conservation programme historical reviews can only be useful if we can resolve to learn from the inevitable mistakes that were made. Conservation in Scotland can only be forward looking while conscious of the need to look critically at ourselves and hopefully be distanced from what was the current use of hyperbole, gobbledygook, the crippling and soul destroying administration and departmental so-called procedures that had alienated the bulk of the population to date.

The late Sir James Fisher, who was arguably the doyen of latter day authors on the history of nature conservation and ornithology in Britain, included Burns in his list of some 30 notable “birdwatchers” active in Britain during the 18th century, a list which included such notable figures as George Montagu, William Blake, Mary Lamb, James Hogg, Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Moore.

Sir James was obviously and specifically dealing with birds; had he encompassed the full range of Robert Burns’ records, I have no doubt that he too would have agreed with my supposition and described the Bard as Ornithologist-Naturalist and Conservationist.

It is fair enough to compare the natural history lists of Burns with those of his contemporaries but totally futile by present day standards. The upsurge of interest in “The Natural World” has been fuelled by concern for the environment aided by publicity and massive exposure of generally excellent documentary and biologically explicit educational films on television.

These have all followed on from the first of the BBC “Look” programmes, hosted by the late Sir Peter Scott, which triggered and demonstrated the potential power of television as a communicating media taking the conservation message into the living rooms of large numbers of people.

Since that era, interest in the environment has accelerated at an amazing pace. Pre, and immediately post-war naturalists, armed with butterfly net, vasculum and lens, or daring to “look” at birds with no intention of shooting them, other than with a camera, were formerly, quite literally, branded as cranks.

Suddenly, they found themselves accepted, their numbers inevitably multiplied but the new found popularity, unfortunately, mainly attracted the so-called middle classes to the virtual exclusion of the urban-based working population.

The veritable flood of well presented and widely distributed films to an ever-increasing audience, the availability of good, cheap books, the new interest in, for example, extra-mural classes, and an added emphasis on biological
and conservation training in colleges and schools, brought a new awareness and had the effect of drawing in thousands of devotees and relatively quickly brought rising standards in fieldcraft and species identification. The ornithologist, previously judged by his egg collection, and the botanist, by his herbarium, had become not only respectable but "in people". Societies representing the various natural history groups flourished and the official stamp of conservation approval was at last given by the Government of the day, establishing the Nature Conservancy in 1949. These indeed were exciting times, largely influenced by Max Nicholson, and under the Chairmanship of a Dumfriesshire Burns’ enthusiast, the late Sir Arthur Bryce Duncan, a well known, popular and respected farmer, keen game shot and all round naturalist, but above all, a country gentleman ever ready to share his time and expertise with anyone who showed an interest.

"The fine beginnings" were unfortunately not to last. To date, nature conservation in Scotland has been characterised by weak direction, political naiveté and the subsequent recruitment or promotion of low calibre middle managers into vital planning structures. As a result it has for some decades remained financially under-resourced and has failed to relate 'to the people', indeed recently to motivate a dedicated pool of skilled staff, who see their environmental work as a vocation, the main reward of which is satisfaction with a job well done and progress gained from "unrecorded hours" devoted to what they see as the cause and certainly not for significant financial gain in comparison with other fields of public service.

TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING

One can now, only welcome the policy of recruitment of dynamic well known, firm, able, practical managers with a proven background of sound scientific integrity and an ability and willingness to communicate to all. Allied one can at least hope, indeed pray, for an acknowledgement that, the people at the sharp end, on the ground as it were, should preferably be recruited from native Scots, who would naturally not only be the best people for the job any way but would communicate more efficiently with the people living, working and spending their leisure time on the land.

There are already, in my view, too many disastrous examples of the proverbial "Liverpudlian sailors", attempting the impossible by trying to naturalise in Scotland and pose as conservationists. They are at best left elsewhere on their proverbial backsides, organising festivals or serving in whatever reserve force ineffectual but fee paying committee or so-called working party that they can get wheedled onto.

To be progressive, surely the key words in nature and countryside conservation in Scotland must now be Communication with the people, leading to Consultation, Co-operation and thus avoiding Confrontation, in other words:- For the people by the people!

Respected countryside communicators simply cannot be produced on the conveyor belt of ecological courses at some obscure English college, but can only emerge following thorough training in the "university of life", the textbook of the real world.

Progression must also commence from a base of honesty and an acknowledgement that during the last decade the Government agencies involved with countryside management have, with the notable exception of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, failed rather sadly in their attempts to communicate successfully with landowners when involved in either major or sensitive environmental issues, their own staff and, more especially, with the urban populations.

Full of their own importance, they have failed to take the proverbial step backwards and review the overall scene. An appreciation of Burns' philosophy could well have prevented most of the resultant hiatus and alienation.

O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
An foolish notion:
What airs in dress an gait wad lea’e us,
an ev’n devotion!
It is indeed fortunate that, during a relatively undistinguished era the scientific credibility of conservationists was at least maintained by a few high profile scientists. People like Hugh Boyd of the the Wildfowl Trust, typically forced to express his undoubted talents abroad, the late Geoffrey Harrison, who served wildfowling so well, and Dick Potts at the Game Conservancy.

An outstanding duo of Derek Radcliffe and Norman Moore at the Nature Conservancy Council and Ian Prestt, who has at long last given bird protection an acceptable platform from which to, optimistically, launch into the 21st century.

SCOTLAND'S NATURAL HERITAGE

We thus enter a new and exciting phase, the merger of Countryside Commission for Scotland and Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. Chaired by Magnus Magnusson and with a much respected first Chief Executive in Roger Crofts, this merger to form SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE is a marriage of scientific and species protection expertise, with communication skills and interpretive knowledge. Staff are once more excited, morale has been restored but the task remains awesome. Only future generations may judge but we must not fail; the resource is too precious for that!

With the millstone of English bureaucratical domination removed from the scene hopefully the nature conservation image in Scotland can be removed from the perceived notion of bearded scientists clad in oiled coats, green wellies, clipboards round their neck and all accompanied with a seemingly endless correspondence or in a panoply of inevitable meetings, cloaked usually with an air of superiority. The use of condescending language meant to "educate the locals" and all with a sickening moral cloak of condescension - "the rank is but the guinea's stamp, the man's the gowd for a' that".

Emphasis has now changed direction especially in the minds of the general public. While conservation of landscape, animals, birds and fish remains important they are now literally bombarded with totally justified concern about the whole future of the environment. Problems on a scale that in 18th century Britain could not possibly have ever been even dreamt about. The issues that are now gripping public attention are the suggested holes in the ozone layer, air, oceanic, and soil contamination. The massive over-use of pesticides and chemicals to boost agricultural production, the so-called acid rain effect and the horrific slaughter of intelligent sea mammals. Most worrying is the obvious destruction of the world's rainforests and the subsequent effects that is having on our weather patterns. These are but an example of the threats that are now at the very centre of "life" as we know it. It is not, in my view, an exaggeration to state that, we have now entered the most destructive era the natural world has ever had to contend with.

"Think ye, that sic as you and I,
Wha drudge and drive thro wet and dry,
Wi never ceasing toil;
Think ye, are we less blest than they,
Wha scarcely tent us in their way,
As hardly worth their while?
Alas! how oft in haughty mood,
God's creatures they oppress!
Or else, neglecting a' that's guid,
They riot in excess!
Bairth careless and fearless
Of either Heaven or Hell;
Esteeming and deeming
It a' an idle tale!

BURNS AS A CONSERVATIONALIST

To follow from Sir James Fisher's remarks, Poet Burns was in my view not only one of our first bird watchers or ornithologists (the titles are now synonomous) but also our first notable all-round naturalist and conservationist. His natural history knowledge was indeed wide and ranged over many species and aspects. He refers to several exposed rock and soil types and apparently appreciated and was impressed by the vastness of geological and evolutionary scale. When he versified the 90th Psalm, he included the lines –

"Before the mountains rear'd their head"
and
"Those mighty periods of years, which seem to us so vast".

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His awareness of natural phenomena went far beyond the relatively common thunder, lightning and aurora borealis contained in his classic ‘Tam O’ Shanter’:-

“The lightnings flash from pole to pole, 
Near and more near the thunders roll” 
Or like the borealis race, 
That flit ere you can point their place”.

Previous analysts have inferred that his use of the words race and flit were in this case suggestive of referring possibly to one of the group of glowing firefly insects. I have considered this and reject the supposition entirely. Borealis is from the 15th Century Latin to mean boreas, of or relating to the north. None of the fireflies Luciola lusitanica have a geographical range extending to such latitudes. In the same vein, he demonstrates his geographical reading by referring to volcanos in Iceland and the ice fields of Greenland.

His list of, and concern for trees was admirable. He remonstrated with the Duke of Queensberry of his destruction of the woods near Drumlanrig and appealed successfully to the then Duke of Atholl to plant up both sides of the river near the Falls of Bruar. His concern for trees was probably instilled by the influence of a most remarkable and underestimated man – his father William Burns(es) who had advocated and carried out much planting to assist cultivation of the poor Ayrshire soils at that time, long before it became either fashionable or acknowledged that there was an agricultural benefit to do so.

The romantic in Burns is more evident in his treatment of the flowers, which he referred to on over four hundred occasions, with examples available to convey every mood.

“Adown winding Nith I did wander 
To mark the sweet flowers as they spring”.

“But here alas! for me nae mair 
Shall birdie charm, or floweret smile; 
Fareweel the bonnie banks of Ayr! 
Fareweel! fareweel! sweet Ballochmyle!”

That he cared deeply and passionately for them is beyond any reasonable dispute.

"Or when the deep green mantled earth 
Warm cherish’d ev’ry flow’ret’s birth”.

His views on mammals are exemplified by his reference to the small humble mouse and by his comments to Mrs. Dunlop on the wounded hare.

On 21st April, 1789, Burns wrote to Mrs. Dunlop: “Two mornings ago as I was at a very early hour, sowing in the fields, I heard a shot, and presently a poor little hare limped by me, apparently very much hurt. You will easily guess, this set my humanity in tears and my indignation in arms. The following was the result”.

The Wounded Hare

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb’rous art, 
And blasted by thy murder-aiming eye; 
May never pity soothe thee with a sigh, 
Nor even pleasure glad thy cruel heart!

Go live, poor wanderer of the wood and field, 
The bitter little of life that remains! 
No more the thickening brakes and verdant plains 
To thee shall home, or food, or pastime yield.

Seek, mangled wretch, some place of wonted rest, 
No more of rest, but now of dying bed! 
The sheltering rushes whistling o’er thy head, 
The cold earth with thy bloody bosom prest. 
Oft as by winding Nith I, musing, wait

The sober eve or hail the cheerful dawn, 
I’ll miss thee sporting o’er the dewy lawn, 
And curse the ruffian’s aim, and mourn they hapless fate.

Local tradition has it that Burns later remonstrated with the shooter in question and threatened to “throw him into the river Ni
but this cannot now be substantiated.

His references to bird welfare are the main planks in my claim that he was indeed a caring conservationist. Clearly concerned for their plight during winter, he penned -

"Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing!
That in the merry months o spring,
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o thee?
Where wilt thou cow'rr thy chittering wing,
An close thy e'e?!
"

In addition, he was concerned as all good ornithologists should be, that he even disturbed waterfowl during a visit to Loch Turit in Clackmannanshire, as an extract from verses he wrote immediately following the incident proves.

Why, ye tenants of the lake,
For me your wat'ry haunt forsake?
Tell me, fellow-creatures, why
At my presence thus you fly?
Why disturb your social joys,
Parent, filial, kindred ties?
-Common friend to you and me,
Nature's gifts to all are free:
Peaceful keep your dimpling wave,
Busy feed, or wanton lave;
Or, beneath the sheltering rock,
Bide the surging billow's shock.

Conscious, blushing for our race,
Soon, too soon, your fears I trace.
Man, your proud, usurping foe,
Would be lord of all below:
Plumes himself in freedom's pride,
Tyrant stern to all beside.

Or, of Man's superior might
Dare invade your native right,
On the lofty ether borne,
Man with all his powers you scorn;
Swiftly seek, on clanging wings,
Other lakes, and other springs;
And the foe you cannot brave,
Scorn at least to be his slave.

FIELD SPORTS

Burns was obviously very much aware of the sporting scene and many of his friends were involved in it, as he made very clear in his "Tam Samson's Elegy". The subject was one Thomas Samson of Kilmarnock who was described as "a zealous sportsman, and a good fellow".

"Rejoice, ye birring paitricks a';
Ye cootie moorcocks, crousely craw;
Ye maukins cock your fud fu braw,
Without en dread;
Your mortal fae is now awa;
Tam Samson's dead!"

Although Poet Burns presented a dedication to the Caledonian Hunt, it was in recognition of their support and subscribing financially towards publication of an Edinburgh edition of his poems.

There is no real evidence available to us to indicate that he supported hunting or shooting per se, nor that he ever enjoyed or glorified in a day in "the field" actively involved in such pursuits. He did own guns including a brace of pistols that he carried during his excise duties but I am unaware of any occasion when he discharged rifle, musket or shotgun deliberately to shoot animals for either food or fun.

Clearly hunting with horse and hounds; shooting driven game and over pointers; wildfowling; falconry and fishing were well developed and organised country sports during his lifetime.

One could assume, even tingle yet with some excitement at the numbers and variety of wild game that would have been available in such diverse natural habitats.

As a farmer he was latterly primarily dependent on sheep to provide a cash income and as such was aware of the necessity to control fox predation on lambs. In the song "My Hoggie" he wrote -

"The tod reply'd upon the hill
I trembled for my hoggie".

Other agricultural aspects that were vital, was the fact that, the cleared fields remained
close to the heather clad moors, with heather growing to sea level near Dumfries.

The slow growing and ripening corn was eventually cut by hand, bundled into sheaves and then propped together in stooks still in the fields and left to complete ripening and to dry.

Depending obviously on the vagaries of the weather, this meant in fact that in some seasons the stooks would be left out till the end of October or even November and there are records of stooks being taken in “before the winter snowy.

The significant point is that, during all this prolonged ‘harvest’ period, the potential produce remained vulnerable to being eaten by birds. Young boys were retained to ward off crows with noise and sling shot, while the grouse and partridges which also invaded the small fields were shot at in a combination of crop protection and sport.

Nonetheless, in spite of the economic necessity, Burns remained anti-shooting.

“*The death o devils smoor’d wi brimstone reek:
The thundering guns are heard on ev’ry side,*
*The wounded coveys, reeling, scatter wide;*
*The feather’d field-mates, bound by Nature’s tie,*
*Sires, mothers, children, in one carnage lie:*
*(What warm, poetic heart but inly bleeds,*
*And execrates man’s savage, ruthless deeds!)*
*Nae mair the flower in field or meadow springs:*
*Nae mair the grove with airy concert rings,*
*Except perhaps the robin’s whistling glee,*
*Proud o the height o some bit half-lang tree;*
*The hoary morns precede the sunny days,*
*Mild, calm, serene, widespreads the noontide blaze*
*While thick the gossamour waves wanton in the rays”.

He gives several examples of his disdain for premature unnecessary killing.

In “The Twa Dogs” for example he is critical of people who take it casually.

“*Or speaking lightly o their limmer Or shooting of a hare or moorcock”.*

And in his “Epistle to James Tennant of Glenconner”, he also indicated that he was concerned with life and death as an issue, not whether the species involved was a “so called” pest species or not -

*“To cast my e’en up like a pyet When by the gun she tumbles o’er, Flutt’ring an gasping in her gore”.*

His verses put to the song “Now Westlin Winds” really does say it all – one can rest the case on Robert Burns – Poet of Nature, Naturalist and Nature Conservationist.

“*Now westlin winds and slaught’ring guns Bring Autumn’s pleasant weather;*
*The moorcock springs on whirring wings*
*Amang the blooming heather:*
*Now waving grain, wide o’er the plain,*
*Delights the weary farmer;*
*And the moon shines bright, as I rove by night,*
*To muse upon my charmer.*

*The pairett lo’es the fruitfu fells,*
*The plover lo’es the mountains;*
*The woodcock haunts the lonely dells,*
*The soaring hern the fountains:*
*Thro lofty groves the cushat roves,*
*The path o man to shun it;*
*The hazel bush o’erhangs the thrush*
*The spreading thorn the linnet.*

*Thus ev’ry kind their pleasure find,*
*The savage and the tender;*
*Some social join, and leagues combine,*
*Some solitary wander:*
*Avaunt, away, the cruel sway!*
*Tyrannic man’s dominion!*
*The sportsman’s joy, the murd’ring cry,*
*The flutt’ring, gory pinion!*

*But, Peggy dear, the ev’ning’s clear,*
*Thick flies the skimming swallow;*
*The sky is blue, the fields in view,*
*The paitrick lo’es the fruitfu fells,*
*The plover lo’es the mountains;*
All fading-green and yellow:
Come let us stray our gladsome way,
And view the charms of Nature;
The rustling corn, the fruited thorn,
And ilka happy creature.
We’ll gently walk, and sweetly talk,
While the silent moon shines clearly;
I’ll clasp thy waist, and, fondly prest,
Swear how I lo’e thee dearly:
Not vernal show’rs to budding flow’rs,
Not Autumn to the farmer,
So dear can be as thou to me,
My fair, my lovely charmer!”

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS
The Natural World of Robert Burns
by John G. Young
with illustrations by Keith Brockie and Donald Watson
Foreword by Wilson Ogilvie, Past President,
The Burns Federation

The notion that Robert Burns was inspired by ‘nature’ – an appreciation of wild landscape, plants and animals – has been espoused and perpetuated for well over a century by a long list of writers and speakers. Burns referred to flowers no fewer than 446 times; trees, 457; birds, 366; and landscape, 835. A quite remarkable total of 2,280 references in all, if one takes into account other categories – unsurpassed by any other poet, then or since. This book analyses andcatalogues fully, for the first time, the natural history records contained in the Bard’s writings. It proves beyond doubt that his undoubted love of nature was founded on factual knowledge, and not the gleanings of a romantic ploughman. Several long-held, well-established beliefs are also controversially challenged. Each entry is accompanied by its common name, its generic name, and its local name, including Scots and Gaelic; and is supported by extracts from Burns’ poems where appropriate. Appendices condense all the information into concise sections, giving detailed descriptions of each species mentioned, how many times, and their local names.

Contents: Flowers, Trees; Mammals; Rivers, Lochs and Hills; The Seasons; Birds; Fish and other Wildlife Records; Nature Conservation; Glossary; Bibliography; Appendices.

1 898218 60 9 350pp July 1996 pb £14.95

JOHN G. YOUNG,
11 Restenneth Place, Lunanhead,
Forfar, Angus. DD8 3NF.
In that broad and measureless sense in which a poet of the people knits his personality into the hearts of an entire nation, all of grand old Scotia is truly the 'Land of Burns'. In a closer geographical respect, where both personality and genius have been all-pervading and have left on every hand some memory of association and enduring reminder of the Bard's actual presence, there are two 'Burns' Lands' in Scotland.

These are Ayrshire, on the Firth of Clyde, and Dumfriesshire, on the Solway Firth, adjoining counties of South-Western Scotland. And from the top of Merrick Mountain, in the Northern part of Kirkcudbrightshire, which wedges a strip of glorious hill country up to the North between the two former shires, the sight can traverse the entire breadth of both the Ayrshire Land of Burns and the Land of Burns of Dumfriesshire. There is not another scene in all the world more fraught with glowing natural beauty, not another one more sweet and tender in gentle and pathetic memories.

To the eye, the panorama in all the lovely land in which the brief life of the Bard was passed, is practically complete. To the mind, all the vast host of his poetic creations, the joy and sadness of the man in their doing, the penury, struggles, glory and despair, from birth to death, are here massed with overwhelming impressiveness. To the West is Ayrshire with the birth-place near pleasant Ayr, sunny and low beside the sea. Then, following the vale of Doon, it comes all the way to your feet, in gentle uplands, then in rugged hills and shadowy burns and finally in huge mountains and savage glens.

Two tiny streams, hardly more than brooks at some seasons of the year, and having their sources in respective lochs like little mountain burns, are the real source of the Doon. These little lochs lie at the Eastern and Northern edges of Merrick hill. They have the curious names of Eagton Lane and Callow. They flow North and empty into a greater loch called Loch Doon, an
expanse of water perhaps seven miles in length and nearly a mile in width. This in turn discharges its waters into the real River Doon through most picturesque gorges and tunnels, forming many beautiful, if not majestic, torrents, forces and cascades. There the source of the Doon is Northwesterly to where it reaches the sea about two miles below the town of Ayr, and its entire length, inclusive of the expanse of Loch Doon, is upwards of forty miles.

The scenery around Loch Doon is wild and picturesque. Its Northern horizon is a lofty mountain of fringes, of heathery heights, broken here and there by ragged rocks, escarpments of purple. From this Loch, for a distance of about twenty miles, the Doon winds prettily between the Ayrshire hills, through valley reaches and past quaint old villages, but without the exquisite variety of bank and brae for which the pen of Burns has it famous. At Patna, or still a little further at Hollybush, begin its tortuous windings. From here to the sea there is an ever-varying succession of the most idyllic river-side pictures to be found in all Britain.

These were distinctively the boyhood haunts of the Poet. After Hollybush comes Dalrymple, perhaps the loveliest village in the loveliest vale in Scotland. It seems in an endless slumber in its nest-like vale, hushed by the murmuring lullabies of the Doon. A little beyond is the ancient Cassillis Castle, a noble old mansion on the left bank of the Doon, famous in song and story from the elopement of Lady Jane Hamilton, first wife of John, sixth Earl of Cassilis.

From Cassilis Castle to the sea the distance is about twelve miles, and here there is not a straight stretch of the Doon a quarter mile in length. It twists and turns, forming every conceivable fanciful contour of shore, is hid between verdure-covered cliffs to leap again into sunny openings, breaks into broad shallows with lawn-like edges, and then with a rush scrampers to covert beneath over-hanging trees whose branches, dipping to its surface, sob and sough minor refrains to its own melodious music.

Fair indeed is the Doon as Robert Burns knew it, as it is now, past the Old Bridge, past the New Bridge, past Old Alloway Kirk, past the cottage where he was born, past a myriad thrilling witcheries of leaf and bloom and bank and brae to the very spot where it is hushed in the vast blue sea. To wander lovingly beside it is to feast anew, and be marvellously close to the personality of him who made its melodies beloved strains to ear and heart in the most far-off lands.

Passing over into Dumfriesshire, the mountains spread into broad luxurious vales. One where the murmuring Nith winds to the Solway is a dream of beauty and rest. Then, as the spires of the old town of Dumfries blend with the ragged Solway edge, ‘hoary Criffel’ looms threateningly, at last a glint of blue shows where the Brow Well is, from which the Poet, close to death was taken back to his Dumfries home and his loyal Jean, and like a tiny dazzling cone of white is seen the dome of the Mausoleum where old Scotia’s dearest Bard is at rest in eternal peace.

The two shires and their very topography, the Western Sea and its soft shores, the vales, the uplands, the sweet valley where the Poet’s happiest hours were spent at Ellisland beside the Nith, the lowering mountains again, the glint of the sea, and a nation’s grave, powerfully suggest the two epochs of Burns’ eventful life. Ayrshire saw his youthtide, his feverish fervent struggles. Dumfriesshire gave the only blessed calm he ever knew, the sad and desperate later days, and yet it was in Dumfriesshie that the great heart stood still.

Ayrshire glories in his birthplace, the scenes of his youth, the unfolding of his genius, the first acknowledgement of his fame. Dumfriesshire is glorified by his riper fame, his better accomplishment, even by the pathos of his later days and by the previous heritage of cherishing his mortal remains.

A stroll along the banks of the Doon, to which the mind unconsciously reverts at the mention of the Poet’s name, and a pensive wandering among the countless shrines created by his living presence in the two shires and then looking down along the flaming shaft of light that links his genius and world girding human love and magnanimity to the never-fading immortality of his name, you cannot but feel that the scenes which most breathe to the beholder the spirit of ineffable
pathos and tenderness belong to the second epoch of his life, and lie along the Nith, instead of clustering about "the banks and braes o' bonnie Doon."

It is true that from where you may stand on Merrick's heights the Ayrshire shrines, almost within the limit of vision, are rich and countless, and although you may not discern each one of them with the naked eye, you can plainly see where all may be found on a short day's journey.

The spires of Ayr seem almost beneath your feet, just outside the rim of verdure shutting in the town, where a faint curling line of musty purple outlines the sinuous course of the Doon as it nears the sea. And there is the low thatched cottage where Robert Burns was born, on the little farm of seven acres rented by the Poet's father, and the spot where the gipsy hag foretold, as the father was riding in haste for the doctor, that, 'We'll a' be proud of Robin.'

Not half a mile distant can be imagined the bell tower of 'Alloway's Auld Haunted Kirk.' All about are the scenes of 'Tam o' Shanter,' and near to that on a white eminence can be seen the white colonnaded shafts of the great Burns Monument. Then a few miles to the North-East in a pleasant country, now dotted with thriving villages and threaded with lines of hedge, coppice and plantation are Tarbolton and Mauchline just four miles apart. At the former was laid the scene of 'Death and Dr Hornbook' and it was here that the pathetic parting of Robert Burns and Highland Mary occurred. You can see the square tower of Mauchline Castle, whose owner, Gavin Hamilton, became Burns' patron, and you will know that at this village was 'Johnnie Dow's home, while still remains, unaltered, the public house of 'Poosie Nansie', scene of 'The Jolly Beggars.' Over there, just a mile and a half West of Mauchline, is the noted farm of Mossgiel, once farmed with such ruinous heroism by the Poet and his brother Gilbert. It was at Mossgiel that the 'Cotter's Saturday Night' and other of Burns' greatest poems were written. Burns, too, was at Mossgiel when preparing to emigrate to Jamaica, and then suddenly being called to Edinburgh by Dr. Blacklock, from which he returned in triumph and was clasped in his old mother's embrace, while her ecstatic lips could only utter 'Oh Robert! Robert!'

These and countless other interesting experiences are yours when wandering in or near the
vale of Doon, with many tender identifications of the Bard, both places and objects. They are all fine and good, and worth coming a long way to enjoy. I do not think, however, that any or all of them take hold of the heart as does the spell which broods on the other side of those hills, in Dumfriesshire. Perhaps it is your attitude and sentiment. Perhaps in the Doon country the suggestiveness of the youthful, impulsively riotous early years of the ploughman Poet, when he sang of 'the rakish art of Rab Mossgie,' haunts you like hints of hovering shadows. Perhaps, too, it is the occasional shock to your own reverence that now and then comes from the holiday sort of levity of thousands from all lands who poke about and go as though there were a certain kind of prurient gratification in fine remarks on the sacred episodes of Highland Mary and gentle, loyal Jean, and on finding where an immortal poet soul was to be found in the dark recesses of the Ayr cottage.

So, if you know all the strange story and double picture, you instinctively turn from the vague buffoonery that casual pilgrims interpret in the first part, to the later and better part, where the strong fine tread of poet and man first truly set in, a scene where few irreverent pilgrims come. Here at the utmost source of the bonnie Doon, with misting eyes you look over into Nithsdale, past the town of Dumfries to the roaring Solway tide, and seem to know, as of a loved one gone, the deeper tenderer mysteries of his environment and life.

Burns lived in Dumfriesshire for the ten years preceding his death, from his twenty-seventh to his thirty-eight year - a period into which was crowded more personal hope and disappointment, joy and suffering, remorse for impulsive wrong-doing, heaven of purest domestic bliss, temptation and victory, agonised despair and triumph, than fall to the lot of most great men in their entire lives. Prior to coming to the town of Dumfries, there were first the disownment and desertion by Jean Armour, the betrothal to Highland Mary, with the sad parting and her tragic death, the publication of the now priceless, though then humble Kilmarnock edition of his poems, the preparation for his flight to Jamaica, the triumphant visit to Edinburgh, the generous caring for his mother and brothers, the glad re-union with his Jean, and then the home-building at Ellisland over there by the songful Nith.

It is because you see along the witching valleys’ ways the Burns of reality - manly, sturdy, weak as you or I in like plights, generous, pitiful and great, that you linger and still linger here. You can see him singing at his toil by day, or by the ingleneuk with Jean and the bairns at night, or still by the little south window, working away at the little deal table when inspiration came. You see him the guest of lairds or companion of cottagers and beloved by all.

There is hardly in all this fair domain a castle, a gentleman’s seat, a cabin or an old roadside inn that existed in Burns’ time which does not preserve some relic of the Poet, or some revered memory of his one time presence. The eyes of your consciousness may know, all through Dumfriesshire and Kirkcudbrightshire, at this farmhouse or that, of some unrecorded kindness, of some pleasant incident, of some odd adventure, perhaps a forgiveable roystering, perhaps some blessed help in time of need. Then again you may hear of festivity of which he was the life, and even of prayer.

Prayer from Burns? Yes, prayer with the living and at the couch of the dead, among those so lowly that somehow those ‘spiritual excisemen’ who delighted to league the poet exciseman with ‘Auld Hornie’ had no time from their ‘higher’ parochial duties to minister there. You see him riding about the country on his two horses, “Pegasus” and “Peg Nicholson”, not as an exciseman, rapacious with the scourging instruments of law, but keen with friendly warning instead, ever leaning to the side of mercy and saving not ruining the ignorant and lowly. You see him at the Brow Well with the consciousness of death, still the most lovable of men, and alone with his Bible there, you see him taken back to his house to die. Then you hear from the lips of loyal Jean the mighty disproof of all slanderous tongues in the one sentence, ever gloryfying the husband and man, “He never spoke a misbehadden word to me in a’ his life.”
WHO WAS ANDREW BRUCE?
by
John Strawhorn

Four surviving letters by Robert Burns reveal his acquaintance in Edinburgh with a merchant called Andrew Bruce, whose identity has for long remained unknown. Soon after arriving in the capital, Burns wrote on 27 December 1786 to William Chalmers, writer in Ayr, and advised that when replying, “My direction is, Care of Andrew Bruce, Mercht Bridge-street.” Then when he was in Stirlingshire, a letter of 26 August 1787 to the Kilmarnock wine merchant Robert Muir contained the news that before his departure from Edinburgh “I left Andrew Bruce and family all well.” Back in Edinburgh, and writing on 19 September to his cousin James Burness in Montrose, Burns again advised that “Any thing you send me, direct to the care of Mr. Andrew Bruce, Mercht, Bridge Street, Edinr.” Much later, in December 1791 a letter from Dumfries to Clarinda informed her: “I have sent in your hair, a part of the parcel you gave me, with a measure, to Mr. Bruce, the jeweller in Princes Street, to get a ring done for me.” The only other reference is James Hogg’s assertion that ‘To a Haggis’ was “written in the house of Andrew Bruce, Castle Hill, Edinburgh, where a haggis one day made part of the dinner”. It is however possible that he is the person designated in Heron’s Memoir as “Mr. Arthur Bruce, a gentleman of great worth and discernment, to whom Burns was, in his earlier days, well known” and who had “seen the poet steadily resist such solicitations and allurements to excess in convivial enjoyment, as scarcely any other person could have withstood”. But, he continued, “The bucks of Edinburgh accomplished in regard to Burns, that in which the boors of Ayrshire had failed”. Which suggests that this Arthur (or Andrew?) Bruce had known Burns in Ayrshire.

Neither Hecht, Synder, nor any earlier biographer could throw any light on Andrew Bruce, if indeed they mentioned him at all. James Barke, that assiduous researcher, failed to include him among the galaxy of characters who grace his novel on Burns in Edinburgh. Even John McVie ignored him in his study of Burns in Edinburgh. J. W. Egerer has suggested that Andrew Bruce “was the man with whom Burns stayed when he first arrived in Edinburgh”. He indicated (incorrectly) that he “resided in Bridge Street”; and guessed (correctly that among the other subscribers Mrs. Bruce “was his wife”, and Mr. John Bruce “may have been his brother”. More recently, James Mackay has surmised that “Andrew was a partner in the firm of John Bruce and Company and had family connections with Kilmarnock”; guessed from the letters that Robert had lodged with him, possibly on two occasions; and deduced that his wife’s name was Matty, from that name appearing in a damaged part of the letter of 15 December 1786 to Robert Muir. But he failed to realize that Andrew Bruce was the jeweller who made for Burns a ring containing a lock of Clarinda’s hair.

More positive identification of Andrew Bruce comes from among the Boswell papers at Yale University. There was an Andrew Bruce (1691-1741) who came from Fife in 1711 to be overseer of Auchinleck Estate until his death. He married Isbell Templeton, housekeeper at Auchinleck, and had seven children. One daughter married John Murdoch of Bellowmill and had a son, William Murdoch (1754-1839), the noted inventor who pioneered gas lighting and steam navigation. Andrew’s second son James (1719-90) succeeded his father as estate overseer, serving under Lord Auchinleck and the celebrated James Boswell. In 1741 James Bruce married Jean White and of their eleven children, three died in infancy. Andrew Bruce was their ninth child, born in 1759 and named after his grandfather. Of the surviving children, four remained in Ayrshire: Alexander (1752-1829), who married Isabella Ronald of the Bennals; Andrew’s twin sister Jean; and other two
sisters. John (1754-95), James (1761-88), Euphemia (1743-1827), and Andrew all found their way to Edinburgh. In 1769, Euphemia, the “Gardener’s daughter” with whom young James Boswell was briefly infatuated, married Thomas Edmondson, Boswell’s personal servant who then moved to Edinburgh with her to become gownkeeper in the Court Robing Room. Records which commence in 1771 reveal Alexander worked for his father on the Auchinleck estate until 1785; as did John until 1772; and young James was thus employed from 1779 till 1781. Andrew presumably found work elsewhere, as did John after 1772. In February 1778 John Bruce was seeking employ as a clerk in London, but a month later Boswell noted that “John is to be a Hardware man” and “has settled himself in Scotland”. In 1782 James was similarly seeking a clerk’s job in London. In 1784 Boswell suggested his overseer should go to consult the surgeon Alexander Wood in Edinburgh, where “You would also see your sons in their shop, and your daughter and her family.” The sons must have been John and Andrew, for a year later James Bruce sent a letter to Boswell in Edinburgh, carried by Alexander “who has some affairs to settle with his brothers”. It is clear that John Bruce entered the hardware business in Edinburgh in 1778; Andrew must have joined him then or soon afterwards; the third brother followed, though all we know of James is that he died in Edinburgh in 1788.

While sources in America have yielded those basic facts, it is to Edinburgh we turn to fill in the details from two published works. John and Andrew Bruce commenced business in Edinburgh by entering into partnership with James Cooper, who operated a hardware and jewellery shop at 2 North Bridge Street. The young men became acquainted with Deacon William Brodie “who, though then moving in a respectable sphere, was known to be a person of irregular habits.” This was not to the liking of Cooper, who dissolved the partnership and set up for himself at 1 South Bridge. The firm of John Bruce & Co., continued in North Bridge Street; and they remained on friendly terms with Brodie. William Brodie in 1780 had inherited his father’s prosperous business as cabinet maker in the Lawnmarket; and like his father became a member of Edinburgh town council. Though outwardly respectable, he became involved in gambling, and organising a series of burglaries, until the Excise Office was broken into, which led to Brodie’s arrest, trial, and execution on 1 October 1788. Earlier on 25 December 1786 (shortly after Robert Burns arrived in Edinburgh) a hawker called George Smith, acting on Brodie’s instructions, burgled the premises of Messrs Bruce. Watches and jewellery valued at £350 were taken, and Brodie’s share was a gold seal, a gold watch-key set with garnet stones, and two gold rings. Neither was suspected but, when later arrested along with Brodie, Smith admitted his guilt in this and other robberies, and suffered the same fate. Despite this setback, John and Andrew Bruce moved in 1788 to new premises at 10 Princes Street, from 1793 operating as Bruce & Co., jewellers.

Their young brother James died in 1788. John died in 1795, in his forty-first year; and thirty-seven-year-old Andrew Bruce gave up the business a year later. There was a John Bruce married to Catherine Robertson who had four of a family born between 1776 and 1786, and if this was Andrew’s brother, he was presumably survived by his widow and young children. Andrew married a Martha Ross on 26 August 1784, but no children are recorded. Perhaps as a childless widower, he gave up the business, and apparently returned to Ayrshire. Family records state that he died in Ardrossan at the home of his twin sister, Mrs. Adam Harkness.

How Robert Burns made the acquaintance of Andrew Bruce remains uncertain. In his first months in Edinburgh he met over a score of persons of Ayrshire origin. Though both Andrew and the poet were of the same age there is no evidence they had any association before Edinburgh. Yet Burns may well have been in contact with other members of the Bruce family, who lived only a few miles from Mauchline. Burns knew the Auchinleck estate well enough to persuade Captain Grose in 1789 to include a view of the old Castle of Auchinleck in his Antiquities of Scotland.
Among the great men whose memories Scotsmen in particular have been delighted to perpetuate, few, if any, have been held in greater love and admiration than Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland. Indeed, the enthusiasm which is aroused as each succeeding January comes round is a source of continual wonder to other nations and it certainly has no parallel in any other country. In this article we shall deal mainly with Burns’s activities as a Freemason and as such Scotsmen should be immensely proud that the Bard was a member of the Fraternity. As we shall see, Masonry and Scottish Masonry at that, played no mean part in giving to the world the poetry of Robert Burns.
The above two signatures with the "Burness" spelling, the body of the minutes being in the handwriting of John Wilson (Dr. Hombook) the Secretary of the Lodge.

According to Dr. Halliday, "One prime factor which assisted to unite all classes in eighteenth-century Scotland into a recognised brotherhood, and provided the opportunity and sanction for voluntary co-operation, was the bond of Freemasonry: not Freemasonry as we know it to-day with all its modern trappings and symbolic teaching, but the earlier jolly Brotherhood with its gatherings at the local inn. There is no cause for wonder or surprise that in the fulness of time Robert Burns became a Freemason: the wonder would have been if he had not." The heart of the poet was a soil ideal to the seeds of Freemasonry, for the beautiful teaching of the Craft is alive with the very essence of poetry. His abiding interest in, and love of all that was in any way connected with the Order no doubt coloured much of his poetry and ultimately found expression in "A man's a man for a' that," the great poem on the Brotherhood of Man. In that poem, and especially in the last verse, we find expressed the whole of the grand ideal of Freemasonry. This is not to say, however, that such a poem was wholly inspired by Freemasonry, because Burns would have written in this vein had he never entered the door of a Masonic Lodge.

Masonry made a direct appeal to one of his temperaments, loving as he did social companions, and who himself was the life and soul in any congenial company. Not only so, but Freemasonry was flourishing so strongly in Tarbolton at the time that it was to be expected that in due course he would enter fervently into everything concerned with the Order. Freemasonry gave him an impetus, and we cannot doubt that the hours he spent with the Brethren helped in no small way to lighten many a dark hour in his life and cheered him between his periods of despondency.

"The social, friendly, honest man
Whate'er he be,
‘Tis he fulfils great Nature’s plan
And none but he.”

Another typically Masonic verse by him is:-
“A’ ye whom social pleasure charms,
Whose heart the tide of kindness warms,
What hold your being on the terms
‘Each aid the other,’
Come to my bowl, come to my arms,
My friends, my brothers.”

His enthusiasm for Freemasonry was mainly attributable to his sociable disposition, and there is sufficient testimony that Burns was not given to conviviality merely to satisfy a craving for strong drink. But the influence of Masonry on his life must be put into its proper perspective, for there is no denying that the part it played in the publication of his poems cannot be overlooked. It would appear to be manifestly unfair on the part of Carlyle and several other of his biographers that either not a word has come from their pen or, if it did, it was to depreciate his connection with the Craft. In fact, to omit or slight Burns’s Masonic career is surely unjust to him and to Freemasonry. His association with the Brethren indeed was a means of enabling him to meet persons of a higher social status than himself and of introducing him to families of distinction, especially during his stay in Edinburgh, and at the same time helping to raise him from obscurity to the place he so richly deserves – the national poet of Scotland.

During the fifteen years (1781-1796) which covered his Masonic career he devoted himself wholeheartedly to all that pertained to the Brotherhood, making that “daily advancement” of which our First Charge stresses the importance.

Burns’s Masonic life might conveniently be divided, like all Gaul, into three parts. The first part includes his initiation into the Fraternity and his active work in his native county of Ayr, the historic home of Freemasonry. Included also in this period is the publication of the now famous and priceless Kilmarnock Edition of his poems. The second comprises the two periods he spent in Edinburgh, where Masonry did not enter particularly prominently into his life, probably because of the assiduous attention he was giving to the publication of his Edinburgh Edition. The chief matter of interest in his visit to the Capital is the controversy surrounding his supposed inauguration as Poet Laureate of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning. The third division concerns his declining years in Dumfriesshire, where he again resumed his Masonic interests though, partly owing to illness, to a lesser extent.

In 1781 the Burns family tenanted the farm of Lochlea, near Tarbolton, having come there from Mount Oliphant in 1777. Robert, before joining the Craft, had attended a school in Kirkoswald in the practical use of instruments concerned with mensuration and surveying, the Square, the Level, etc., and so, at the beginning of his Masonic career he was already well versed in the operative uses of a mason’s working tools. He tells us that while in Kirkoswald he went on with a high hand at his geometry till the sun entered Virgo, which was always a carnival in his bosom.

The history of Freemasonry round about the period with which we are dealing was of a somewhat turbulent nature. On 17th May 1771 Lodge Tarbolton Kilwinning had received its Charter from Mother Kilwinning. Twenty of the Brethren, seeing clearly that the power of the latter was on the decline, wished to erect a Lodge under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Scotland which since 1736 was steadily growing in power and so St David’s, Tarbolton, No. 174, was chartered on 5th February 1773. Those who were left in the original Tarbolton Kilwinning Lodge also saw the wisdom of working under Grand Lodge and so they too applied for recognition. This resulted in 1774 in the erection of a new Lodge, St. James’s Tarbolton, No. 178. The Grand Master Mason at the time was John, 3rd Duke of Athole. No doubt a little jealousy in this case crept in
over the original secession. At the same time the Brethren were fully aware that there was not room in such a small village as Tarbolton for two Lodges. It was accordingly agreed to sink all differences and the two Lodges combined on 25th June 1781, under the name of Lodge St. David, Tarbolton, since this Lodge held “the oldest charter” from Grand Lodge, “probably a compliment or concession,” according to Chambers, “designed to appease the schismatic body.”

Into this united Lodge Burns, nine days after the union, was initiated in his twenty-third year, and his name recorded in the Minute Book as follows:— “Sederant for 4th July. Robert Burns in Lochly was entered an Apprentice, Joph. Norman, M.” His initiation fee was 12s. 6d., and was paid on the same day.

The Lodge met in John Richard’s public house where the Bachelors’ Club, founded in 1780 by Burns and other kindred spirits, had a room. This house has been recently renovated and is now in an excellent state of repair. The following is from the preamble which Burns himself wrote regarding this club:-

“Of birth or blood we do not boast,
Nor gentry does our club afford;
But ploughmen and mechanics we
In nature’s simple dress record.”

The social urge and the opportunities he had for expressing his thoughts fluently there were very soon to bear fruit in his Lodge.

Shortly after his initiation he removed to Irvine to learn flax-dressing. This upset for a time his Masonic attendances, but on 1st October 1781, he was passed to the Fellowship Degree and raised to the Degree of Master as set forth in the brief Minute: “Robert Burns in Lochly was passed and raised,” signed by the Master, the Wardens, Secretary and Treasurer.

The united Lodge enjoyed a brief history of only a few months, but a history rendered glorious for all time by having the peculiar distinction of making Burns a Freemason. Nor did the union

\[\text{B: James Manson, Treasurer}
\text{B: John Manson, Senior Stewart}
\text{B: John Cunningham, Junior Stewart}
\text{B: John Dunnoch, P.G. Master}
\text{B: James McWinnie, Tyler}
\]

Tarbolton June 23rd 1780. —

This night the Lodge met, and Robert Andrew a Brother of St David's Tarbolton, was admitted by unanimous vote, gratis, his wife James Good having been duly recommended. He was entered an Apprentice. —

R. Burns Im

The above contains the caligraphy of John Wilson (Dr Hornbook) the Secretary of the Lodge, and a full minute written and signed by Burns.
appear to have been a happy one. Apparently that harmony which should characterise Masons the world over was lacking. At any rate, a fresh disruption took place the following year, June 1782. Burns was one of the seceders. Some of the members doubtless objected to Lodge St. James losing its identity and it was to be expected that it was only a matter of time before a separate Lodge would be formed. This materialised on 17th June 1782, under its former name of St James, Tarbolton. Some years later, a list of its members was sent in to Grand Lodge, and the names of these members are found engrossed in the books there. Burns’s name does not appear in this list, possibly because only the names of intrants, after the Lodge had become a separate body, were submitted to Grand Lodge. This is borne out by the fact that the name of Gilbert Burns, who was made a Mason five years after the erection of St. James’s Lodge, appears only about a dozen names from the top. On the other hand, this neglect may have been occasioned by the carelessness of Grand Lodge officials at the time who have been alleged to have been very much averse to such dry labour as the enrolment of names. Lodge Tarbolton Kilwinning St. James now appears on the Roll of the Grand Lodge of Scotland as No. 135 and possesses a large commodious hall of its own in the centre of the village. Lodge St. David became dormant in 1843, but was reponed in 1869 as No. 133, with Mauchline as its meeting place. It has some interesting relics consisting of jewels, plate for printing Diplomas of the Lodge, master’s chair, chest, Lodge glasses, toddy-ladles, and a Minute Book. These are now believed to be in safe custody in Ayr.

At a meeting of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in May 1951, it was reported that the Minute Books containing details of the initiation of Burns into Freemasonry, now in private hands, were valued at £3,000. The Grand Librarian informed the Grand Committee that a lady in Kilmarnock had in her possession certain old Minute Books and other items lately belonging to Lodge St. David, No. 133. When the Lodge became dormant in 1843 the Charter was recovered by the Provincial Grand Master and returned to Grand Lodge. The Minute Books passed into private hands. The Lodge was reponed in 1869 and, although the Charter was returned, the Minute Books were not. In 1925 the law agent advised the Grand Committee that an action would have to be raised against the lady if it were decided to prove title.

Burns’s name is not recorded in the Minutes of St. James’s Lodge until 1784. But his keen interest in the Lodge is evident from the following letter in his hand-writing, but not necessarily composed by him, addressed to the Master, Sir John Whitefoord, Bart., of Ballochmyle, on behalf of the seceders in connection with the dispute, towards the end of 1782:-

"SIR,—We who subscribe to this are members of St. James’s Lodge, Tarbolton, and one of us in the office of Warden, and as we have the honour of having you for Master of our Lodge, we hope you will excuse this freedom, as you are the proper person to whom we ought to apply. We look on our Mason Lodge to be a serious matter, both with respect to the character of Masonry itself, and likewise as it is a charitable society. This last, indeed, does not interest you farther than a benevolent heart is interested in the welfare of its fellow creatures; but to us, Sir, who are of the lower orders of mankind, to have a fund in view, on which we may with certainty depend to be kept from want should we be in circumstances of distress, or old age, that is a matter of high importance.

We are sorry to observe that our Lodge’s affairs, with respect to its finances, have for a good while been in a wretched condition. We have considerable sums in bills which lie by without being paid, or put in execution, and many of our members never mind their yearly dues, or anything else belonging to our Lodge. And since the separation from St. David’s we are not even sure of our existence as a Lodge. There has been a dispute before the Grand Lodge, but how decided, or if decided at all, we know not.

For these and other reasons we humbly beg the favour of you, as soon as convenient, to call a meeting, and let us consider on some means to retrieve our wretched affairs.

We are, etc."
On 30th June 1784 the famous Manson’s Inn, the Cross Keys, became the meeting place, the proprietor being Treasurer to the Lodge. This old inn is no longer in existence, but its locus has been indicated by a tablet placed in a corner of the garden. A month later, on 27th July, Burns was elected Depute Master, an office which was then elective and of much more practical importance than it is to-day. This position carried with it the active duties of a Master, who in these days was little more than a figurehead, and attended meetings but rarely. So Burns was in reality the virtual head of the Lodge, and it is on record that he carried through his work with marked ability. He held the Depute Mastership till St John’s Day, 1788.

“Oft have I met your social band,
And spent the cheerful festive night;
Oft honour’s with supreme command,
Presided o’er the Sons of Light.”

His first Minute as Depute Master, and which is wholly in his handwriting, although unsigned, shows his keen interest in the Lodge:—

“This night the Lodge met and ordered four pounds of candles and one quire of eightpence paper for the use of the Lodge, which money was laid out by the Treasurer and the candles and paper laid in accordingly.”

By his enthusiasm he justified his election to the leading place in the Lodge. Robert Chambers tells us “that according to the reports of old associates he was so keen a Mason that he would hold Lodges for the admission of new members in his own house.” and it was at one of these that his brother Gilbert was admitted to the Craft.

He was himself most faithful in his attendance at Lodge meetings. During 1785 he was present at nine meetings, and it was because of an incident at one of these where the “vainglorious tendencies” of the village schoolmaster gave birth to his amusing poem, “Death and Doctor Hornbook.” The story is so well known that there is no need to detail it here. The famous colloquy between himself and Death has been read by thousands with amusement and delight and has conferred an immortality on John Wilson, the dominie, which he scarcely deserved.

A quaint regulation, dated 7th December 1785, written by John Wilson (Dr Hornbook) and signed “Robert Burness” is worthy of mention at this point.

“The Lodge thought proper to writing that old regulation. That who ever stands as Master shall be bound at the entry of a new member for that members dues if the money is not paid or security such as the Lodge shall approve of.”

In 1786 Burns again attended nine meetings, at the second of which, on 1st March, he passed and raised his brother Gilbert. It is interesting to note that he signed the Minute of the meeting “Robert Burns.” Up to this date he has used the signature “Robert Burness.” Apparently during all this time, though living some miles from the village, he never missed a single meeting of his Lodge and on several occasions, as we have seen, he held subordinate meetings in Mauchline, thus doing his utmost to promote the tenets of Freemasonry.

For a time at least Gilbert Burns took an active part in the affairs of the Lodge. His name appears in the Minute Book on five separate occasions between 11th December 1786 and 21st December 1787, and he occupied the Chair on two occasions, when the Lodge met at Mauchline on 18th and 20th November 1788. In July 1787 he had a loan from the Lodge of £6, 5s. (a not uncommon practice in those days), which he repaid in June 1788.

It soon became apparent that the Brethren were not satisfied with their meeting place in Manson’s Tavern and they began to look around for more suitable quarters. We find a curious proposition recorded in the Minute of 15th June:—

“It was proposed by the Lodge that, as they much wanted a Lodge-room, a proposal be laid before the heritors, who are intending to build a steeple here, that the Lodge will contribute to the building of a Lodge-room, as the basis of that steeple; and that, from the funds of the Lodge, they
offer fifteen pounds, besides what will be advanced from the particular friends of the Lodge. In order that this proposal be properly laid before the heritors, five persons, namely the Right Worshipful Master, Brother McMath, Brother Burns, Brother Wodrow, Brother William Andrew— are appointed to meet on Saturday at one o’clock, to draw up a proposal to lay before the heritors on Friday first.”

What became of the proposal is unknown. There is no record of the Lodge ever having assembled in the base of the proposed steeple.

In all Burns signed twenty-nine Minutes as Depute Master, and three are wholly his penmanship. He also subscribed his initials to a postscript. One of these signatures was stolen and never recovered. A second attempt was made to steal another part of the precious volume, but the theft was discovered in time and the stolen portion returned. It can be seen neatly pasted in its original setting. This Minute Book is, of course, of especial interest and is fully preserved in the Lodge which also treasures the Master’s chair, footstool, apron and the mallet used by him when presiding at its meetings, the candlesticks and other articles associated with him during his term of office. Also to be seen is an old Tyler’s sword. The Lodge Bible, which bears the date 1775, was one of the poet’s possessions and was presented to the Lodge by his brother Gilbert and himself. It was purchased by the Lodge on 29th July 1786. The Minute reads— “Bible cost 13s., lettering (i.e., the printed name of the Lodge outside) cost 3s.” The Lodge has also the oft-quoted letter addressed by him from Edinburgh to his Lodge Brethren, prior to his Highland tour, intimating the reason for his inability to be present at one of their important meetings.

At this point it might be interesting and enlightening to enumerate some of the Rules applicable to St James’s Lodge in Burns’s day:—

“At the third stroke of the Grand Master’s hammer silence shall be maintained under a penalty of twopence.

“Whosoever shall break a drinking glass at any meeting shall be liable to the instant payment of sixpence sterling for it, and the same sum for every other he may break before he leaves the room or company.

“Those not at meetings within an hour of the fixed time shall be fined twopence.

“If any Brother be so unfortunate as to have disordered his senses by strong liquors and thereby rendered himself incapable of behaving himself decently, peaceably and kind towards those around him, such Brother coming to the Lodge in that condition to the disturbance and disgust of his Brethren, shall be prudently ordered away to some place of safety in the meantime, and at the next meeting shall submit to such censure and admonition from the Chair, and to such a fine inflicted by the Lodge on him as to them may appear proper to his crime, and deter him from it in all time coming.

“Whereas a Lodge always means a company of worthy men and circumspect, gathered together in order to promote charity, friendship, civility and good neighbourhood, it is enacted that no member of this Lodge shall speak slightingly, detractingly or calumniously of any of his Brethren behind their backs, so as to damage them in their professions or reputations without any certain grounds, and any member committing any such offence must humble himself by asking on his knees the pardon of such person or persons as his folly or malice hath aggrieved. Obstinate refusal to comply with this rule of the Brethren assembled shall be met with expulsion from the Lodge with every mark of ignominy and disgrace that is consistent with Justice and Freemasonry.”

The excellent manner in which Burns carried out his duties may be gauged not only from his attendance record and his care of the Minutes of Proceedings, but also from the following letter written by Professor Dugald Stewart:—

“In Summer 1787 I passed some weeks in Ayrshire, and saw Burns occasionally... I was led by curiosity to attend for an hour or two a Masonic Lodge in Mauchline, where Burns presided. He had occasion to make some short unpremeditated compliments to different individuals from
The above contains a full minute written and signed by Gilbert Burns; also a full minute written and signed by Robert Burns; also Burns's signature to another minute.

whom he had no occasion to expect a visit, and everything he said was happily conceived and forcibly as well as fluently expressed. His manner of speaking in public had evidently the marks of some practice in extempore elocution.”

Professor Dugald Stewart, who was then resident in Catrine, was admitted an honorary member of St. James’s Lodge, and the Minute recording his admission was signed “Robert Burns, D.M.” The Professor was a member of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning and proved himself a very good friend to the poet during his residence in Edinburgh and according to Burns was “the most perfect character I ever saw.” Their early morning walks on the Braid Hills were greatly enjoyed by both.

During Burns’s term of office as Depute Master the Brethren were convened no fewer than seventy times, at thirty-three of which he was present, and his attendances would doubtless have been more numerous had he not been away from the district for lengthy periods in these two momentous years, 1787-1788.

It is generally believed that he visited a number of Lodges in his immediate vicinity. At a meeting, on 27th March 1786, of Lodge Loudoun Kilwinning, Newmilns, of which his friend Gavin Hamilton was Master, he was introduced to the Brethren and “much to the satisfaction of
was admitted a member, Brother John Morton being “answerable for” his “admission money.”

A writer in the *Burns Chronicle* of 1893 states that the poet was present at a Mason Lodge held at Sorn on 5th October 1786, and in the same Annual for 1905 we have it that he “mixed with the Brethren of the Craft in St. Andrew’s Lodge in Irvine,” and that “it is conjectured that it was in that town” that the “stanza added in a Mason Lodge” was tacked on to his bacchanalian song, whose refrain is the “big-bellied bottle”:—

“Then fill up a bumper, and make it o’erflow,
And honours Masonic prepare for to throw;
May every true Brother of the Compass and Square
Have a big-bellied bottle when harass’d with care!”

Notwithstanding the long distance he had to travel he never found the road to and from the Lodge wearisome. The thought of the meeting ahead and poetical composition so intruded into his mind that the miles would seem shorter. Masonic thoughts which are easily detectable in his poems can no doubt be traced to these evening walks. It has been said that Burns’s attendances at Masonic meetings led him into excesses. His brother Gilbert’s testimony on this point is surely an effective answer to those who would cast this slur on the poet:—

“Towards the end of the period under review (in his twenty-fourth year), and soon after his father’s death, he was furnished with the subject of his epistle to John Rankin. During this period, also, he became a Freemason, which was his first introduction to the life of a boon companion. Yet, notwithstanding these circumstances, and the praise he has bestowed on Scotch Drink (which seems to have misled his historians) I do not recollect during these seven years, nor till towards the end of his commencing author (when his growing celebrity occasioned his often being in company), to have ever seen him intoxicated; nor was he at all given to drinking.”

By this time Burns had become recognised as an outstanding poet, and his poems had been well received by those who heard them. It was during the winter of 1785-1786 that the full strength of his genius shone forth as at no other time. His poems were known to comparatively few, however, but among those few were the members of his own Lodge, and they from the first recognised the poet’s merits. On the suggestion of Gavin Hamilton, a lawyer, and landlord of Mossgiel Farm, Burns was persuaded to collect his writing and publish them by subscription, and so early in 1786 he went to Kilmarnock to arrange for this being done. He took up the suggestion with enthusiasm, and it is not too much to say that the Brethren of his Lodge were, out of friendship to their brother Mason, largely responsible for the first edition of his poems. The Brethren of St John’s Lodge, Kilmarnock, which he frequently visited, also assisted very handsomely by subscribing freely themselves and getting others to supplement their action. They agreed to take 150 copies as soon as they were printed, the Right Worshipful Master subscribing for 35 copies and another Brother for 75. This volume might with every justification be called a Masonic Edition. Burns himself could not find the means to publish it, but his Masonic Brethren loyalty supported him in ensuring the success of the venture, which was, as might be expected, dedicated to Gavin Hamilton. John Wilson, an enthusiastic Mason, was the printer of this First Edition. It cannot fail to be noticed that contact with Freemasons and Freemasonry runs like a golden thread throughout the poet’s life, and the friends he met in the Craft had no small share in shaping his destiny. Well may Scottish Masons claim to have “deserved well of humanity.” for they saved from oblivion these gems of poetry and song which came from “the soul of a man.”

Meantime he was having serious domestic troubles, Jean Armour and Mary Campbell had entered into his life, and his farming losses were heavy. The Highland Mary episode wherein Mary Campbell and Robert Burns enacted their betrothal, on opposite banks of the River Ayr, with ritualistic ceremony had a Masonic touch about it: vows of fidelity were pronounced, Bibles exchanged, the Masonic Mark with, on the one leaf, “And ye shall not swear by my name falsely.
...I am the Lord” from Leviticus, Chap. xix, v. 12, and on the other, “Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths” from St. Matthew, Chap. v., v. 33. This historic Bible with the signatures erased and part of the “Mark” obliterated fell into the hands of a relative of Mary Campbell after her death, was purchased in Canada for £25, and may be seen in the Burns Cottage Museum at Alloway.

Burns was so weighed down by despondency that it was in the hope of bettering his position that he made up his mind on 12th June to proceed to Jamaica to take up an appointment there. One can easily understand in what stress he must have been when he entertained such a thought. Freemasonry had taught him “ever to remember that the Almighty had implanted in his breast a sacred attachment towards that country whence he derived his birth and infant nurture.” In his early years he had again and again nourished the hope that he would “for puir auld Scotland’s sake” make “some usefu’ plan or book” or “sing a sang at least.”

He was re-elected to the Depute Mastership on 16th June 1786, his brother Gilbert going into the Senior Warden’s Chair. It is rather curious that he should have allowed his name to go forward on that date for re-election to this office as he had already set his mind on Jamaica, and on 23rd June he recited his “Farewell to the Brethren of St James’s Lodge.” This meeting was probably that to which he had sent his poetical invitation to his doctor, Dr. Mackenzie of Mauchline.

“The Day appointed” was the anniversary of St John the Baptist, and this was observed by the Brethren walking in procession. It was “Carnival day in Tarbolton.” As Mid-summer Day was one of the few occasions on which Free-masonry came before the public, Burns was especially anxious that there should be a good muster of the Brethren and so used to address the members personally. The poem quoted above has been preserved with the signature “Robert Burns, D.M.” and dated from “Mossgiel, 14th June, A.M. 1790.”

The famous Kilmarnock Edition of his poems was published on 31st July, met with instant success, and he suddenly leapt into fame. The whole 612 copies were bought up in the matter of a few weeks, he himself being richer by £20. What these volumes are worth to-day it would be difficult to assess.

His passage to Jamaica had been booked. His vessel was due to sail at the end of November. He had written his “Farewell to the Brethren,” and Scotland seemed on the point of losing her illustrious son, when a letter written by Doctor Blacklock to a friend, and which Burns received, caused him to change his mind, overthrow all his schemes, and remain in his native land, where new prospects to his poetic ambition were opened up. To quote his own words:–
"I had just taken the last farewell of a few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; when Dr. Blacklock's opinion that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition fired me so much that I posted away to that city."

This "last song" was "The gloomy night is gathering fast." Had Burns's intention to emigrate been fulfilled it is more than likely that his great "Farewell" poem would have concluded his active connection with Scottish Freemasonry.

"Adieu! a heart-warm, fond adieu
   Dear brothers of the mystic tie!
Ye favour'd, ye enlighten'd few,
   Companions of my social joy!
Tho' I to foreign lands must hie,
   Pursuing Fortune's slidd'ry ba',
With melting heart, and brimful eye,
   I'll mind you still, tho' far awa'.

Oft have I met your social band,
   And spent the cheerful festive night;
Oft honour'd with supreme command,
   Presided o'er the sons of light;
And by that hieroglyphic bright,
   Which none but craftsmen ever saw!
Strong mem'ry on my heart shall write
   Those happy scenes when far away'.

May freedom, harmony and love,
   Unite you in the grand design,
Beneath th'omniscient eye above,
   The glorious architect divine!
That you may keep th'unerring line,
   Still rising by the plummet's law,
Till order bright completely shine,
   Shall be my prayer when far away'.

And you, farewell! whose merits claim,
   Justly that highest badge to wear!
Heav'n bless your honour'd, noble name,
   To masonry and Scotia dear!
A 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'!"

Some of his biographers have stated that by the time he reached the last stanza many of the Brethren were in tears.

The person entitled to wear the "Highest Badge" was the Master of the Lodge, and the Master of St. James's at that date was Captain, afterward Major-General James Montgomerie, a young brother of Colonel Hugh Montgomerie, afterward Earl of Eglinton. Some authorities assert that the reference is to the Grand Master Mason of Scotland, William Wallace, Sheriff of Ayr. The
poet’s request to be remembered yearly at the festive board is regularly honoured in St. James’s Lodge.

On 26th October Burns was made an honorary member of Kilmarnock Kilwinning St. John, No. 24 (now No. 22), which met in the old Commercial Inn, now demolished, in Croft Street. He was pleased at the honour conferred upon him and in recognition wrote the stanzas beginning “Ye sons of Old Killie, assembled by Willie,” the Christian name of the reigning Master whose name appears at the close of the following Minute:—

“Oct. 26th, 1786.”

“Present the Right Worshipful Master, Deputy Master and several brethren, when John Galt, farmer, in Cressland, was, upon his petition, made and entered Apprentice. At same time Robert Burns, poet, Mauchline, a member of St. James’s, Tarbolton, was made an honorary member of this Lodge.”

(Signed) “WILL PARKER.”

“Ye sons of Old Killie, assembled by Willie,
To follow the noble vocation;
Your thrifty old mother has scarce such another
To sit in that honoured station.

Within this dear Mansion, may wayward Contention
Or withered Envy ne’er enter;
May Secrecy round be the mystical bound,
And brotherly Love be the Centre!”

Several Lodges now began to recognise the genius of the poet and also to show their appreciation of the man. In this connection it is noteworthy that Kilmarnock Kilwinning conferred on him his first honorary membership, and it was the first occasion on which he is described as a poet. This Lodge has amongst its many treasured possessions a Master’s mallet presented to the Lodge by Burns, and a holograph letter from Sir Walter Scott. Here is a copy of the letter:—

“Sir,—I am much gratified by the sight of the portrait of Robert Burns. I saw that distinguished poet only once, and that many years since, and being a bad marker of likeness and recollector of faces, I should in an ordinary case have hesitated to offer an opinion upon the resemblance, especially as I make no pretension to judge of the fine arts. But Burns was so remarkable a man that his features remain impressed on my mind as I had seen him only yesterday, and I could not hesitate to recognise this portrait as a striking resemblance of the poet, though it had been presented to me amid a whole exhibition.

I am, sir,
Your obedient servant

WALTER SCOTT.

Edinburgh, 14 November (1829).”

Burns presided at a meeting of his Lodge on 10th November 1786, soon after which he set his face towards Edinburgh, reaching there on 28th November and taking up his residence with his friend John Richmond in Baxter’s Close, Lawnmarket. In the metropolis he was to spend some of the happiest moments of his life, and these were closely bound up with Freemasonry. Two days after his arrival the Grand Lodge of Scotland celebrated the Festival of Saint Andrew. The Brethren assembled in the aisle of St Giles and walked in procession to St. Andrew’s Church, where a Masonic service was conducted. Burns may have been in that procession as invitations were issued to Brethren of country Lodges requesting their presence at the function. Shortly after his arrival in
the city he was introduced to Lodge Canongate Kilwinning by Brother James Dalrymple of Orangefield near Ayr, and who had previously known the poet. He is reputed to have attended a meeting of this Lodge on 7th December, but Brother D. Murray Lyon does not admit to definite evidence on the point. If he was there, and whether or not, he met Lord Glencairn and the Hon. Henry Erskine, both introduced by Brother Dalrymple. Of these three Brethren Burns writes in terms of the highest praise. In conversation with his friend Gavin Hamilton the same evening, he says:—

"I am in a fair way to becoming as eminent as Thomas à Kempis or John Bunyan... My Lord Glencairn and the Dean of Faculty, Mr. H. Erskine, have taken me under their wing; and by all probability I shall soon be the tenth worthy, and the eighth wise man of the world... I have met in Mr. Dalrymple, of Orangefield, what Solomon emphatically calls 'A friend that sticketh closer than a brother.'"

The Earl of Glencairn never lost interest in Burns. He introduced him to Creech the publisher, secured the patronage of the Caledonian Hunt, did everything in his power to obtain subscribers among the nobility, and used his influence to get Burns into the Excise. Burns was not the man to allow this kindness to pass without showing his appreciation. Some three years later Glencairn died, and when the poet learned of this he wrote to the factor in these words:—

"Dare I trouble you to let me know privately before the day of interment, that I may cross the country and steal among the crowd to pay a tear to the last sight of my ever revered benefactor?"

And in addition to this he composed in his "Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn" one of the finest stanzas he ever wrote:—

"The bridegroom may forget the bride
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;
The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head an hour has been;
The mother may forget the bairn
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
And a' that thou hast done for me!"

In Edinburgh he was to find many of the literati who thought highly of him. Principal Robertson, for example, owned that he scarcely ever met any man whose conversation displayed more intellectual vigour. Dugald Stewart's reference to him has already been noted. Dalzel, Professor of Greek in Edinburgh University says:—

"We have a poet in town just now, whom everybody is taking notice of — a ploughman from Ayrshire — a man of unquestionable genius. He runs the risk of being spoiled by the excessive attention paid him just now by persons of all ranks. Those who know him best say he has too much good sense to allow himself to be spoiled."

Burns's fame was now rapidly growing and he threw himself zealously into the work of publishing a second and enlarged volume of his poems. He was to find that the Masonic associations which had proved so helpful in the issue of his Kilmarnock Edition were to stand him in good stead again. These friends were practically all members of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning.

He definitely visited Lodge St Andrew on 12th January 1787, on the occasion of a visitation from Grand Lodge when the Grand Master Charteris unexpectedly gave the toast "Caledonia and Caledonia's Bard, Brother Burns." The following day Brother John Ballantine of Ayr received this letter from the poet describing his visit to the Lodge:—

"I went to a Mason Lodge yesternight where the Most Worshipful Grand Master Charteris and all the Grand Lodge of Scotland visited. The meeting was most numerous and elegant; all the different Lodges about town were present in all their pomp. The Grand Master, who presided with great solemnity, and honour to himself as a Gentleman and Mason, among other general toasts
gave ‘Caledonia and Caledonia’s Bard, Brother Burns,’ which rung through the whole Assembly with multiplied honours and repeated acclamations. As I had no idea such a thing would happen, I was downright thunder-struck, and trembling in every nerve made the best return in my power. Just as I finished, some of the Grand Officers said so loud as I could hear, with a most comforting accent, ‘Very well indeed,’ which set me something to rights again.”

Two weeks afterwards, on 1st February, we find him in Canongate Kilwinning Lodge, surrounded by some of the literary personalities of Edinburgh, and there he was affiliated as set forth in the following short Minute:-

“The Right Worshipful Master (Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch) having observed that Brother Burns was at present in the Lodge, who is well known as a great poetic writer, and for a late publication of his works, which have been universally commended, and submitted that he should be assumed a member of this Lodge, which was unanimously agreed to, and he was assumed accordingly.”

The Minute concludes that:—

“Having spent the evening in a very social manner, as the meetings of the Lodge always have been, it was adjourned till next monthly meeting,”

and it was at this meeting on 1st March that Burns is supposed to have been installed as Poet Laureate. The Minute of 1st February went upon the Lodge Book, and it is preserved to-day in the Lodge among its choicest treasures. The meeting on 1st February was, so far as in known, the last Masonic meeting attended by Burns in Edinburgh, if we omit the ceremony of the Poet Laureateship on 1st March, about which there has been so much dispute. The matter has never been satisfactorily cleared up. Lodge books in those days were very imperfectly kept. Many of the Minutes were not even signed. For example, there is no Minute in the St. Andrew’s Lodge Books that Burns was ever in that Lodge, and his visit there might never have been remembered had he not happened to refer to it in the letter already quoted to one of his friends.

With regard to the much discussed meeting of Lodge Canongate Kilwining on 1st March 1787, it has been assumed that the business which was to have come before the meeting was in the first place to send a letter of congratulation to the Prince of Wales, who had on 6th February been initiated into the mysteries of Free-masonry at the Star and Garter, London, and secondly to confer a mark of respect on Robert Burns. But the Minute in question as it appears in the Canongate Kilwining records reads:—

“St John’s Chapel, 1st March 1787.—The Lodge being duly constituted, it was reported that since last meeting” (and here follow the names of newly made Entered Apprentices and Fellow of Craft) “no other business being before the meeting the Lodge adjourned.”

No word here of Burns’s installation as Poet Laureate nor of any congratulatory epistle to the Prince of Wales.

Was he referring to the Laureateship when he penned the following lines in acknowledgement of a present from a friend?

“But Latin Willie’s reek noo raise (Willie Nicol)  
He’d seen that nicht Rab crown’d wi’ bays.”

It would appear that as far as Lodge Canongate is concerned the first reference to Burns’s inauguration to the Poet Laureateship was not until 1815, when the Brethren were asked to subscribe to the fund for the erection of the Mausoleum of Burns who, they said, “had been Poet Laureate to the Lodge,” this being followed in 1835 when James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, was elected to succeed Burns as Poet Laureate, acknowledged the honour conferred upon him as well as the compliment of being Burns’s successor. The Brethren drank to the memory of Burns as “the last Poet Laureate of the Lodge.” If any of those who were members of the Lodge in 1787 were present on either or both of these dates they must have known the facts. Certain it is that the statements were never contradicted.
An interesting correspondence between Brother H. C. Peacock, Secretary of the Lodge, and Brother D. Murray Lyon is to be found in *The History of the Lodge Canongate Kilwinning, No. 2*, by Allan Mackenzie, R.W.M., in 1883-1887, regarding the controversy.

The Edinburgh Edition of Burns’s poems was published on 21st April 1787, from the publishing shop of Mr. Creech, in the Luckenbooths. It was in a handsome octavo volume, price five shillings. Creech’s advertisement contained the following note:—

“As the book is published for the sole benefit of the author, it is requested that subscribers will send for their copies: and none will be delivered without money.”

The Kilmarnock Preface was abandoned and in its place appeared a

DEDICATION

TO THE NOBLEMEN AND GENTLEMEN

OF THE CALEDONIAN HUNT

and then follows the Preface by Burns. The list of Subscribers extended to over thirty-eight pages comprising 1,500 persons subscribing for 2,800 copies. Many of them were members of Canongate Kilwinning. Smellie, his printer, Creech, his publisher, and Nasmyth, who provided the frontispiece to his works, were all Masons. In that connection it has been said that “surely never book came out of a more Masonic laboratory.” It was, too, his Brother Mason, John Ballantyne of Ayr who, hearing that poverty prevented the publication of a second edition of his poems offered to lend him the money required for the purpose.

“Affliction’s sons are brothers in distress;
A brother to relieve, how exquisite the bliss.”

There is no doubt that his connection with Freemasonry in Edinburgh was the most interesting and to him the most enjoyable period of his life, and it was during the few months spent there that his genius was appreciated and rewarded.

After having spent about five months in the Capital he set out on 6th May 1787 on a tour to the South of Scotland with Mr. Robert Ainslie, a young lawyer, to whom he had been introduced at a Masonic meeting. They visited a number of interesting spots and met several distinguished people. On 7th May they reached Coldstream and crossed the border into England. Burns’s love for his native land overcame him here and he could not refrain from uttering aloud, with deep emotion and devotion, the two concluding stanzas of “The Cotter’s Saturday Night,” four of the lines being:—

“O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven

The above contains the signature of the poet with his Mason’s mark (9 points); also the signature of John Wilson (Dr. Hornbook).
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health and peace and sweet content!"

On 18th May they arrived at Eyemouth where, through the influence of their host, a meeting of the Lodge was convened for the next day, and there Burns and Ainslie were made Royal Arch Masons, as set forth in the following Minute:—

"Eyemouth, 19th May 1787.

"At a general encampment held..." in Lodge St Ebbe, "the following Brethren were made Royal Arch Masons — namely Robert Burns... and Robert Ainslie... Robert Ainslie paid one guinea admission dues: but on account of R. Burns's remarkable poetical genius, the encampment unanimously agreed to admit him gratis, and considered themselves honoured by having a man of such shining abilities for one of their companions."

The members of the Lodge forming this "general encampment" secured an English Charter some three months later authorising them to be erected into a Chapter, bearing the name of "Land of Cakes" R. A. Chapter, No. 52, on the English Roll. The Chapter is now Scottish, No. 15.

Having parted with Ainslie he crossed the north of England to Dumfries, where he stayed two days and was presented with the freedom of the burgh. Ayr and Mossgiel were reached on 9th June and ten days later he was re-elected Depute Master of his Lodge, but there is no record of his being at the meeting and the Minute is unsigned. St. James's Lodge sometimes met by deputation at Mauchline. On 25th July he presided at a meeting there, honorary membership being conferred on several well-known Masons, including Professor Dugald Stewart, who had on more than one occasion befriended the poet.

In the early days of August Burns returned to Edinburgh to settle with his publisher. An important meeting of his Lodge was due, and he found himself unable to be present. He accordingly sent the following letter to his Tarbolton Lodge, addressed "Men and Brethren" and with the date "Edinburgh, 23rd August 1787:—

"I am truly sorry it is not in my power to be at your quarterly meeting. If I must be absent in body, believe me I shall be present in spirit. I suppose those who owe us monies, by bill or otherwise, will appear — I mean those we summoned. If you please, I wish you would delay prosecuting defaulters till I come home. The court is up, and I will be home before it sits down. In the meantime to take a note of who appear and who do not, of our faulty debtors, will be right in my humble opinion; and those who confess debt and crave days, I think we should spare them. Farewell!

Within your dear Mansion may wayward Contention
Or withered Envy ne'er enter;
May Secrecy round be the mystical bound,
And brotherly Love be at the Centre!!

ROBERT BURNS

The quatrain above it will be recalled was the last of the verses he wrote to Lodge Kilmarnock Kilwinning on his receiving honorary membership there. One word only was changed, viz:— "your" replacing "their" in the first line.

Two days later he set out on his Highland tour with Willie Nicol, immortalised as having "brewed a peck o' maut," said to be the greatest drinking song in any language. They reached beyond Inverness, travelling in all nearly 600 miles over a period of twenty-two days, and meeting many Masonic Brethren en route. Tradition has it that he was made an honorary member of Lodge Ancient Brazen. No. 17, Linlithgow, but there is no record of this having taken place. Lodge Stirling Ancient, No. 30 also believes that he attended a meeting of the Brethren and entered his name in the Attendance Book. This Register used to be displayed to visitors, but on one occasion it was found that the page containing the poet's signature had been removed, and at a subsequent
date the register too disappeared. This would almost indicate that he was in reality a visitor there. Their arrival in Edinburgh on 16th September completed the tour.

Burns spent the winter in the Capital prodding his publisher for a settlement. When this was squared he found himself enriched to the extent of £500. He was also in communication with Brother Patrick Millar of Dalswinton for a lease of the farm of Ellisland, and at the same time was seeking, through the good offices of one of his brother Masons, an appointment in the Excise. There is very little documentary evidence to show that he interested himself in Masonry during this second Edinburgh period, though it has been asserted that he attended many meetings during these five months. On one occasion he states in an undated letter that “To-night the Grand Master and Lodge of Masons appear at the Theatre in form. I am determined to go to the play... I will call on you a few minutes before the Theatre opens.” Members of the Craft were patrons of the Drama and when a particular play was on they were wont to appear in full Masonic regalia.

Burns returned to Mossgiel in March 1788, married Jean Armour in April, and lent his brother Gilbert £200 to ease the condition of his widowed mother and her family. He attended his Lodge on 7th and 23rd May, the latter occasion being the last time he signed the Minute as Depute Master. It is reputed that he foregathered with the Brethren on 24th June, on the occasion of the annual Masonic procession. A few days before, on 13th June, he had taken possession of Ellisland, but does not seem to have been enamoured with the idea of residing in Dumfriesshire, for in a letter to his friend Hugh Parker, lamenting the fact that he was missing his Ayrshire friends, he pens a verse concluding with:—

“Tarbolton, twenty-fourth of June,
Ye’ll find me in a better tune.”

Another fact of regret to him was that there was not a “keen’d face” in the district except his auld mare, Jenny Geddes:—

“Dowie she saunters doon Nithside
And aye a westlin’ leuk she throws
While tears hap ower her auld broon nose.”

On this 24th of June James Findlay, a fellow exciseman, was appointed Depute Master in succession to the poet, the Master being James Dalrymple of Orangefield, who has already been referred to as befriending Burns while in Edinburgh.

He paid flying visits to Mauchline on 21st October and 11th November, when his Lodge met under his presidency. This was the last meeting of St. James’s Lodge he attended and his association with this Lodge which he so much adorned was at an end.

While at Ellisland his Masonic interest was renewed. He affiliated to Lodge St. Andrew, Dumfries, No. 179, erected in 1774, and with this Lodge he retained his connection to the end. It became known as “Burns’s Lodge.” His affiliation fee was 10s. The Minute which records his admission is a quaint one and full of inaccuracies, both as to spelling and figures:—

“The Brethren having celebrated the Anniversary of St. John in the usual manner and Brother Burns is Aellisland of St. Davids Strabolton Lodge, No. 178, being present The Lodge unanimously assumed him a member of the Lodge being a Master Masson he subscribed the regulations as a member Thereafter the Lodge was shut.

Signed Sim Mackenzie.”

The next mention of the poet is made in the Minute of 28th December, 1789, when his name appears on the list of those present, and as having made payment, along with the other members, of his quarterly fees. Then again he is one of five Brethren who met in the Globe Tavern, Dumfries, in April 1790, when as usual friendships were established, one of his friends presenting him with an apron of

“Chamois leather, very fine, with figures of gold, some of them relieved with green, others with a dark red colour (while) on the under side of the semi-circular part which is turned down at the top is written in a bold, fair hand:—
Charles Sharpe, of Hotham, to Rabbie Burns, Dumfries, Dec. 12, 1791.”*

Burns and Sharpe were mutually interested in music and verse.

His next appearance was at the meeting on 19th April 1791, but for some reason the blank space left for the Minute was never filled in. On 27th December of the same year, and on 6th February and 14th May 1792, he was again present at meetings of the Lodge when he acted as Steward. On 31st May of that year he took part in the proceedings, part of which was ordering the clerk to procure “a proper silver seal for the use of the Lodge.” On 5th June he appears again. As he was now resident in Dumfries, having given up the farm at Ellisland, it was more convenient and easier for him to be present at Lodge meetings. He attended again on 22nd and 30th November of that year, and at the latter meeting (St. Andrew’s Day), was elected to the Senior Warden’s chair, which office he filled for a year. Exactly a year later “The Senior Warden” (Burns) is noted as being present. His name does not appear again until 29th November 1794, when the election of office-bearers took place, and over a year elapses ere his name is mentioned on the sederunt, when on 28th January 1796 he stood sponsor for a candidate “a merchant in Liverpool who, being recommended by Burns, was admitted apprentice.” At this meeting the Brethren agreed that the new Apprentice’s “fees be applied towards defraying the expenses of this night.” While a member of St. Andrew’s Lodge, out of a possible sixteen meetings he was present at eleven of them. His final attendance was on 14th April 1796.

The state of Burns’s health at this time was such that Robert Chambers in his *Life of Burns*, speaking of these last two meetings says, “It is not unlikely that both on this occasion (14th April) and on the 28th of January Burns made an effort, if not a sacrifice, for the honour of persons whom he regarded as friends.” The Lodge records contain no reference to his death, though we may be sure the members paid tribute and respect to the memory of one who had assisted so often in their Masonic labours.

The Lodge ceased to meet in 1805, and an attempt was made in 1815 to revive it, when the Minute closes with a resolution to support the Provincial Grand Master, now William Millar of Dalswinton, at laying the foundation stone (on 5th June) of the Mausoleum to be erected over the remains of Robert Burns, the most distinguished Brother that St. Andrew’s Lodge had been privileged to receive within its portals. Several Lodges attended the ceremony, but St Andrew is not mentioned as being represented, although over 400 Freemasons took part in the proceedings. Efforts to revive it proved futile and no other meetings are recorded. It was struck off the roll of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1816. No reference is made in any of the other Lodges, meetings regularly while Burns lived in Dumfries, to his having paid them any visits, though no doubt he took his share in their proceedings from time to time, and thus it is to the precious Minute Book of the Lodge alone that we are indebted for some knowledge of the Masonic activities of our national poet during his stay in Dumfries.

In December 1879, at a public sale, certain articles, once the property of Lodge St. Andrew, No. 179, were purchased and paid for by the then Grand Master Mason, Sir. Michael Shaw Stewart, Baronet, who presented them to the Grand Lodge of Scotland. These were — (1) The Minute Book of Lodge St. Andrew, Dumfries, No. 179, of which Burns was an affiliated member, bearing the poet’s signature to the Bye-laws and containing the Minute of his admission; (2) the mallet of St. Andrew’s, and an apron used in the Lodge in Burns’s time. These are on exhibit in the Grand Lodge Museum.

In this brief survey of the Masonic activities of our national poet some minor details have been omitted, but perhaps sufficient has been written to show that in the short span of life vouchsafed to him Robert Burns proved himself an adornment to the Fraternity of which he was one of the most illustrious members.

[circa 1955]

* The apron is on display in Burn’s House, Dumfries.
Did Scotland’s national bard drink himself to death? One conventional view of Burns is that he was always rather too fond of a dram, and that alcoholism contributed to his early death in 1796 at the age of 37. Despite firm denials of evidence of alcoholism by medical experts, who have pointed instead to heart disease as the trouble which took Burns to his grave, at the popular level the drink theory has been hard to shift. However, documentary proof exists of Burns’s involvement in a single episode of drunken misbehaviour by his friend and fellow exciseman John Lewars, which took place in May 1792.

Briefly, on the way home after a night of drinking in Dumfries, Lewars tried to take a short cut through a neighbour’s property. When two serving-girls sought to stop him an angry altercation ensued, in the course of which a porringer of boiling water was thrown at Lewars and “a pig-full of suds” hurled back in exchange. The violent incident ended only when Burns managed to get Lewars safely out of the garden he had entered. A summons was raised but after considering the case brought against Lewars, the procurator-fiscal decided to abandon it.

It is open to denigrators of Burns to cite his participation in Lewars’ “roar of Folly and Dissipation” as a sign of decadence. One the other hand, the record of the case in question plainly shows that while Burns swopped verbal insults with one of the serving-girls, his main role was to put an end to the disturbance which had threatened to get out of hand: “Mr. Burns got him taken away.” In any case, indiscreet drinking on occasion does not constitute alcoholism.

The strongest argument against addiction to drink as the cause of Burns’s death, has always been the fact that both as exciseman and as song-writer he continued to get through a great deal of hard work until the end of his life. There has now come to light a completely fresh source of information, a diary entry written as late as June 1796, which suggests - among much else - that Burns did not at that time betray signs of alcoholism.

Thanks to the generosity of Sir Edward Playfair, who has presented the diary of James Macdonald to St. Andrews University Library, and of Mr. R. N. Smart, Keeper of Manuscripts, it is at last possible to add to the biographical record an independent eye-witness comment which in its own terms confirms not only Burns’s undimmed wit and humanity a few weeks before his death, but also his essential moderation in company.

James Macdonald was a gifted North Uistman in his mid twenties, with a remarkable career before him. A graduate of King’s College, Aberdeen, he was soon to leave Scotland for Germany as tutor to the son of a prominent Scots lawyer. It was almost certainly a Dumfries lawyer of his own age, William Wallace, who made it possible for him to spend an evening with Burns. The meeting took place in Johnstone’s public-house in “The Marquis’s Close”, Dumfries. (Johnstone was a local character who once requested Burns to write an epitaph about him. Burns obliged with the lines:

Here lies a mock Marquis
whose titles were shamm’d
If ever he rise, it will to be
d—’d).
Already an inveterate diarist, James
Macdonald made this long entry in his travel diary the next day:

Sanquhar, June 2:

"I arrived here from Dumfries this evening, after a ride of about 30 miles in the most romantic Country the mind can conceive. Yesterday Burns, the Ayrshire Poet, dined with me and few evenings of my life passed away more to my satisfaction. He looks consumptive, but was in excellent spirits, and displayed as much wit and humour in three hours time as any man I ever knew. He told me that being once in Stirling when was a young lad, and heated with drink, he had nigh got himself into a dreadful scrape by writing the following lines on the pane of a glass window in an Inn:

Here Stewart once in triumph reign'd
And laws for Scotland's weal ordain'd:
But now unroof'd their Palace stands,
Their Sceptres fall'n to other hands;
Fall'n indeed unto the Earth
Whence grovelling reptiles take their birth;

And since great Stewart's line has gone,
A race outlandish fills their throne;
An idiot race to honour lost,
Who know them best dispise them most.

These lines are a proof of Burns's rashness and folly. He promised to send me an ode he composed when chosen poet Laureat to a Meeting of Jacobite Gentlemen once in Edinburgh, when old Farquharson of Monalterie happened to meet with a poor Man who had fought by his side at the Battle of Culloden which circumstance when he mentioned it brought the tears into the Poet's Eyes. He told many anecdotes of himself and others in the very best and most genuine spirit of pleasantry.

The landlord of our Inn commonly known by the name of the Marquis of Johnstone, is also a good humoured fellow, and served as a whetstone for Bums's wit. They are both staunch republicans. Burns repeated an ode he composed on the Pretender's birthday, replete with grand imagery and brilliant expressions. I am sorry I do not remember the words of the ode, one simile which referred to the Swiss avalanche was sublime. He promised to send me a copy of it.

At parting the poor Poet with tears in his Eyes took an affectionate leave of me. He has vast pathos in his voice and as he himself says in his Vision, 'His eye e'en turned on empty space, beams keen with honour.' I am happy to have seen and enjoyed the company of this true heaven-born Genius, whose conversation is at least correspondent to his published thoughts, and whose personal appearance and address, partake more than is generally allowed of those of the Gentleman and of the scholar."

When Macdonald met Burns, the poet already knew that he was dying. Only days earlier, he had written to the engraver James Johnston, publisher of the Scots Musical Museum,

This protracting slow, consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the Poet to other an more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of Wit or the pathos of Sentiment.

Macdonald’s impression noted down in the language of the day “he looks consumptive” matches exactly the assessments of others who met Burns. Maria Riddell recognised ‘the stamp of death’ on Burns’s features when she saw him at Brow Well at the beginning of July. Burns greeted her with the question ‘Well, madam, have you any commands for the other world?’

Mortally ill though he was, his heart trouble painfully exacerbated by rheumatism, Burns revealed to Macdonald for three hours on end “the very best and most generous spirit of pleasantry”. It was natural that the two should talk of Jacobite affairs. Macdonald’s lineage was pure Hebridean. He was related to Flora Macdonald and had spoken only Gaelic for the first 12 years of his life.
Moreover, he had a young man's radicalism, which he was not to lose until years later, when anti-British comments on mainland Europe tilted his sympathies in another direction. As late as 1793 he could write to a friend "I have always had the ill or good fortune to be stigmatized as a democrat... I have always been for the French until this year, and of course will always be regarded as a Jacobin. Yet the mens sibi conscia recti is my rock and I fear nothing. "Burns no doubt read the character of the man quickly and accurately. It was safe to talk in his presence. Thus there were glimpses of the poet's own republicanism or "Jacobin" leanings, as well as of sentimental Jacobitism.

All this gives especial interest and value to Macdonald's diary entry. It has often struck students of Burns as paradoxical that the same man should have identified himself at different moments with Jacobite and then with republican ideas, while showing himself ready to write a patriotic ode at a time when Napoleon threatened invasion. There is no fundamental inconsistency. He was a man of radical temperament living in a period which made it peculiarly dangerous for him to disclose the fact. The orthodox might jib, but for Burns there was no insuperable difficulty in reconciling admiration for the lost Jacobite cause with contemporary revolutionary enthusiasm. He readily found a common element in his dislike of the Hanoverian establishment and of much that went with it. His native land was not to be stolen by any foreigner ("Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?"); but the man whose anecdotes gave such pleasure to James Macdonald had also the imagination to hail a new dawn beyond the tragic divisions of the 1790's. "It's coming yet for a' that."

One bond with Macdonald lay in an easily overlooked strand of Burns's family history. In 1787 he had informed John Ramsey of Ochtertyre that he was a Jacobite "Owing to his grandfather having been plundered and driven out in 1715 when he was gardener to Earl Marischall at Inverury." (George Keith, tenth Earl Marischall commanded the Jacobite cavalry at the battle of Sheriffmuir). This claim has proved hard for biographers to verify, but Burns clearly believed it, for it tallies with a comment in a letter to Dr. John Moore written in August 1787: "My fathers rented land off the noble Keiths of Marshal, and had the honor to share their fate". There was thus a personal identification with the Jacobite movement, even although Burns noted in his interleaved copy of the Scots Musical Museum, "To tell the matter of fact, except when my passions were heated by some accidental cause, my Jacobitism was merely by way of Vive la bagatelle."

The occasion, recalled for Macdonald, when Burns risked most in this connection took place in Stirling on August 27, 1787. In an unguarded moment the poet scribbled blatantly anti-Hanoverian lines on the window of an inn where he was being entertained by, among others, the captain of the castle and headmaster of Stirling High School. Almost inevitably, a copy of what he had written was pointedly printed by someone who objected to his "disloyal" sentiments. Subsequently, when Burns sought help towards an excise appointment, he was "question'd like a child about my matters, and blamed and schooled for my Inscription on Stirling a window."

Looking back across the years, he was able to admit to Macdonald that he had been rash to venture such lines in a public place. Line seven of the version he gave to Macdonald differs from known manuscripts. "And since great Stewart's line is gone" is arguably more forceful than "The injur'd STEWART-line are gone", recorded elsewhere.

It was on December 31, 1787, that Burns attended a dinner in "Cleland's Gardens", North St. James' Street, Edinburgh, held in honour of Prince Charles Edward's birthday. The Ode he wrote for the company, unpublished in Burns's lifetime, pays tribute to the honor'd mighty Dead Who nobly perished in the glorious Cause, and compares the Jacobite vengeance still to come to an avalanche:

As from the cliff with thundering course The snowy ruins smokes along,
With doubling speed and gathering force, Till deep it crashyng whelms the cottage in the vale:
The meeting which Burns described to Macdonald as having taken place after 41 years between Farquharson of Monalterie and a soldier who had fought with him at Culloden is not to be found in biographies of Burns and has poignant appeal.

"Francis Ban," Laid of Monalterie, had been among the leaders of Clan Chattan, "which bore the brunt of the battle". He was captured on the battlefield, named in the Act of Attainder and condemned to death, then released on the eve of execution. A condition of his release was that he must remain out of Scotland for 15 years. This Farquharson did, studying methods of agricultural improvement near Berkhamstead, then on his return to Deeside he made a significant contribution to farming in Aberdeenshire, as well as helping to create the village community that later acquired quite other royal associations as Ballater. Yet his presence at this dinner is clear proof that residence in England had not altered his allegiance. He died in 1790.

James Macdonald's diary entry connects in a dramatic way with the early history of Burns's reputation in Europe. In A Hebridean in Goethe's Weimar (1969) Alexander Gillies showed conclusively that Macdonald was instrumental in creating interest in Burns's work among the German writers he met from late 1796 onwards, that is considerably before Carlyle's writing stimulated German interest in Burns. The reason is now plain to see. Macdonald drew on personal experience. He could never forget his meeting with a poet whose talk was the equal of his writings, and whose eyes like Coila's in his poem The Vision "beam'd keen with Honor."

This article first appeared in The Scotsman 22 January, 1983.

THE LASS OF CESSNOCK BANKS

by

NORMAN R. PATON

On Cessnock banks a lassie dwells;
Could I describe her shape and mein!
Our lasses a' she far excels, –
An' she has twa sparkling rogueish een.

A Song of Similes,
By Robert Burns.

All these charming qualities, heighten by an education much beyond anything I have ever met with in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface.

Robert Burns to Dear E.
c. 1781.

Some twelve years after the untimely death of Robert Burns in 1796, one of his English admirers set forth northward on a journey which he hoped would fulfil his ambition of surveying the landscape and habitat of the famous poet. He was anxious to meet and converse with relatives and friends of Burns and gather what he could by way of information.
on the life and writing of the poet. He yearned, above all, that he might come into the possession of, *a scrap of handwriting of Burns*. As it transpired he obtained much more material than he had originally thought possible. The itinerant’s name was Robert Hartley Cromek. A trained lawyer, born at Hull in 1770, he had abandoned thoughts of a professional career, and chose instead the path of following artistic pursuits. He has left this account of his quest in gathering copies of poems, songs, fragments and letters, not previously in print, and which were subsequently made available in his published edition – *Reliques of Robert Burns* (Cadell & Davies, London 1808).

They are the result of a most diligent search, in which I have used the utmost exertions; often walking to considerable distances, and to obscure cottages in search of a single letter. Many of them have been obtained from the generous confidence and liberality of their possessors… In this pursuit I have followed the steps of the poet, from the humble cottage in Ayrshire in which he was born, to the House in which he died at Dumfries. – I have visited the farm of Mossgiel where he resided at the period of his first publication; I have traversed the scenes by the Ayr, the Lugar, and the Doon. Sacred haunts!

Among those whom Cromek traced and visited was the wife of a Glasgow businessman, Hugh Brown, whose premises were then at, 74 King Street in the city. The English lawyer had good reason to believe that Mrs. Brown had known Robert Burns long before he had emerged as the Bard of Alba, and he presumably pressed her for information regarding the poet, which she might be willing to divulge. The outcome of the visit must have delighted Cromek, as Mrs. Brown gave him permission to copy down the words of a song which Burns had written in her praise, all of twenty-six years previously. In due course Cromek published the verses in his edition, listing the accompanying tune as, *if he be a Butcher neat and trim*, and added the following source reference in a short footnote:

> This song was an early production. It was recovered by the Editor from the oral communication of a lady residing at Glasgow, whom the bard in early life affectionately admired

*On Cessnock banks there lives a lass,¹
Could I describe her shape and mein;
The graces of her weel'fard face,
And the glancin' of her sparklin' e'en.*

She’s fresher than the morning dawn
When rising Phoebus first is seen,
When dewdrops twinkle o'er the lawn;
An she’s twa glancin’ sparklin’ e’en.

She’s stately like yon youthful ash,
That grows the cowslip braes between,
And shoots its head above each bush;
An’ she’s twa glancin’ sparklin’ e’en.

Her voice is like the ev’ning thrush
That sings in Cessnock banks unseen,
While his mate sits nestling in the bush;
An’ she’s twa glancin’ sparklin’ e’en.

Her lips are like the cherries ripe,
That sunny walls from boreas screen,
They tempt the taste and charm the sight;
An’ she’s twa glancin’ sparklin’ e’en.

Her breath is like the fragrant breeze
That gently stirs the blossom’d bean,
When Phoebus sinks behind the seas;
An’ she’s twa glancin’ sparklin’ e’en.

But it’s not her air; her form, her face,
Tho’ matching beauty’s fabled queen,
But the mind that shines in ev’ry grace
An chiefly in her sparklin’ e’en.

Burns called it his *Song of Similes* and, despite the fact that it carries one or two weak stanzas, it certainly ranks as being among the best of his early effusions. The final verse captures, in a fitting climax, the full essence of the song:– the poet is enraptured with his heroine’s intellect – the concentration is solely on her head, enthusing on her exquisite features. Although the revised version (1927) makes reference to her bosom (stanza 12), Scott
Douglas had taken responsibility for the emendation of substituting bosom for teeth, assuming an error in the Aldine (1839) MS, the girl’s teeth having been referred to in a previous stanza, which, incidentally, is surely the poorest verse in the song. Of all her features, the poet is held in total admiration of her sparkling eyes, and with effortless ease, he rhymes een (eyes) no fewer than fourteen times without necessitating a repeat.

From the same period of his life in which the song had been composed Burns wrote four love-letters to one whom he referred to only as Dear E. The draft copies of the letters came to light among his papers when Dr. Currie was preparing the material for his four-volume edition, The Works of Robert Burns (Cadell & Davies 1800). Much speculation and a considerable amount of newsprint, have been given over to these letters ever since. The songwriter, William Motherwell thought them: the only sensible love-letters we have ever seen – other writers on Burns have been a good deal less charitable. The general opinion concluded that Robin had tried too hard in his attempt to emulate the examples in his manual on letter writing, and that he had merely emerged as a literary poseur vainly trying to impress the recipient in artificially stilted English. By the third letter of the series a clear proposal of marriage was offered to the girl:

If you would be so good and so generous as to admit me for your partner, your companion, your bosom friend through life; there is nothing on this side of eternity shall give me greater transport; but I shall never think of purchasing your hand by arts unworthy of a man, and I will add, of a Christian.

He seeks from the lady either: a peremptory refusal, or a generous consent. The fourth letter makes clear that his proposal was rejected. He informed Dear E. that his heart was so shocked by her reply that he can scarcely collect his thoughts to write to her. Then, in a passage which bears striking comparison with the concluding note of his song, he declares that her... uncommon personal advantages ... superior good sense, and her, endearing sweetness of disposition; he never again expects to meet with in this world:

All these charming qualities, heightened by an education much beyond any thing I have ever met in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface.

Although some authorities still continue to express doubt, the evidence points to the fact that, the lady who communicated the song to Cromek, had received those letters from Burns. No date was given on the copies discovered by Currie; however, it is clear from the text that early 1781 was the specific period. In a thorough research of this affair James Mackay, in his mammoth biography of the poet (1992) has identified the lady as Elizabeth Gebbie, the daughter of a tenant farmer at Pearsland, close to the village of Galston. At the time of her intimacy with Robert Burns she was employed as a housekeeper in a country mansion on the Cessnock banks. The facts given by Dr. Mackay verified information on the girl previously noted by Burns’s sister Isabel, as far back as 1848, with one significant difference – her maiden name! To the Burns family she was known as Ellison Begbie. Can any explanation satisfy this remarkable situation?

The discrepancy in the surname is, in fact, fairly minimal. By interchanging a g with a b Gebbie is obtained from Begbie; the mistake here may have been no more than the slip of a pen. Burns, in discussing her with his family, would probably have used only her first name in such conversations, thus a slight lapse of memory by Isabel Burns is also a distinct possibility. The first name, Ellison, may well have been the Ayrshire phonetic of Alison, and given to the girl by Burns, as a sobriquet or pet-name, from the song, Peggy Alison, which, it is thought, he had composed in her favour:

And I’ll kiss thee yet, yet,
And I’ll kiss thee o’er again;
And I’ll kiss thee yet, yet,
My bonie Peggy Alison.

In giving this song to James Johnson’s Musical Museum in 1788, Burns marked it Z, thereby indicating that he was using some
material from an old song: in all probability, the chorus given above. Only two verses, however, were given to Johnson; another verse now given in most editions of Burns, immediately after the chorus, was first published by Robert Hartley Cromek—it runs thus:

Ilk care and fear, when thou art near,
I ever mair defy them, O:
Young kings upon their hansel throne
Are nae sae blest as I am, O.

The clue as to the source and means of Cromek chancing upon this additional stanza, emerges from the fact that, he chose to place it in his edition, adjacent to The Lass of Cessnock Banks. Where else but from Mrs. Hugh Brown, the erstwhile Elizabeth Gebbie, did Cromek obtain the restored first verse? Some early sources suggested that Mary Campbell, the poet’s Highland Mary, was the subject of the song Bonie Peggy Alison; the confusion here was, almost certainly, caused by Gilbert Burns’s statement that, his brother’s exquisite verses on Mary Morison were composed for the same girl as the ones he had written for Peggy Alison. In the early studies of Burns his affair with Mary Campbell had been assumed as taking place in the early 1780’s, at the time when these two songs had been composed, and, the mistake of thinking that Burns had substituted Morison for Campbell, to suit the rhyme and scansion of the song, prompted all the complications. In actual fact it is much more likely that he amended his early draft of Mary Morison whereby the original name Peggy Ellison was deleted in favour of the factitious Miss Morison. There is no doubt that the quality of the song is thus enhanced at the point of impact in the conclusion of each stanza. When Scott Douglas confronted the poet’s sister with this theory she conceded:

The idea regarding ‘Peggy Ellison’ being a euphonious rendering of Ellison Begbie is fanciful, but very like truth. ‘O Peggy at thy window be’—very sensibly arranged by Mr. D.

However, when Scott Douglas raised the issue of Ellison being the subject of the song Montgomerie’s Peggy he was immediately spiked by Isobel Burns’s reply—one of her daughters declaring:

How Mr. Douglas runs into the mistake of saying that Mrs. Begg (Isobel Burns), in her account of Ellisen Beggie, represents her as the same with Montgomerie’s Peggy, is to me incomprehensible: she has ever said the very reverse: they were as distinct as two souls can be... Burns and she (Montgomerie’s Peggy) had met frequently at Tarbolton Mill... they sat in the same church, and had a good deal of intercourse: but she was engaged to another before ever they met: so, on her part, it was nothing but amusement, and on Burns’s part, from the way he speaks of it little more.

This, however, does not quite tally with Burns’s view of his affair with Montgomerie’s Peggy, although he admitted that he:

...began the affair merely in a ‘gaite de cour’, and, to tell the truth, a vanity of showing my parts in courtship, particularly my abilities at a Billet-doux which I always piqued myself upon, made me lay siege to her; and when I had battered myself into a very warm affection for her, she told me one day, in a flag of truce, that her fortress had been for some time before the rightful property of another, but with the greatest friendship and politeness she offered me every alliance, except actual possession... but it cost me some heartaches to get rid of the affair.

The above passage was published by Cromek, transcribing the text from the poet’s Commonplace Book, and he immediately followed it, by giving the publication of the song itself. Cromek also added, in a footnote of considerable interest: This passage explains the love letters to Peggy. Whether he merely assumed that Burns, by citing reference to his Billet-doux, was specifically meaning the letters he had written to Ellison, or, perchance, during the conversation with her in Glasgow she had actually revealed this to Cromek, cannot now be established. If some indication was made by Ellison, then it would certainly link her as Montgomerie’s Peggy, thus showing Isabel Burns, in this instance, to be in error. It is
interesting to note that James Mackay goes very close to accepting this possibility, but in the final analysis concludes, perhaps wisely, that he is left wondering.

From his identification of the girl as Elizabeth Gebbie, Dr. Mackay confidently declared her to be the Eliza of Burns’s song, *Farewell to Eliza*, backing his judgement with some added details. Burns, he claimed, had informed John Moore (autobiography, 2 August 1787), that the song had been composed before 1782, and Gilbert Burns had endorsed the fact, *that the song was one of Robert’s early compositions*. Since Burns, at this period, was imbued with the works of Lawrence Sterne, Mr. Mackay was equally sure that the poet had bestowed on Elizabeth Gebbie the name of Sterne's heroine – Eliza:

Eliza Gebbie was undoubtedly the heroine of ‘Farewell to Eliza’ which previous editors associated with either Elizabeth Barbour or Elizabeth Miller, without ever reconciling the discrepancy of the song having been composed before 1782... three years before either of these ladies swam into his ken...7

The fact is, however, that Burns made no mention to Moore of the song being composed before 1782. What he did say was that the first three songs given in his book were written before his twenty-third year. Only four songs, in all, are given in the *Kilmarnock Edition* (1786) and the third of these is *Farewell to Eliza*; however, Burns was obviously referring Moore, NOT to the *Kilmarnock Edition*, but to the newly released *Edinburgh Edition* (April 1787), in which a further selection of songs from his earlier years were published. In chronological order the three songs are: 1. *Corn Rigs are Bonnie*; 2. *Song, Composed in August*; 3. *My Nanie, O*.8

As regards Gilbert’s statement about the song being an early composition, unfortunately, Dr. Mackay gives no source reference for this statement. Gilbert Burns in his *Narrative*, did mention an Eliza with regard to his famous brother’s early love affairs, but it is perfectly clear that he was not connecting this to Eliza Gebbie, or any other Eliza of Robert’s acquaintance; he was merely passing a comment on Yorick and Eliza from Sterne’s writing. It is, indeed, doubtful, if Burns had read Lawrence Sterne before his affair with Ellison. The much respected Prof. Kinsley, for example, places 1782 as the year in which Burns came across the authors Sterne and MacKenzie. The young medical student, John Hamilton, whom Burns befriended in Irvine, is a more than likely source of ‘introducing’ him to these writers, in which case late 1781 or early ’82 would be correct, and in the aftermath of his failed love affair. Although Burns claimed that he did not add much to his reading in Irvine, he later informed Henry MacKenzie that it was during this period that he first encountered that author’s book, *The Man of the World*.

The song *Farewell to Eliza* was, on the internal evidence of the opening lines, written in 1786. Elizabeth Miller claimed, with considerable justification that Burns had composed the verses for her, and her recognition should now be fully restored. She was, in Burns’s own words, *the Tenant of (his) heart*, for a spell in 1785; she was ‘walking-out’ with him in the Autumn of ’86, when Armour had turned away from him, and Mary Campbell had gone back home to the West Highlands; she was the *quondam Eliza* whom he met with on his *eclatant return* to Mauchline in June 1787.9

By then, *The Lass of Cessnock Banks* was happily married to another, and giving birth to a second daughter, even as her former admirer, the poet Robert Burns was calling at Mossgiel farm to give his family an account of his recent triumphant acclaim in Edinburgh. When questioned by his mother and sister on the fashionable ladies he had met in the Capital City, he reflected for barely a moment before announcing that, of all the girls he had seriously admired, Ellison was the one who would most likely have formed for him an agreeable companion for life.10 Not until he sent James Johnson a copy of *Bonie Peggy Alison* in 1788, seven years after his affair with Ellison, did Robin venture to offer for publication, one of the songs which he had written specifically for her. Nor did he, as Dr. Mackay has astutely noted, involve himself again in an epistolary
courtship until he met Clarinda in Edinburgh as the year 1788 approached. By then, perhaps he had reasoned that he hadn’t been quite so skilled in the composition of a Billet-doux in his younger days as he’d then thought, but was now prepared to set himself to the task again. Clarinda at least was spared having to read such prose as:

I verily believe my Dear E., that the pure genuine feelings of love, are as rare in the world as the pure genuine feelings of virtue and piety. This I hope will account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you. By uncommon, I mean, their being written in such a serious manner, which to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister.

Robin should have recognised, even in the flush of early manhood that, as a superbly gifted songwriter, he should have presented this art alone to the girl, and resisted the temptation to show-off his stilted, artificial, book-taught fantasies of love epistles — they simply bore no comparison with the lyrics which flowed with such natural rhythm from his gifted pen:

\[
\text{And I'll kiss thee yet, yet,} \\
\text{And I'll kiss thee o'er again,} \\
\text{And I'll kiss thee yet, yet,} \\
\text{My bonie Peggy Alison.}
\]

When in my arms, wi' a' thy charms,\(^1\)
I clasp my countless treasure, O!
I seek nae mair o' Heav'n to share
Than sic a moment's pleasures, O!

And by they een sae bonie blue,
I swear I'm thine for ever, O!
And on thy lips I seal my vow,
And break it shall I never, O!

Notes:
1. An abridged version of the song from Cromek's text is given: Stanzas 1-3, 8, 9, 11 & 12. All modern editions of Burns now follow a revised MS. (1927) taken from the Law Collection in which two verses, not given by Cromek, are included. There are also several variations between the texts, suggesting that Burns made some revisions to the version he originally gave to Ellison; she may also have made a few textual mistakes in offering the lyrics to Cromek. The word een (eyes) is misspelled in Cromek's text, as e'en.
2. A fifth letter was traced and first published in 1878, with the initial A. in lieu of E., leading to speculation that it formed part of the same series. The implications are outwith the scope of this article; the details can be read in CHAMBERS-WALLACE, Vol. 1, pp. 75-6.
3. The opening sentence of the final (i.e. fourth) letter clearly indicates that Dear E. had replied to Burns in writing. It would, therefore, seem likely that his own letters were sent to her. Several writers have been suspicious that Burns had written the letters to assist the courtship of a friend; the internal evidence of the letters doesn't really sustain this theory.
4. Burns wrote: “The songs marked Z in the Museum I have given to the world as old verses to their respective tunes; but, in fact, little more than a chorus of a good many of them is ancient…”
5. Hansel throne is interpreted as ‘Maiden throne’ (Chambers-Wallace). Hansel is frequently glossed as, ‘first gift of the New Year’, but the word has several meanings such as, opening, entrance, etc. Thus in the song Rantin Rovin Robin (stanza 2) the implied meaning is that the Janwar win’ is announcing his presence to the infant Robin.
6. Claims were made on behalf of a local Mary Morison as being the subject of this song. For further information see: A BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT BURNS (1992) by James Mackay, p. 85.
8. Scott Douglas was inclined to the view that Ellison Begbie (Gebbie) was the heroine of the song, My Nanie, O. The verses were composed close to the time of Burns's courtship of Ellison. The tune’s title, Nanie O, and its popularity would have constrained him to use the name 'Nanie', Scott Douglas argued, regardless of the name of the girl he was courting at the time.
9. See, Letter to James Smith, 11 June 1787. The suggestion that his 'quondam Eliza' was Bess Paton is ill-founded. Although Burns refers in the same letter to calling for his daughter (at Mossgiel?) he had no contact with her mother (Bess Paton) after 1786. It is also possible that the daughter he was referring to was young Jean, who was then staying with Armour at her parents’ home. Since Robert Jnr. was also with
his mother at the Armours, Burns would surely have stated his twins, rather than making mention of his daughter. It was arranged during this visit to Mauchline, that Robert Jnr. should be taken into the household at Mossgiel. Young Jean died shortly afterward in seemingly perplexing circumstances. (See, letter to John Richmond, 25 October 1787).


11. The two stanzas of *Bonie Peggy Alison*, written by Burns c. 1781, were repeated as an eight-line stanza in the song, *Come Let Me Take Thee*, composed in 1793, presumably for Jean Lorimer - his Chloris.

**BURNS COTTAGE, ALLOWAY**

While there have been a number of minor changes over the years to Burns Cottage, Alloway, the birthplace of Robert Burns, there have been no major works this century, apart from the rethatching of the roof from time to time.

This together with the ever increasing competition from other places of interest and visitor attractions, motivated the Trustees to introduce a new presentation offering a more authentic and lasting experience while retaining the dignity of the “clay biggin” in which Robert Burns was born.

*Exterior and interior scenes at the cottage.*
A further aspect of this ambitious project which was to cost £285,000 was the restoration of the exterior and interior of the Cottage.

Essential structural repairs were carried out. The Cottage was rethatched in Scottish style, and the exterior now presents an appearance more in keeping with the time of Burns. Inside a new interpretive presentation, including audio/visual, offers the visitor a more realistic perception of how the Cottage looked when the Burns family lived there.

The scheme which was initiated in March 1992 and fully completed in December, 1993 was made possible by a generous grant from the European Regional Development Fund through Strathclyde European Partnership, and also financial assistance from Enterprise Ayrshire, the Local Enterprise Company, Kyle and Carrick District Council, Strathclyde Regional Council, the Scottish Tourist Board, and the Friends of Thatched Houses who are supported by Historic Scotland.

The Trustees believe that the new interior and exterior presentations offer the Burns enthusiast and the tourist alike a memorable and interesting visit, while retaining the refinement and sensitivity so essential for the birthplace of Scotland’s National Bard.

BURNS NATIONAL HERITAGE PARK

The Joint Agreement establishing the Burns National Heritage Park in Alloway, the birthplace of the Poet was completed and signed by the participating bodies, the Trustees of Burns Monument and Cottage, Kyle and Carrick District Council, now South Ayrshire Council, and the local Enterprise Company, Enterprise Ayrshire, in June 1995.

The purpose of the joint arrangement was to bring together for management and marketing the places of interest in Alloway pertaining to our National Bard, i.e. the Cottage, the Poet’s birthplace, the adjoining Museum which was built by the Trustees in 1901 and extended in 1935 and in 1951, the Monument built in the 1820s, the recently opened Tam O’Shanter Experience, the nearby Brig O’ Doon, and Alloway Auld Kirk. The establishment of a National Heritage Park which is a fitting tribute to Robert Burns, provides for the enhancement and linking of the various sites and buildings, offering the Burns enthusiasts and the tourist a varied selection of cultural and interesting experiences, with a high standard of ancillary services available.

The development programme for the Park includes the enhancement of the Cottage which was completed in December, 1993, the Tam O’Shanter Experience which was opened to the public in April, 1995; the linking avenue between the Cottage/Museum and the Tam O’Shanter Experience and Monument which was opened in September, 1996, and the development of the Museum adjoining the Cottage, which is now being planned and which is programmed to be completed late in 1999.

The cultural importance as well as the significance to tourism both locally and nationally is evidenced in the wide ranging financial support and assistance forthcoming in the development plans so far. In addition to the three participating bodies, the European Regional Development Fund through Strathclyde European Partnership, the Scottish Tourist Board, Strathclyde Regional Council and the Friends of Thatched Houses have made contributions to the various related improvements affected to date.
Walk your way through History, see the Treasures, experience the Burns Mystery and Magic

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THE MUSEUM

THE TAM O'SHANTER EXPERIENCE

BURNS MONUMENT

THE AULD BRIG O'DOON

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TEL: 01292 443700 FAX: 01292 441750

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OPENING TIMES FOR BURNS COTTAGE & MUSEUM
April-October inclusive: Open daily 9.00am to 6.00pm. November-March inclusive: Mon-Sat 10.00am to 4.00pm. Sun 12.00-4.00pm.
The already popular and well established visitor attraction at the Cottage/Museum and Monument which have had many thousands of visitors over the years, has been enhanced by the added audio visual and other facilities at the Tam O’Shanter Experience as well as the combined attraction of the Park area as a whole.

The creation of the National Park dedicated to Robert Burns will be an everlasting and well deserved memorial to one of Scotland’s most famous sons, and will make a greater contribution not only to tourism in this part of the Country, but also to the preservation of the Poet’s memory for the benefit and education of the public as well as increasing the public knowledge and interests in his works.

DEVELOPMENT OF MUSEUM

The Trustees of Burns Monument and Cottage wish to improve and to extend the Museum accommodation at Burns Cottage, Alloway in order to exhibit in an enhanced environment, the many artefacts and the extensive collection of original manuscripts and documents, as well as introducing an educational facility in the same building.

This project also features in the Report which dealt with the formation of the Burns National Heritage Park, mentioned earlier and on completion will be the final stage in the development of the Park.

Some initial progress has been made in the early stages of the project but the detailed layout of the existing Museum building is still to be determined. The proposed scheme will provide a new reception centre offering an entrance from the car park, a shop and a cafeteria which are being relocated from the existing building, and modern toilet accommodation. Also in this new building will be an exhibition area within a circular feature in the shape of a horse mill. Full facilities for the disabled are built into the scheme. Much emphasis is being placed on improving the conservation qualities in the Museum with suitable lighting and control of humidity. The new library will accommodate the Trustee’s extensive collection of books, and the educational facility will include a computer bank for research.

Assistance is being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, and in addition to the planning process, full consultation is taking place with the Scottish Museum Council, the National Museum of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and the Scottish Arts Council.

The development of the Museum is yet another tribute to Robert Burns and his works. Commenced in the bicentenary year of his death, the enhanced Museum will serve as an eternal reminder of his contribution to our national history and to our cultural heritage, and secure for the future the irreplaceable original artefacts and documents held by the Trustees.

Douglas T. Hemmings

1996 BICENTENARY

Ye fowk wha deify ma wraith
Your eulogies tae say,
Whit ken ye o’ the fearfu’ darg
Tae thole the live-lang day?

Whit ken ye o’ the luve that scars
That sets your bein’ afire
Whane’er ye meet a bonnie lass
That wad your sowl inspire?

Whit ken ye a’ o’ poortith’s pangs
That blude tae watter turns
Whan even Nature gin ye strives
God help puir Robert Burns!

The Muse that drove me to excess
Hoo mony hae it read?
Or dae ye, fulsome, praise ma verse -
Jist because I’m dead?

Mabel A. Irving
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ON FAITH, MORALS AND MARRIAGE

The number of genuinely irreligious people in eighteenth-century Scotland must have been very small, and Robert Burns was not among them. In his work he makes numerous references to some form of deity, and sometimes ventures an agnostic suspicion of ‘old-wife prejudices and tales!’ As he put it in a letter to Robert Muir on 7 March 1789, ‘every age and every nation has a different set of stories: and the many are always weak, of consequence they have often, perhaps always been deceived’. Whatever Burns’s attitude to religion, it was not bred of casual ignorance. His father’s Manual of Religious Belief in the form of a dialogue between Father and Son is touching evidence that William had laboured to see his son ‘drawn by the conviction of a Man, not the halter of an Ass’, as Robert later put it to Mrs. Dunlop in his letter of 1 January 1789. Yet Burns knew his Bible with a thoroughness that verged on the encyclopedic. This was not just the reach of a remarkable memory or familiarity bred of pious study. It caught his imagination. As he said to Bishop Skinner, the son of ‘Tullochgorm’, the Rev. John Skinner, he had early become familiar with ‘the old bards of the best of all poetical books - the Old Testament’. There is little in the human experience that is not spelt out in that huge store of narrative.

As we will see later, the Reformation in Scotland was driven initially by a dislike of a top-heavy establishment where the higher clergy were remote and the parish ministry poverty-stricken and ineffective. The reformers got the result they had intended. Whatever the form of church government, whether under the government-sponsored prelates or bishops of the Episcopal system, or the rabid theocrats of Covenanting Presbyterianism, the parish minister was faced not just with a congregation, but a jury.

The spirit of Presbyterian theocracy was maintained by the Scottish revolution settlement of 1689, because the Episcopalians gave Dutch William cause to think that a Presbyterian settlement would serve him better. That pushed Episcopalians into the Jacobite camp, and identified the Presbyterians with the new deal of what eventually became known as the ‘Glorious Revolution’, when in 1688 James VII was chased off this throne. But following the Union of the Scottish and English Parliaments in 1707, the now English-dominated legislature proceeded to interfere. In 1712 the Toleration Act made life easier for the Episcopal party that had lost out in 1689, but also opened the road to every expression of schismatic fancy. At the same time, the Patronage Act severely restricted a congregation’s power of choice over its minister by handing much of that power back to the heritors: in effect, the landowners. Over the years this would alter the basic character of the established Kirk; ministers increasingly reflected the values of worldly as well as spiritual authority. As the eighteenth century wore on, a theologically aware population voted with its feet. Those who felt strongly enough set up new congregations and new denominations outside the establishment, and that included an extraordinary range. On the one hand were the fire-breathing Cameronians, who represented the ultimate vision of a nation in a marriage contract with God, and who saw themselves as the suffering and bleeding remnant of the true Kirk of Scotland. In 1740 an evangelical party within the establishment who could no longer put up with the system of appointing ministers was pushed out of the main body, and became the first ‘seceders’, rapidly...
building up an alternative organisation, but one which only four years later would split further and recede into the mind set of the previous century. A quite different and liberal group started in 1761, Thomas Gillespie’s Relief Presbytery, for those ‘oppressed in their Christian privileges’ by narrow legalistic dogma.

A later age would look back on all this schism in puzzlement, but for Burns and his generation it was familiar. Armed and armoured with erudition, the different groups strove not just with the Devil, but with one another, and their departure from the established Kirk left the Moderates in charge, and by Burns’s time they had come to dominate. On one level morally correct, on another urbane and easy-going, the Moderates reflected the attitudes of the Enlightenment. That was one reason why the break-away groups despised them, but, if anything, Burns took their part, not in a partisan spirit, but because at best they reflected a sane breath of toleration and broader interests. One such, John McMatch, requested a copy of ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’, which was already going from hand to hand in Ayrshire.

_But I gae mad at their grimaces,_
_Their sighin, cantin, grace-proud faces,_
_Their three-mile prayers, an hauf-mile graces,_
_Their raxin conscience,_
_Whase greed, revenge, an pride disgraces_
_Waur nor their nonsense._

TO THE REV. JOHN MCMATH

Other religionists who had been maligned by the die-hards got Burns’s support:

_Sour Bigotry on his last legs_
_Girns and looks back,_
_Wishing the ten Egyptian plagues_
_May seize you quick._

EPISTLE TO JOHN GOLDIE

However, it was not bigotry that was on its last legs, but what had become of the orthodox interpretation of Calvinist doctrine, and the God who on some mysterious personal whim:

_Sends ane to Heaven, an ten to Hell,_
_A’ for Thy glory,_
_And no for onie guid or ill_
_They’ve done before Thee!_

HOLY WILLIE’S PRAYER

Although Burns made sport of Calvinist orthodoxy, his enemy was far from beaten. A mental habit of generations would live on long after him, and to this day is far from dead. People can still find in Burns’s satire a personal liberation – from something that they have inherited from past generations but still carry within them.

John Mair was born in 1469 in Gleghornie near North Berwick in East Lothian. He went to Haddington Grammar School, and then travelled widely, studying at the universities of Glasgow, Oxford, Cambridge and then Paris. John Mair, or Major, as he became known, was one of the foremost intellectuals of the day. Besides his History of Greater Britain in 1521, he wrote a commentary on the Four Gospels published in 1529, defending the Roman Church against the theories of John Wycliffe, Jan Hus and Martin Luther. Major would remain faithful to the old Kirk until his death at St. Andrews in 1550. He wanted to reform it from within, yet had what were radical views for the time, maintaining that the people were the true source of civil power.

One of John Major’s pupils at the Collège de Montaigu in Paris in the late 1520s was a young Jean Calvin from Noyon in Picardy. By that time Europe was in the uproar started by Martin Luther in 1517 when he nailed his criticisms of the Pope to a church door in Wittenberg in Germany. Because he tried to understand those whom he opposed, Major was one of Calvin’s main sources for the theoretical framework of the reformers’ thinking. What had enraged Luther was the sale of ‘indulgences’. In crude terms ‘indulgences’ provided a remission of sins for a cash payment; it was no more than a money-making racket. In intellectual terms Luther was tilting at a windmill. But what he rediscovered was the ‘doctrine of grace,’ the central plank of the Reformation. Man should not presume to shove
and push God to look favourably on humankind by a parade of good behaviour, much less cash payments. What Adam had messed up God had restored in Christ. All people had to do was respond to that unique act of divine generosity and their spirit would be reborn, their hearts would change and the rest would find its place. An act of free will as we might understand it had nothing to do with it, because unredeemed people in the thrall of sin do not have that kind of control over themselves, they can only pleiter on through the mire of sin. But God is seeking His people out, the initiative is His. The early reformers did not concern themselves overly with notions of ‘predestination’; that is, that some are fated to be touched by grace and others left out. If anything it was a counsel of comfort and assurance that the Divinity was striding out over the hill in confident certainty, as the shepherd who knew exactly where he would find lost sheep.

Settling in Geneva in Switzerland, Calvin became the arch theoretician of the reformers, setting out his thoughts in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he first published in 1539, with the final version in 1559. It was a monumental work, in the same league as Augustine’s *Confessions* and Marx’s *Das Kapital*. One of Calvin’s pupils — and also one of Major’s when he was professor of philosophy and theology at Glasgow — was John Knox, and he brought the teachings of his master to Scotland. But they did not survive in their original form. Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, and the following generation of divines, including those in Scotland such as Andrew Melville and Robert Rollock, ‘developed’ Calvin’s theology so that one fundamental changed. For Calvin and Knox, repentance was something that flowed from forgiveness, the proper human reaction to the outstretched hand, not the condition that went before it. But now this was stood on its head. If you repent, then God will forgive you. What a terrible abyss now opened before the supplicant for salvation! How much repentance was necessary? God would know, but the hapless penitent could never know. In an ironic paradox, it was back to the days of ‘indulgences’, with cash payments changed for an infinitely harsher tribute, the fencing in of the running fires of doubt with legalistic trenches of ‘correct’ behaviour. At worst, morality lost that spontaneous sense of a nobility of the spirit for its own sake, and became a mere firebreak against the wrath of God, and Life was reduced to Standard Living Procedure. In Scotland this reached a high tide of theocratic puritanism between 1648 and 1651, the so-called ‘Second Reformation’. The harsh discipline of the revolutionaries was destructive. The wholesale importation of English Puritan usages, which shouldered aside the spirit and character of Knox’s Reformation more surely than any high-church meddling by an anglicised Charles I, left a tough new orthodoxy that would persist, because it was also entwined with an emergent political philosophy. Burns rejected the theology, and, as we shall see, was an ardent disciple of the political philosophy that grew out of it.

The deficiency of a theology that had become a product of fear and legalism was that it differed little from a morality bred of common sense and mutual convenience. Such a morality is founded on the simple and practical question: what if? What if no one tells the truth? What if no one keeps agreements? This is not the product of faith, but of rationality. It is in the realm of what was then called ‘natural law’. Any religion that pitches its camp in the same territory will have to fight it out with reason on equal terms. In the eighteenth century the spread of the Enlightenment meant intellectual bruises such as David Hume in the field. The man at the tail of the plough would hardly halt at the endrig to thumb his way through *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, but he would hear the artillery slugging it out. This was usually a one-sided cannonade on the part of the defenders, some of their guns trained on the infidels of reason, and the others – most of them – pointed at their own troops to keep them in order. It was as if the fabric of the belief was imploding, leaving the defending ministers to a bitter and even dishonest scrap over the surface details:

*Ev’n ministers, they hae been kend,*
In holy rapture,
A rousing whirl at times to vend,
And nail 't wi Scripture.
DEATH AND DOCTOR HORNBOOK

Burns did not have some grand counter-structure to put in its place, but he had his personal alternative. As he confessed to Mrs. Dunlop in his letter of 1 January 1789, he longed for a certain freedom and expression of the spirit that was to be found elsewhere:

The first Sunday of May; a breezy blue-skied noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of Autumn; these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of Holidays. — Not like the Sacramental, Executioner-face of a Kilmarnock Communion; but to laugh or cry, be cheerful or pensive, moral, or devout, according to the mood and tense of the Season and myself.

One such season in Burns's poetic imagination was 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Here is no grinding theological apparatus, no Treatise on Effectual Calling (Robert Rollock, 1596), with its Covenants of Works and Covenants of Grace. The meal is a cheerful but wholesome affair, shadowing the Christian fellowship in the body of Christ expressed in the sacrament of communion. Then they turn to The Word, embodying as it does the law and the prophets. But the sequence is quite clear. In this, Burns was truer to the spirit of the original Reformation than the cohorts of orthodoxy, drawing on a quiet but broad subterranean stream that still informed the personal attitudes of the many hopeful spiritual travellers who next to the Bible kept John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

Burns reconstructed what might be called a kind of personal, secular 'theology' which liberated his mental energy just as the rediscovery of 'grace' had liberated the early reformers. He had his own peculiar version of The Fall: 'We come onto this world with a heart and disposition to do good for it' until dragged down by prudence 'to the blackguard Sterling of ordinary currency' (Letter to Mrs. Dunlop, 2 August 1788). The antidote lay in the cult of 'sensibility'.

The high priest of this movement was Henry Mackenzie, and the attitude was expressed in his novel The Man of Feeling, published in 1771. Hardly readable now, the book would have been long forgotten but for Burns's interest in the underlying idea. In Mackenzie's novel that idea was the exercise of pity and generosity towards the victims of a cruel world, a work-out of emotional piety. With Burns, sensibility grew to stand for the honest response and feeling of the whole person, a kind of super-awareness of the heart. This was Burns's personal 'doctrine of grace'; it suffused all of his writing, and affected his personal morality. His satire did much more than burn the dreich temples of orthodox Calvinism, it cleared the ground for the attitude he expressed. When people complain that Burns can become a religion, they are sometimes nearer the mark than they think.

From the 1930s a belief grew in literary circles that the Reformation had destroyed something essential in the spirit of Scotland that had never been recovered. In his 'Scotland 1941' Edwin Muir expressed this in words that sob with rage:

A simple sky roofed in that rustic day,
The busy corn-fields and the haunted holms,
The green road winding up the ferny brae.
But Knox and Melville clapped their preaching palms
And bundled all the harvesters away,
Hoodicrow Peden in the blighted corn
Hacked with his rusty beak the starving haulms.
Out of that desolation we were born.

The charge was that the reformed Kirk was a jealous and joyless monster that had savaged the natural music of the soul. In abolishing the old festivals of Yule and Pace or Easter it had destroyed the foci of song and merriment for the people, and thus much of the folk culture.
The names of Whitsunday and Martinmas very much survived, but only to mark the periods of work. Then people would leave one tenancy or service and start another. In the same way, Candlemas was a time for yoking the plough, Lammas-tide for winning the hay.

There is some truth in this, for the abolition of these festivals as part of religion was a fact. But behind the old Kirk festivals lay another enemy: superstition. The target was not enjoyment in itself, but a serious pagan rival. The old Christian festivals were to the reformers a front for the iniquities of the Golden Calf. Behind the Invention (ie Discovery) of the Cross was Beltane, then believed to refer to Baal’s Fire. Yule, the old name for Christmas, was pagan anyway. The Johnsmas fires of midsummer and the bleize on Halloween were equally abominable.

The divide in belief was real. In the old country communities, just as problems had to be coped with locally, so did the explanations have to be provided. People were as impatient of uncertainty then as they are now. There had to be a reason for things. When disaster struck, such as animal disease, the explanation did not stop at ‘an act of God’. For the reformers, the logical response was that the community had caused offence to the Almighty, and a public day of ‘humiliation and prayer’ would be announced in which dour country folk were urged to forsake the fleshpots of Egypt for the moral hygiene of the desert.

For those still cleaving to the old superstitions, the reaction was entirely different. The same procedure would be followed as in the creation of the Beltane fire of spring. All the fires in the district would be put out and fresh fire – needfire as it was called (the derivation is uncertain) – would be kindled by rubbing two sticks together. Once a roaring bonfire had been built up, it would be divided to create a passage through it, and the cattle would be driven between the flames to sain or cleanse them. In the Highlands, where the established Kirk was much weaker, such remedies were tried well into the eighteenth century. Remarkably, in Ayrshire itself, that heartland of Covenanting piety, a Johnsmas fire blazed every year on the Moat Hill at Tarbolton until 1927.

The Kirk’s implacable dislike of these activities was not only against the superstition itself, but also that they were communal acts. Turning to the fires of Baal rather than mass repentance might provoke such bolts of divine displeasure as hardly bore thinking about, such as the plagues the Lord had visited on the recalcitrant Egyptians. It was playing out the theme of conditional grace on a grand scale. Dreadful famines attended the closing years of the seventeenth century, yet some ministers were alarmed at the resilience with which the population recovered its spirit. It was feared that such levy could start the whole grim process over again.

Years of shortage there would be, with months of perishing hunger and malnutrition. In the early part of 1796 there were riots in the streets of Dumfries over the severe shortage of meal, but in the Lowlands there was never again overt famine. The growth of trade, the painful but steady advance into improved agriculture, the broader horizons and opportunities of a bigger world demolished the old, closed-in superstitions.

This may have been happening in Burns’s day, but the process was far from complete. The Kirk could put a stop to public acts that it deemed relics of the old papistical superstitions and pagan rites, but it was harder to break into the private personal world where belief was passed on within families. Betty Davidson was a cousin of Agnes Brown, Robert’s mother, and she came to stay with the family from time to time at Alloway to help Agnes with her cheese-making business. She had an extraordinary store of strange tales and beliefs with which she frightened and entertained the children. As Burns wrote to Dr. John Moore in his autobiographical letter of 2 August 1787, this had

so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical in these matters than I, yet it often takes an effort of Philosophy to shake off these idle terrors.
Although Burns would always have his feet planted in the rational world, he never lost his insight into that archaic half-lit region of *freats* and *notions*. He recorded them as something passing, yet conveyed the sense of a different mind-set. The whisky-soaked vision of the *guidman* of Shanter is the most famous example, but ‘Halloween’, although more detached, is also a more systematic description, the explanatory notes that Burns wrote as fascinating as the poem is fun. Here superstition has stuck to that inner world that defies rational prediction, and in particular the relationship between the sexes. Long after the poem was written, young people would still *haud Halloween* and in the spring roll their bannocks to see with whom they would be partnered for life. In William Bumets’s north east, a hint of old horrors would remain on the lips of children as they went round seeking fuel for the Halloween *bleize* shouting ‘Gie’s a peart tae burn the witches!’.

Although we might not expect it, this world of supernatural is very physical. It is connected with events and quite specific places:

*And near the thorn, aboon the well,*  
*Where Mungo’s mither hang’d hersel.*  
*TAM O’ SHANTER*

In the ballad ‘Tam Lin’, which Burns collected for the *Scots Musical Museum*, the elements are all intensely physical – water, fire, plants, and the very place itself:

*O I forbid you, maidens a’*  
*That wear gowd on your hair,*  
*To come, or gae by Carterhaugh,*  
*For young Tom-lin is there.*

‘Tam Lin’ is one of the most extraordinary ballads that Burns collected. The frontiers of time and place and the natural world part to reveal familiar things in a different light. It is the tale of the love between Tam Lin and Janet, and how she retrieves Tam from the Abyss.

*The queen o Fairies she caught me,*  
*In yon green hill to dwell,*  
*And pleasant is the fairy-land;*

*But, an eerie tale to tell!*  
*Ay at the end of seven years*  
*We pay a tiend to hell;*  
*I am sae fair and ju of flesh*  
*I’m fear’d it be mysel.*  
*.........*  
*But the night is Halloween, lady,*  
*The morn is Hallowday;*  
*Then win me, win me, an ye will,*  
*For weel I wat ye may.*

The story turns on a symbolically described but barely concealed physical union between Janet and Tam that is startling in its directness:

*They’ll turn me to a bear sae grim,*  
*And then a lion bold;*  
*But hold me fast and fear me not,*  
*As ye shall love your child.*

*Again they’ll turn me in your arms*  
*To a red het gaud of airm;*  
*But hold me fast and fear me not,*  
*I’ll do you nae harm.*

*And last they’ll turn me, in your arms,*  
*Into the burning lead;*  
*Then throw me into well-water,*  
*O throw me in wi speed!*

Tam is pleading with the maiden Janet to trust him and the potentially frightening side of a man’s sexual expression. There is no boundary between love, sex and the begetting of children. Burns was exposed to this attitude by his mother. As she sang to her children:

*O, kissin is the key o love*  
*An clappin is the lock;*  
*An makin of’s the best thing,*  
*That e’er a young thing got.*

*O, CAN YE LABOUR LEA —*

The sure way to Burns’s heart was through song. Helen Blair, the first girl he admired, sang sweetly, enough to prod him to fit his own words to the music. His Jean also had a fine singing voice, and it was Jessie Lewars singing ‘The Robin cam’ to the Wren’s nest’ as she helped
nurse Burns in his last illness that inspired his last Scots song, ‘O, Wert thou in the Cauld Blast’. It is not just a love song, but contains a tender paternal element, the keepsake of a dying man for the brightness and energy of youth.

In the eighteenth-century countryside the energy of youth was simply directed. For young people there was work – and the courtin. If people imagine that the late twentieth century has come monopoly in a consuming interest in sex, they are mistaken. In Burns’s day, all the rituals connected with courtship, rituals predicting who would marry and when, the opportunities opened up by dancing, the songs, the giving of love tokens, the making of trysts, not to mention the physical get-together, all this was the principal enjoyment open to young people, and for many probably the only one.

What was changing in Burns’s day were not the values, but the social controls by which they were enforced. On the one hand was the tight family circle of ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, where one of the daughters brings home her lad for the first time:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wi kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben; } & \\
\text{A strapping youth, he takes the mother’s eye; } & \\
\text{Blythe Jenny sees the visit’s no ill-taen; } & \\
\text{The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye. } & \\
\text{The youngster’s artless heart o’erflows wi joy, } & \\
\text{But blate and laithfu, scarce can weel behave; } & \\
\text{The mother, wi a woman’s wiles, can spy } & \\
\text{What makes the youth sae bashfu and sae grave; } & \\
\text{Weel-pleas’d to think her Bairn’s respected like the lave. } &
\end{align*}
\]

That was how the Burnes family were brought up. With the possible exception of his brief stay at Kirkoswald, where a prosperous trade in contraband made it a wild place and where the teenage lad beheld novel scenes of ‘roaring dissipation’, Burns was restrained in sexual matters until his twenty-third year. It is not just that Burns was ‘an affa man with the lassies’, as the phrase still puts it. New opportunities presented themselves when he won free of his father’s control.

Burns’s experience was true in a more general way, and stemmed from economic change. The virtuous young lad in ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’ might have been from a neighbouring cotter’s family and still subject to family discipline. Within Burns’s lifetime he would have become a farm servant, like one of those in ‘The Inventory’, lodging with his employer and perhaps sleeping above the stable or another part of the steadings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{For men, I’ve three mischievous boys, } & \\
\text{Run-deils for fechtin an for noise... } & \\
\text{...I rule them, as I ought, discreetly. } & \\
\text{An after labour them completely; } & \\
\text{An ay on Sundays duly, nightly, } & \\
\text{I on the Questions tairge them tightly...} &
\end{align*}
\]

Not all masters would take such trouble. And as Burns adds:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I’ve nane in female servan’ station, } & \\
\text{(Lord keep me ay frae a’ temptation!)} &
\end{align*}
\]

As the labour structure changed in the countryside, so did the farm servant housing. In the Lowlands between the Forth and the Moray Firth a whole system was taking root about or just after Burns’s time, where in many areas single men were housed in barrack-like bothies that were part of the steadings. The bothy men had a strong group identity and a fearsome work ethic, but also cultivated a devil-may-care independence that scoffed at moral interference. Pregnancy out of wedlock was commonplace among country girls.

Not that pre-marital pregnancy was rare before this time. The law of Scotland virtually licensed pre-marital sex, because subsequent marriage legitimised any offspring, a survival from the old pre-Reformation canon law. Marriage was not something imposed by an act of officialdom, it was a personal covenant between the woman and the man. After this fashion Burns first ‘married’ Jean Armour. The weakness of this arrangement in law lay in the
want of witnesses, either in a spoken covenant or a witnessed document.

Thus the road was open for couples to enjoy their physical union first and complete the formalities if and when the woman became pregnant. The number of children conceived out of wedlock but born within it was enormous. Even then, this trend was not straightforward. Privacy was something of a luxury. A common theme in Burns’s songs is the resort to quiet places in the countryside for the tryst or meeting.

Control was also slipping over the initial places of meeting. The harvest field and the kirk that might follow (the kind of celebration which is the setting of ‘Mary Morrison’) were increasingly rivalled by the scenes described in ‘The Holy Fair’. Here was pointed paradox indeed, for against the backdrop of a religious gathering with relays of book-pounding preachers:

Here sits a raw o tittlin jads,
Wi heaven breasts an bare neck;
An there a batch o wabster lads,
Blackguardian frae Kilmarnock,
For fun this day.

And at the finish:

An monie jobs that day begin,
May end in houghmagandie
Some ither day.

As the trail of natural children showed, Burns was no stranger to the houghmagandie himself. Yet when the inevitable happened, as with Betty Paton, there was still no split between physical enjoyment and his affection for woman and child:

Sweet fruit o monie a merry dint,
My funny toil is no a ’ t tint,
Tho thou cam to the warl’ asklent
A POET’S WELCOME TO HIS LOVE-BEGOTTEN DAUGHTER

The modern view of fornication still owes much to the attitude developed in the late eighteenth century among ‘respectable’ people that the man seduced and ruined the woman. This was not necessarily the view held by the other ranks of society. Eve with her rosy-cheeked apple offered carnal as well as intellectual knowledge. It may have been a male presumption, for we have little or no evidence from the other half of humanity, but the presumption was there. As the soldier’s widow sings in ‘The Jolly Beggars’:

I once was a maid, tho I cannot tell when,
And still my delight is in proper young men...

The Merry Muses of Caledonia enlarge on this theme in graphic detail. The situations described are gross, often absurd and can be very funny, and the fun is frequently at the expense of the man who cannot satisfy a woman’s natural appetite. Early biographers suppressed Burns’s letter to Bob Ainslie of 3 March 1788, describing his reunion with Jean Armour after his return from Edinburgh. After sorting out various other matters, her claims on himself (which he stubbornly denied), her accommodation, even her furniture and her aliment:

I have f—d til she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory... Oh, what a peacemaker is a guid weel-willy pintle! It is the mediator, the guarantee, the umpire, the bond of union, the solemn league and covenant... and Tree of Life between Man and Woman.

Later Biographers have passed lofty judgement on the poet for what they deem his scandalous disregard for the welfare of Jean and the imminently expected twins, and have indeed blamed Robert for the infants’ deaths. Rash though the encounter was, recent research in 1992 by Dr James Mackay in his Biography of Robert Burns (pp. 402-3) has suggested that this incident and the birth of the twins were sufficiently far apart for there to be no connection between it and their subsequent demise. What has escaped attention is Robert’s report to Jean’s apparent sexual enjoyment, dismissed out of hand as mere bragadocio or empty boasting.
The braggadocio refers to the man's capacity to do the necessary:

'Come rede me, dame, come tell me dame,  
My dame come tell me truly.  
What length of graith, when weel ca'd hame,  
Will sair a woman duly?'

The car/in clew her wanton tail,  
Her wanton tail sae ready -  
I learn'd a sang in Annandale,  
Nine inch will please a lady...

COME REDE ME, DAME

But Burns could see beyond this. One popular version of 'John Anderson' which he collected for the Merry Muses describes the sour mirth of a woman whose husband is past it:

John Anderson, my jo, John,  
When first that ye began,  
Ye had a good a tail-tree,  
As ony ither man;  
But now it's wagen wan, John,  
And wrinkles to and fro;  
I've twa gae-ups for ae gae-down,  
John Anderson, my jo.

He took this rather dismal situation and quite transformed it. In Burns's well-known version of 'John Anderson', after looking back on youthful pleasure the woman concludes:

Now we maun totter down, John,  
And hand in hand we'll go,  
And sleep thegither at the foot,  
John Anderson my jo!

This poem is extraordinary in several ways, for it turns base metal into gold. It is a convincing love-song of an old woman to an old man who had come to the end of their lives together, and yet it was composed by one not even in his middle years. It balances the joys of youth against the pleasures of memory in old age.

It was not unknown for Oxford dons declining into a senile adolescence to quarrel over which of Jane Austen's heroines was the most desirable. A vaguely similar process haunts the ghosts of the various women Robert Burns took up with. The difference is that here we are dealing with real people, who were as they were and not as we would have them. Yet even when we try to form a true picture of what they were like, as in the case of Jean Armour, whom Robert married, it is not easy. Not that she could have been a shadowy figure in her lifetime. Through all the vicissitudes, even when Burns swore that he was not going to marry her formally after all, and even after he expressed outright rejection on his second return from Edinburgh, he kept returning to her, to 'that delicious armful'. John Syme, one of Burns's friends in Dumfries, hinted that it would require poetic imagination to discern Jean's bonniness; however, his view was that of a man whose gentlemanly background perhaps found attraction in cultivated refinement and not elsewhere. 'Bonie Jean' inspired fourteen songs. We can only infer what she might have looked like as a young woman, and before frequent childbirth and hard work had taken its toll on her figure, since the first likenesses of her are in middle age, when she was described as 'still very comely'. It is possible to imagine that in her twenties she was indeed pretty and sexy, rather than beautiful, with her regular features, high cheekbones, luxuriant hair and dark eyes.

Burns's friends such as William Smellie would enquire kindly after 'Jean and the bairnies'. She was described as a person of practical good sense, and her widowhood was marked by a dignity and maturity that impressed the constant stream of curious visitors. Burns's own sober assessment is an interesting one. Writing to Peggy Chalmers on 16 September 1788, he stated that his recent marriage to Jean 'was not in consequence of the attachment of romance perhaps; but I had a long and much-loved fellow creature's happiness or misery in my determination... Nor have I any cause to repent it... I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the county'. Burns enjoyed being married. As he put it to his Edinburgh friend, Alexander Cunningham, in a letter of 10 September 1792:
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how do you like, I mean really like, the Married Life? — Ah, my Friend! Matrimony is quite a different thing from what your love-sick youths and sighing girls take it to be!... I shall give you my ideas of the Conjugal State... Well then, the scale of Good-wife ship I divide into ten parts. — Good nature, four; Good-sense, two; Wit, one; Personal Charms, viz a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage, (I would add a fine waist too, but that is so soon spoilt you know) all these, one: as for the other qualities belonging to, or attending on, a Wife, such as fortune, connections education... family blood, etc. divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please...

Sensible though this joking formula may be, there is also in it a certain naive egocentricity that puts the burden of a successful marriage on the woman. Jean Armour's bigness of heart extended to mothering his love-child by Anna Park with the comment that 'our Robbie should have had twa wives'.

It was a shrewd as much as generous comment. Burns not only loved women, he was utterly dependent on them. This may explain some of his attraction for them, for often they appear to have mothered him. This was the case with old Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, who frequently burdened Burns with kindly advice like some clocking hen. When Burns fell out with Maria Riddell, it was she who made the initial move to reconciliation, even though he as the older of the two had behaved like a petted child in the interval. Perhaps a woman's instinctive understanding of Burns's immaturity in this respect was disarming, and the lack of self-understanding the irritant grit which makes the pearl.

Not all Burns's girlfriends were so easily relieved of their predicament as Anna Park when they found themselves with child. On balance it seems that the erotic tension between 'Sylvander' and 'Clarinda' — Burns and Nancy McLehose — was not consummated. Burns's physical head of steam was relieved in the person of Jenny Clow, Clarinda's servant lass. He also may have bairn't May Cameron, another servant girl in Edinburgh, although it may have been a false alarm, or a miscarriage ensued. Although he was willing to take Jenny Clow's child into his own household, it was symptomatic of a different and split world, where physical satisfaction was in one place and emotional fulfilment was in another. It also raises the tension between emotional and intellectual fulfilment in Burns's life on which people have often speculated.

The Peggy Chalmers to whom Burns wrote describing Jean is the other woman whom the posthumous matchmakers have had in mind for him, and 'Clarinda' cattily suggested that at the time. There is no doubt that their minds met, and had Peggy not been betrothed to another when Burns proposed to her, it is a matter of speculation as to whether she might have accepted. (She would not have divulged his proposal years later had she not been moved by it). Her refusal did not break their friendship, the real test of their mutual understanding. Here was someone who united both physical and intellectual attraction, and Burns could acknowledge this to her later with remarkable directness. He wrote to her on 16 September 1788, reflecting on time spent together, that he had 'lived more of a real life with you in eight days, than I can do with almost anybody I meet with in eight years — when I think on the improbability of meeting you in this world again — I could sit down and cry like a child!'.

Yet there was one divide between them. It was not one of 'manners' or of education, but the practical one which related to livelihoods. All the advice Burns had had since his rise to fame pointed him back to the land and its people as the source of his inspiration. His patrons liked the idea of their ploughman-poet, and that in the first instance was what he chose. Some of this is revealed in a letter Burns wrote to Mrs. Dunlop on 10 August 1788. In discussing his recent marriage to Jean Armour, beneath the aureate phrases several interesting points tumble out: 'I could never have got a female partner for life who could have entered into my
favourite studies, relished my favorite Authors, etc. without entailing on me at the same time, expensive, living, fantastic caprice, apish affection...’ All this despite the possible prospect of employment in the Excise, which ‘poor as it may comparatively be, whose emoluments are luxury to any thing my first twenty five years of Life could promise’. Already he hints that the farm at Ellisland may turn out to be, in his familiar phrase, ‘a ruinous bargain’. Yet he was going to have a good shot at it. In preparation, Jean is ‘regularly and constantly apprentice to my Mother and Sisters in their diary and other rural business’.

There was good reason for this. In the farming economy of the south west of that day, the guidwife was as vital as the farmer. The making of cheese, a long and time-consuming business, paid a substantial portion of the rent. It also took a lot of skill. In the absence of scientific knowledge, success depended on experience gathered over years, and the small-town-bred Jean was undergoing a crash course in just that at the hands of Robert’s family. She grew fond of her cows at Ellisland, but whether she ever made much of a success of her cheese-making is not known. If this contributed to the financial difficulties of Ellisland, Burns did not mention it. The simple fact is that, he had had enough of farming.

It is sometimes suggested that, in marrying Jean Armour, Burns denied himself a helpmeet who was a true kindred spirit. Jean was evidently free of affectation, loved her husband dearly and got on with life. In settling with Jean, Burns chose not some ‘simple life’, but a world that they shared. She, as much as her husband, had defied the hatchet-faced rigidity of Calvinist orthodoxy with her ‘sprightly cheerfulness’; she had been an equal participant in the joys of the flesh; and in the practicalities of family life she showed a sober decency. As he remembered his mother’s singing, so Burns took great pleasure in Jean’s ‘wood-notes wild’.

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THE PHRENOLOGISTS AND ROBERT BURNS

by

Mark Fraser

Phrenology, the science by which it was claimed that a person’s character could be deduced from the exact shape of his head, was unknown in Burns's lifetime; it was not until 1834 that an opportunity could be taken to analyse his personality by this new method. In that year the poet’s skull was dug up and taken away overnight so that plaster casts could be made. How that came about is a story which began in 1817.

The year 1817 was a time of deep social unrest, with postwar depression of trade aggravated by bad harvests. There was much unemployment and bread was selling at three times its normal price, the price artificially upheld by a Corn Law forbidding the import of grain. The discontent was harshly handled by the government, the very conservative government of Lord Liverpool, and the Habeas Corpus Act was even suspended for a year. It was against this background that the Scotsman newspaper was founded.
A cast of the Poet's skull, engraved from photographs as presented by James Fraser of Dumfries.
A group of young men in Edinburgh, disgusted by the subservience of the press, met to discuss establishing a weekly newspaper of whig sympathies and this appeared early in 1817. Seven original shareholders contributed £20 each to the starting capital, and three of them – William Ritchie, Charles Maclaren and John McDiarmid – were deputed to lay out the first issue. Ritchie was a lawyer from Lundin Mill in Fife and became a trustee while Maclaren, a farmer’s son from Ormiston in East Lothian, took up the post of editor. McDiarmid on the other hand left Edinburgh almost at once, on being offered the editorship of the *Courier* in Dumfries. In 1817 also, another young man in Edinburgh took an important step: George Combe published his first article on phrenology. The son of a brewer near the Grassmarket, Combe had become a successful advocate before his interest in phrenology developed. Editor Maclaren would also become a convert, an office bearer of the Phrenological Society and one of Combe’s lifelong friends. Of three of these men we shall hear more, as each was influential in the episode in which the skull of Burns was borrowed from his grave.

**THE ERA OF PHRENOLOGY**

Phrenology had been pioneered before 1800 by a German doctor, Franz Gall. Born near Baden, he worked in Vienna as an anatomist and was a genuine investigator of a theory that different functions of the body are controlled by particular areas of the brain; this was many years before Broca would identify a speech centre. Gall unfortunately was carried away into proposing that separate facets of temperament and character must be represented in definite areas of the cerebral cortex and that those areas will be correspondingly thicker or thinner. Assuming that prominences on the surface of the brain will be faithfully reflected by bumps on the skull, he began measuring living heads with callipers in order to relate variations in shape to personality and behaviour. By 1800 he was lecturing on this new science of cranioscopy with an assistant, another doctor from southwest Germany, Johann Spurzheim. Later they called it craniology and finally phrenology ("study of the mind"). When their teaching was condemned as immoral and irreligious they had to leave Vienna, settling in Paris. In time they had models of the head marked out like a street map, with areas to which they allocated qualities such as constructiveness, self-esteem and even hope, and graded them so that in a certain person they might say, from their measurements, that ‘Conscientiousness is large but acquisitiveness less than average’.

As time went on they differed, as Spurzheim branched out into hypothetical details which Gall could not accept, and Spurzheim travelled widely on his own. He was clearly an inspiring lecturer. In 1815 he was in Dublin when a scathing review of some books by Gall and himself appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, rejecting them as quackery and downright nonsense. This served to publicize the subject and led to thirty years of fervent debate, when phrenology had a dedicated following in Britain with appeal for doctors, lawyers, clergymen and artists among others. Spurzheim arrived in Edinburgh to confront his critics, in the wake of the Scottish Enlightenment, and the lawyer George Combe was an early convert, calling himself a Spurzheimite and going on to succeed Gall and Spurzheim as the leading authority in the field. Combe actually met Spurzheim first at a dinner table, when the visitor produced a human brain, ‘a recent brain’, and turned the occasion into an anatomy tutorial.

**EXHUMATION OF THE SKULL**

The link between these phrenologists and later events in Dumfries was John McDiarmid. The son of a Gaelic-speaking minister in Perthshire, he had been working in Edinburgh in the head office of the Commercial Bank but moving in literary circles, meeting Scott, Hogg and Jeffrey. As editor in Dumfries he quickly established himself as a leading citizen; years later it would be said that, with the single exception of Burns, no name was more firmly associated with Dumfries. Studying local history he put on record in one of his books what he had learnt of the occasion in
1815 when the poet’s remains were moved from his original grave to the newly built mausoleum. That had been carried out with considerable secrecy and had distressed the widow Jean Burns, who needed much persuasion before she gave her approval. Later, as phrenology became widely known, McDiarmid wrote of the regret which various people had expressed to him that the opportunity had not been taken to obtain a cast for phrenology. It was known that a chance had been taken to study the skull of King Robert Bruce, during building repairs in Dunfermline Abbey. So the intention had been prepared when in 1834 Jean Burns became terminally ill and it was clear that the crypt of the mausoleum would soon be opened. Jean was 69 years old and had been a widow for 37 years.

Three days after her death, when the funeral date had been set, the Scotsman published the comment that now there would be an opportunity for the advancement of science, to repair the omission of 1815, and urgent planning must have taken place in Dumfries. The eldest son, Robert Burns junior, was living in the town but his permission alone was evidently not thought adequate. Jean’s brother Robert Armour did not arrive from London by the afternoon mail coach until the day before the funeral, but by 6 p.m. his reluctant agreement had been obtained. So during that evening of 31 March a small group of men met at the mausoleum near St. Michael’s Church and borrowed the skull, taking it half a mile across town to a plasterer’s workshop, where a mould was carefully made and three plaster casts prepared. Since I stumbled on this story several years ago I have been interested in the questions, who were these men and how did they become involved? Eleven who were present that evening can be identified by name.

It emerges clearly that three at the centre of the exploit were members of the Dumfries Burns Club – John McDiarmid, Adam Rankine and James Kerr. They had been founding members, with their names on the Spode punchbowl, and McDiarmid was currently the president. James Kerr, described as ‘long the leading plasterer of the town’, was his brother-in-law, and Rankine was a senior merchant much involved in municipal affairs. They were joined late in the planning by one of the local doctors, Archibald Blacklock, also a member of the Burns Club, who undertook to examine the skull and to describe it in writing. These men with two others formed the party who with darkened lanterns and a ladder wend down into the crypt. The others were the builder, Andrew Crombie, whose responsibility it had been to open the crypt, and James Bogie, a gardener who (like the McNight sisters, see table) was a friend of the Burns family. Bogie had been present in 1815 when the move to the mausoleum took place. These six were aged between 44 and 57 with the exception of young Crombie, who only a few years earlier had inherited the family business. There seems to have been a seventh person at this stage, for it is on record that ‘a small party’ went to the mausoleum and the six who entered the crypt are named, while ‘one of our number kept watch above’. That was probably James Pagan, a reporter on McDiarmid’s staff at the Courier who later moved to the Glasgow Herald, returning only to marry and carry off James Kerr’s daughter. Certainly in later years as editor of the Herald Pagan would tell how once he had held in his hands the skull of Burns.

McDiarmid and Blacklock left written accounts of what took place and they are our primary sources. William McDowall (1815-88), a later editor whose historical notes are well known, was of course writing a generation later and sometimes differs in detail. It is emphasized how conscious they were of the need to avoid public attention, not only to keep away sightseers but because sentiment at the time was so strongly against the disturbance of graves, and they must have remembered what had happened only five years before when the presence of William Hare in the town had been detected. Hare had been set free after turning King’s Evidence against Burke and was making for Ireland. A riotous mob in Dumfries threatened to lynch him and he was lucky to escape, as the police smuggled him away and he set out instead on the road to England, to disappear from history.

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THE CASTS OBTAINED

It was not practicable to make the mould on the spot and the skull, found in 'a high state of preservation', was placed in a fine linen bag belonging to Mrs. McDiarmid and carried to the workshop in Queensberry Street, where the group was joined by three men invited to watch the work – two lawyers, Provost Murray and Archibald Hamilton, and the rector of the Academy, John MacMillan. The casts were made by James Fraser, one of Kerr's workmen, 'with all the tact and accuracy of an experienced artist', as the party stood watching until 1 a.m., when the skull was locked up overnight, to be returned to the crypt in a lead-lined box early next morning.

Impressed by the skull's unusual size the doctor had tried his hat on it, and then in turn the skull had been tested with hats of ten people present, but none was large enough. Size of head was in those days thought to reflect intelligence. As one phrenologist wrote about the skull of the Bruce, 'it is remarkably large, which circumstance indicates a large brain, and size in the brain corresponds with power in the mind, the kind of power coinciding with the direction in which the brain is largest'. A week after the funeral a solemnly detailed account of these proceedings was published in the Courier. There must have been talk, because the editor wrote that it would be best to confess the whole truth. He reported how the party had gone to their rendezvous at the mausoleum one by one, by different routes, climbing over the churchyard wall. Meeting at 7 p.m. they had agreed that there were still too many people about, and had quietly dispersed to meet again at 9 p.m. He admitted there was something degrading about this ‘which reminded us of the horrid trade of bodysnatching’ but declared that ‘our motives were good, and totally alien to those of idle curiosity’.

Within a few days this report was lampooned in the Spectator under the title ‘The skull of Burns and the skulls often Dumfries-men’. McDiarmid was indignantly convinced that the parody must have been sent to London by his rival editor Robert Douglas of the Dumfries Times, although all that Douglas initially printed in his paper was the mild dissent that ‘We are old fashioned enough to wish that the remains of poor Burns had been allowed to rest in peace.’

McDiarmid in the meantime was corresponding with George Combe in Edinburgh, arranging to send him two of the casts when there happened to be a reliable traveller who could be entrusted with the package; he asked that someone should meet the coach at the Black Bull near the top of Leith Walk to receive it from the hand of Mr. Walter Dunlop, the UP minister in Dumfries. Combe wrote of ‘this enlightened contribution to the philosophy of mind’ and the Phrenological Society in Edinburgh minuted the receipt of a cast, ‘the gift of John McDiarmid Esq. of Dumfries’.

One name notably missing from the accounts of this episode is that of Rev. Robert Wallace, the minister of St. Michael’s, and there is no mention of the exhumation in the minutes of the Kirk Session. There was however another minister who very possibly may have been one of those who encouraged John McDiarmid to plan it. Rev. David Welsh had been one of the six founders of the Phrenological Society in Edinburgh in 1820 and had then spent some years in the parish of Crossmichael, little more than twenty miles from Dumfries. After his return to Edinburgh as professor of Church History he wrote, still in favour of phrenology, ‘I have found the greatest benefit from the science as a minister of the gospel… I have examined the doctrines of our church also, one by one, in connection with the truths of this new science, and have found the most wonderful harmony subsisting between them’.

ANALYSIS AND REACTION

Very soon Combe was putting on record his judgments on examination of the cast that ‘the animal propensities are very strongly indicated, but there is an equally strong development of sentiments such as benevolence and wonder… the intellect highly respectable but inferior to the feelings.’ Within a month he published a full analysis in a small book, concluding – as he might have written without the pseudoscientific approach, simply from knowledge of the poet’s life –
that Burns had been endowed with ‘powers calculated for a far higher sphere than that which he was able to reach’ and ‘with passions which he could with difficulty restrain, but which it was fatal to indulge’. The book contained ‘Views of the skull’ drawn by a member of the Phrenological Society, George Harvey, later president of the Royal Scottish Academy (knighted 1867), but these must to some extent be spurious: they are drawings of a cast, made to look like those of a skull, therefore reliable only as to size and general shape.

Thirty years later similar conclusions were published when Lorenzo Fowler12, a London-based phrenologist, lectured in Dumfries. He was presented with a cast by James Fraser, by this time a bailie, and his notes include: ‘Benevolence was very large indeed… Adhesiveness was extra large, making him friendly and companionable… Parental love was also a strong feature’. It is refreshing to find love of one’s offspring described simply as ‘parental love’, because in Combe’s jargon it was ‘philoprogenitiveness’.

In this century the large size of Burns’s brain has been confirmed by the anthropologist Arthur Keith13, working from a plaster cast which is in the Royal College of Surgeons in London. He found that the skull had been very broad and of exceptional length, characteristic of the longhead pre-Celtic stock which inhabited Britain before the Bronze Age. The three original casts are now difficult to identify, since many copies were made in later years.

Public reaction was conflicting from the start, ranging from enthusiastic praise to disgust. Shakespeare’s epitaph was quoted, ‘curst be he that moves my bones’, but the fact that the senior figure involved, Provost Murray, died within two months15 at the age of 49, does not seem to have set off any forebodings of the Tutankhamun variety. Allan Cunningham drily regretted14 that the district craniologists had thought it necessary to satisfy their minds by measurement that Burns had been equal to the composition of ‘Tam o’ Shanter’.

A VERDICT

Later comments have on the whole shown understanding of the intellectual climate of the times – ‘phrenology was then in its believable period’, and ‘for a time phrenology proved useful to thousands of believers15. Flugel pointed out the irony that this had been the most popular doctrine in the history of psychology but also the most erroneous16, it had been ‘psychology’s great faux pas’. One verdict was less tolerant, when Sulley17 wrote in 1896 that this had been ‘a wanton act of desecration’, and that must be challenged. ‘Desecration’ is perhaps difficult to reject, but it was by no means wanton (‘unrestrained, reckless’). These were mature earnest men, doing what they thought was important. ‘Wanton’ I personally refute, and I do so on behalf of Great-great-great uncle John McDiarmid and of my direct ancestors who were with him, James Kerr and James Pagan. Burns himself, after all, left us one guideline which should be remembered more often by modern biographers – ‘Gently scan your brother man…’

THE SIX IN THE CRYPT

John McDiarmid, 1790-1852.
Dumfries editor from 1817.
Married Anna McNight, 1819.

Archibald Blacklock, 1790-1875.
MRCS England, 1811.
Surgeon in Royal Navy, War of 1812: expedition against New Orleans.

Adam Rankine, 1777-1859.
Wine merchant.
Later elder of St. Michael’s and bailie.

James Bogie, 1778-1861.
Gardener.
Present at exhumation in 1815.

James Kerr, 1780-1836.
Plasterer.
Married Janet McNight, 1810.

Andrew Crombie, 1799-1855.
Builder.
Later Bailie.

Archibald Blacklock, 1790-1875.
MRCS England, 1811.
Surgeon in Royal Navy, War of 1812: expedition against New Orleans.

Andrew Crombie, 1799-1855.
Builder.
Later Bailie.

John McDiarmid, 1790-1852.
Dumfries editor from 1817.
Married Anna McNight, 1819.

Archibald Blacklock, 1790-1875.
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Surgeon in Royal Navy, War of 1812: expedition against New Orleans.

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Surgeon in Royal Navy, War of 1812: expedition against New Orleans.

Archibald Blacklock, 1790-1875.
MRCS England, 1811.
Surgeon in Royal Navy, War of 1812: expedition against New Orleans.
THE TWO ASSISTANTS

James Fraser.
Plasterer.
Later Bailie.

James Pagan, 1811-70.
Glasgow from 1839, editor from 1856.
Married Ann Kerr, 1841.

THE THREE SPECTATORS

Robert Murray, 1785-1834.
Writer.
Provost for six months, dying in office.

Archibald Hamilton, 1796-1851.
Writer.
Later elder of St. Michael’s and Dean of Guild.

John MacMillan.
Rector of Dumfries Academy, 1830-37.

THREE WITH INFLUENCE AT A DISTANCE

Charles Maclaren, 1782-1866.
Editor, The Scotsman, from 1817.
Geologist and phrenologist.

George Combe, 1788-1858.
Writer to the Signet, 1812.
Leading phrenologist.
The Constitution of Man, 1828.
Rev. David Welsh, 1793-1845, DD.
Phrenologist.
Crossmichael parish, 1821-27.
Seceding Moderator, 1843, at the Disruption of the Church of Scotland.

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Article based on a lecture to the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine.
OF SCOTTISH MICE, MEN, LASSES AND 18th CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

By Dr. Manfred Malzahn
(Sponsored by The National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan, Republic of China)

Of the two well-known phrases that epitomise Scottish egalitarianism, the apparently age-less dictum "We're a' Jock Tamson's bairns" seem to be the younger one, having originated no further back than the 19th century. This means that Robert Burns would not have had this saying in mind when he wrote the line "A man's a man for a' that" in his song "Is There for Honest Poverty". There is little doubt about the prime source of inspiration being the French Revolution, although Richard Hindle Fowler finds an additional model for the egalitarian sentiment as well as for a key metaphor in the writing of Englishman John Locke, rather than in any evidence of a time-honoured Scottish demotic tradition.

Whatever its genesis, the postulate for the global equality of man rings out loud and clear, and came to be firmly incorporated in the Scottish sense of identity. Still, there is the possibility for a radical-political as well as for a conservative-sentimental interpretation, or as David McCrone has it, an "activist" and an "idealist" reading of both the aforesaid parts of the Scottish credo. In the case of Burns, the second version is frequently propounded in conjunction with an understanding of "To a mouse" as a sentimental poem. By adding a similar treatment of "To a mountain daisy", the rebellious assertion of human dignity as independent of rank or riches is submerged in the picture of a meek and mellow poetic empathy with all living creatures, right down to the humble flowers.

It is certainly not an easy task to reconcile the effluence of a radical spirit with any sentimental ponderings, even if the hagiographers of great revolutionary leaders or the propagandists of fascism have ever been fond of adding a human touch to their portraits. Uncle Joe Stalin loved children, and Onkel Adolf Hitler was fond of dogs. Some archive will surely preserve evidence of Mao Zhe-dong's delight in blossoms, in the form of some photograph taken during the political campaign with the floricultural slogan. Why then should one not simply accept a similar syzygy in the case of a radical Caledonian bard?

At this stage, it is worth taking a closer look at "To a mouse", a poem probably almost as frequently misread as read at all. Among the misunderstandings I would count Alan Bold's interpretation, although Bold does quite fittingly bring in Alexander Pope's Essay on Man, whose "Nature's chain" he sees reflected in Burns's "Nature's social union". Bold, however, does not mention an even more pertinent passage in the first epistle, which Burns's poem inverts or corrects. Thus Pope:

Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescrib'd, their present state;
From brutes what men, from men what spirits know:
Or who could suffer Being here below?
To Burns, the exclusive awareness of the “present state” is what pertains to the mouse, whereas man bears the burden of memory as well as of forethought. This is a slightly different definition of their respective places in the chain of being, although Burns, like Pope, seems to acknowledge the existence of a clear-cut natural hierarchy. This, however, makes the idea of “social union” between mice and men rather ironic, and the possibilities for empathy between the different strata extremely limited. There is certainly little empathy with lesser beings in the almost Miltonic picture of Pope’s deity:

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
Atoms or systems into ruin hurl’d,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world.

The hero and the sparrow are united here in a way which may well be called a yoking together, or as the Greeks would have it, a zeugma. The similarly sylleptic nature of Burns’s “best-laid schemes of mice and men” in the seventh stanza of “To a mouse” is revealed by the eighth, which denies the mouse the very foresight it had just been credited with, and exposes rhetorical ingenuity as exactly that. It is all just a manner of speaking. This undercutting or self-deconstruction of the rhetoric is almost as blatant and certainly as effective as for instance in John Donne’s “The Paradox”, but such subtlety and trickery is perhaps too unexpected even for critics who would not consciously consider Burns as a simple ploughman poet.

“To a mouse” expresses neither Pope’s Stoic acquiescence in the way things are ordained by the powers above, nor Blake’s visionary refutation of a hierarchy of being in his poetic amalgamation of man and fly. Burns’s mouse and man are neither merged nor confused. One is talked of in terms of the other, but the difference in scale is constantly emphasised by the use of diminutives. Letting his thoughts flow in a casual, amused, even playful way is what enables the speaker to face a deadly serious matter, viz. the precarious nature of his own existence, of which the mouse happens to remind him. The speaker’s compassion is thus extended to the mouse as a mouse, and not in a sentimental-anthropomorphic mood. The decision to spare this one rodent can after all be justified in terms of common sense: the one “daimen icker” will not be missed, while a donation of half a harvest to the united field mice of Ayrshire would in all likelihood be perceived as a different proposition.

In this attitude, Burns’s speaker is a world apart from Sentimentalism and even further from the Romantic spirit, especially as exemplified by the arch-Romantic Wordsworth. The reader is asked to feel with the man, not the mouse, and, one might add, not with a woman either. Consider the following comment by Camille Paglia on Wordsworth’s poetry, where she finds the radical exclusion of one human type: the adult man of active virility. His poems are filled with children, women, old men, and animals. But a stone in the road arouses more fellow-feeling in William Wordsworth than does a masculine man.

In Paglia’s classification, Wordsworth and Spenser as well as Blake and Wilde represent the androgynous-Apollonian eye, whereas Burns would presumably be grouped with Chaucer’s Protean-Dionysian party. That this alignment has more than merely aesthetic implications, and is thus a particularly apt basis for a discussion of radical ideas in Scottish literature, becomes apparent in Paglia’s verdict that “the Apollonian is always reactionary”. As for the label she gives to the other side, its usefulness in this context might be inferred simply from the fact that a recent book-length study of 18th-century Scottish literature was based on the concept of the Protean, whose essentially subversive nature Paglia documents. The most prominent radical-egalitarian feature of Burns’s poetry lies, to quote the title of Paglia’s book, in his use of sexual personae. Those are certainly the opposite of androgynous: full-blooded, lusty heterosexual men and women populate many of his works. Even at his most formal,
controlled, conventional and innocuous, there seems to be an undercurrent of earthiness and earthliness which could make certain people uncomfortable, as for instance Francis Jeffrey, who wrote the following words in the Edinburgh Review of January 1809:

He has written with more passion, perhaps, and more variety of natural feeling, on the subject of love, than any other poet whosoever. - but with a fervour that is sometimes indelicate, and seldom accommodated to the timidity and 'sweet austere composure' of women of refinement. He has expressed admirably the feelings of an enamoured peasant, who, however refined or eloquent he be, always approaches his mistress on a footing of equality; but has never caught that tone of chivalrous gallantry which uniformly abases itself in the presence of the object of its devotion.

This is the voice of the establishment, speaking in the name of what Leslie Fiedler calls the Sentimental Love Religion, a middle-class adoption and adaption of courtly love, which centres on “the convention of the inferiority of the lover to his mistress”. To Fiedler, this pose is a part of a Manichean duality whose other side is the denigration and brutalisation of women, especially those of the lower classes. He quotes William of Poitou, the author of courtly love poems as well as of “phallic poems full of male arrogance”, with the line “and so I screwed them eighteen times so hard I broke my belt and armour”, which is not so far from the following piece of swagger in Burns’s letter to Robert Ainslie of 3 March 1788:

I have f-d her till she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory... I took the opportunity of some dry horse litter, and gave her such a thundering scalade that electrified the very marrow of her bones.

The bragging goes on a bit, and at the same time as a correspondence of a quite different nature with Mrs. Agnes McLehose. While he shows rhetorical verve, but no undue delicacy in the account of his exploits with Jean Armour, who was soon to give birth to his twin children, Burns is addressing his “Clarinda” as “Mistress of my soul.” The “sexual philosophy” underlying this use of dual registers is formulated in one of Burns’s later letters to George Thomson, in remarks which Richard Hindle Fowler sums up in one curt sentence: “His women were class A or class B.”

It seems appropriate to take the word “class” here not only as referring to an individual classification, but rather to social stratification. It was class-consciousness which prompted Burns’s egalitarian outbursts, and in the declaration of his sexual ethics, he shows his claim to a morality which was regarded as the monopoly of a higher class than his own, as it is neatly expressed in a letter from John Logan to Henry Mackenzie of 28 February 1787: “no man should avow rakery who does not possess an estate of 500 £ a year.”

Whereas Walter Scott’s aristocratic aspirations were shaped by a genteel-bourgeois idea of the aristocracy, and aimed at social climbing, Burns’s attempts to attain aristocratic liberty in his sexual dealings amounted to a subversion of class distinctions. His courtship of ladies of quality threatened a social miscegenation which was obviously as much of a threat to the system as a racial mesalliance between a black man and a white woman in the old American South. It would thus hardly be unfair to call Robert Burns’s penchant for high-born females and at least subconscious attempt to revenge himself for all the humiliation he experienced at the hands of people belonging the upper echelons of society, or to say that he was, as the hero-narrator of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man puts it, at least to some degree “confusing the class struggle with the ass struggle”.

There is, however, a possible connection between the two. The sexual act can be one of i' ways of asserting one’s elementary humanity and, like other manifestations of man’s physi
existence, it essentially is very much the same thing no matter whether performed by rich or poor. To the latter, moreover, it may be one of the few affordable sources of excitement and pleasure, a momentary escape from, or an act of defiance of hardship and deprivation, as expressed by Burns in this chorus:

\[ An' why shou'd na poor bodies m-w, m-w, m-w; \\
An' why shou'd na poor bodies m-w; \\
The rich they hae siller, an' houses, an' land, \\
Poor bodies hae naething but m-w. \]

This, of course, poor bodies could have within wedlock, but a considerable number of poor bodies in 18th-century Scotland appear to have been or to have considered themselves quite simply too poor to marry at their most sexually active age, "that season of life when they have the greatest relish for Venery". Fornication was thus a type of behaviour which followed a class-related pattern, and one in which there was at least relatively more equality among the lower classes, where men and women would mix at work as well as at recreational activities, chiefly those of an alcoholic nature. But even at the other end of the social spectrum, as Thomas Crawford notes, women could show "a freedom and spontaneity of manners that surprised the more formal English."

This seems to point to a distinctively Scottish tradition in the interaction between men and women, something for which Wallace Notestein finds ample evidence in pre-1603 literature, where descriptions of hoydenish frolics among the "women of the fairs and taverns" correspond to the poetic praise of ladies for their "merriness and gaiety". But if different registers might be no more than marginally different ways of referring to roughly the same type of behaviour in earlier Scottish poetry, in Burns’s hands they can seem a bit more like the objectionable expression of an essentially two-tiered morality. A case in point is "Blythe was She", a eulogy of a certain Euphemia Murray, whom he had met at the house of Sir William Murray of Auchtertyre:

\[ Her looks were like a flow'r in May, \\
    Her smile was like a simmer morn. \\
She tripped by the banks o' Earn \\
    As light's a bird upon a thorn. \\
Her bonie face it was as meek \\
    As onie lamb upon a lea. \\
The evening sun was ne'er sae sweet \\
    As was the blink o' Phemie's e'e. \]

Nothing very remarkable here, either in content or in literary craftsmanship, but one should recall the traditional lyrics of "Blythe was she" which celebrate a thirsty and crafty regular at a drinking establishment, to gauge the extent of the transformation, as well as the ironic twist. Whereas Burns’s text itself could hardly be taken in evidence of Francis Jeffrey’s assertion that the poet “even in his complimentary effusions to ladies of the highest rank, is for straining them to the bosom of her impetuous votary”, the sub-text throws a different light on the matter. Even if the audience had, contrary to all probability, not recognised the tune and recalled the words associated with it, the jaunty and rollicking air itself would have qualified the polite compliment to a douce and docile lamb.

There is, however, another way of reading such verse, as well as Burns’s need to treat certain females in a courtly fashion, poetically or socially. Louise Olga Fradenburg notes William Dunbar’s technique of separating the courtly ideal or the ideal court from the less savoury reality, "a splitting whose function it is to preserve the ideal from inward as well as outward aggression." For Burns, political circumstances and individual psychology may have gone hand in hand here to produce, in a country which no longer had a court, at least a poetic representation of courtly love directed at an idealised female, or indeed at an idealised “darling” Prince, who in turn is capable of showing passions of the non-courtly kind:
He set his Jenny on his knee,
All in his Highland dress;
For brawlie weel he kent the way
To please a bonie lass.

The next-best thing to a poet-farmer making advances to a noble lady, this is an imaginary instance of egalitarian behaviour from the top down, not viewed as sexual despotism, but rather as the abandonment of royal privilege in meeting the common people at their level. Charles Edward Stuart does not only appear in the role of womaniser, but acting with the intention to please: a sexual expression of a political ideal that was apparently able to accommodate a fair amount of egalitarian imagery.

While the fullness of the available evidence would make it fairly difficult to sustain the contention that Burns was a pre-Feminism feminist, it cannot be denied that his poetic treatment of sexuality has an egalitarian element which is linked, as in the lines quoted above, to his rebellion against class boundaries and to his nationalistic, pro-Jacobite sentiments. What is also noteworthy is that his idealisation of females is by no means restricted to those who would have deemed themselves his betters. In addressing poetic praise to women of the lower social orders, Burns implicitly attacked the condescending attitude which implied that only a certain degree of refinement could make a woman truly adorable. A good example is the following comment from an undergraduate essay by George Gissing, the man who was to become an English novelist:

The rustic maidens he met... were, in all probability, not paragons of loveliness, but his warm nature and lively imagination endowed them with all graces of manner and comeliness of feature.

It is interesting to note that Gissing himself was by no means unattracted by lower-class females, with a biography that features “a conviction for petty theft... to help a prostitute”, and the “mistake” of two marriages to girls “with no education” to put the above passage into a slightly different perspective. In any case, Burns’s eulogising of women of all ranks is significant at a time when women “were beginning to play a key strategic role in the rise of modern Scottish manufacturing”, a role that for many of them meant exploitation to a dehumanising, and by the same token defeminising degree. Yet women labourers were at least on a more equal footing with their men than the ladies of the intellectual elite, as described by A. Murdoch and R. B. Sher:

For all their concern with tolerance and freedom of inquiry, the Scottish literati generally showed little interest in admitting women to their company- let alone their ranks- where intellectual affairs were concerned.

To preserve inequality between the sexes seems to have been a more vital concern among upper-class males than among their lower-class counterparts. Richard Davenport-Hines reports how the Duke of Argyll, in a legislative debate about the proposed Union of Parliaments, held up a condom he had acquired in London, remarking that it “occasioned the debauching of a great number of Ladies of quality, and other young gentlewomen”. He also quotes a comment describing the said John Campbell as a man “whose loftiness of mind did not prevent him from harbouring the most illiberal contempt of women”. In the event, the opposite faction appear to have got more mileage out of the exhibit than pro-Unionist Argyll, by emphasising fears that sexual licence would spread across the border after the Union, but the incident illustrates how much the establishment on both sides feared the loss of the Scottish male aristocrat’s monopolistic claim to promiscuity, as the cornerstone of an entire social system in which “the chastity of upper-class women was based on the whoredom of their poorer fallen sisters”.

Chastity could, of course, also be seen as a stabilising force among the people occupying the middle ground in society, a group growing in numbers as well as in influence which was to step
into the role of moral arbiter. In England, as Davenport-Hines documents, a “plebeian sexuality” was perceived as alarming because it undermined social control: “eroticism was as unsuitable for servants as atheism.” Even greater disruption might then be expected from eroticism among the middle classes, the guarantors and to an ever-increasing extent the keepers of the nation’s wealth.

The English middle classes, however, in their quiet but steady march to power, showed little zest for sexual Jacobinism, and the Scottish middle classes followed suit. The more anglicised Scotland became, or to put it differently, the more advanced in its development towards a bourgeois-capitalist society, the less likelihood was there of any of the medieval-aristocratic acceptance of plebeian licentiousness remaining. Nonetheless, the royal delight in peasant merriment and misbehaviour which is plainly felt throughout the 16th-century poem “Christis Kirk on the Green” found its continuation in the works of poets of humble birth such as Fergusson, Ramsay and Burns, and likewise in the folk song tradition from which these poets borrowed, and to which they repaid in kind.

For both the sexual and the political radical Burns, being a public figure demanded a fair amount of duplicity, all the more so because his livelihood depended on an establishment which he basically resented. And then, in Scotland, patronage could only be sought from those who were themselves quite far removed from the real centre of power. At a royal court, Burns might have felt the same as many other poets before him about the mixed blessings of their status, but it was the absence of a court and the nagging feeling that he was bowing to menials instead of royalty which must have had something to do with the belief in “the Royalty of Man”, as formulated in the “Ode for General Washington’s Birthday”. In Burns’s letters from Edinburgh, the initial and quite understandable pleasure at the way he was being lionised by polite society gives way to the very different feelings of a “wanderer and sojourner in a strange land.”

There is a sense of inadequacy to the role he was cast in, which makes him fear that he “shall have bitter reason to repent” and instead of expressing the perception that he has arrived at the hub of things, he compares himself to St. John the Evangelist who was banished “to a desert island”, and said to have been offered drink from a poisoned cup. Of the many drinks thrust at Burns in Edinburgh, some must have seemed to him potentially baneful, with those who offered appearing to be among the “many wild beasts” which he claims to have encountered in Scotland’s ancient capital city.

Burns’s perception of the capital can be likened to that of David Balfour, the protagonist of Robert Louis Stevenson’s Kidnapped, who arrives in Edinburgh at the very end of his adventures, and gives the following account:

*The huge height of the buildings, running up to ten and fifteen storeys, the narrow arched entries that continually vomited passengers, the wares of the merchants in their windows, the hubbub and endless stir, the foul smells and the fine clothes, and a hundred other particulars too small to mention, struck me into a kind of stupor of surprise, so that I let the crowd carry me to and fro; and yet all the time what I was thinking of was Alan at Rest-and-be-Thankful; and all the time (although you would think I would not choose but to be delighted with these braws and novelties) there was a cold gnawing in my inside like a remorse for something wrong.*

This is not only a country boy’s revulsion but also a Scot’s recoiling at the sight of a capital which is not all it should be, a sore disappointment for a lad who has just come into his kingdom, as the title of the penultimate chapter has it. The nature of the true centre of power is revealed by the final sentence of David’s account: “The hand of Providence brought me in my drifting to the very doors of the British Linen Company’s bank.” A commercial and British, not a rural and
Scottish future: thus David the Lowland Laird is rescued from the feelings of guilt occasioned in
the parting from his Highland companion Alan Breck. It would be hard to find, or even to imagine
a more striking illustration of post-Jacobite Scotland’s path.

When Robert Burns, with his own private feelings of remorse for having left behind a rural
consort, was approaching the capital, he entertained high expectations. If his own poetic “Address
to Edinburgh” expresses an ideal in stark contrast with the above mentioned remarks in his letters,
this can quite easily be explained by the fact that he hailed “Scotia’s darling seat” before had even
got there, in verses “carded and spun” on the road. And yet he might well have done so afterwards,
for the female Edina with her “daughters bright”, and in particular “the heavenly Miss Burnet,
daughter to Lord Monbodo,” is eulogised in the same spirit as other women. Where David Balfour
sees Edina’s sordid reality and turns his thoughts to the non-olfactory purity of gold, Robert Burns
remains as faithful to the female ideal as he was unfaithful to real females, sheltering the pure
image from the “inward as well as outward aggression” of the compulsive Don Juan.

Balfour’s creator Stevenson was, of course, aware of just how far Scotland had gone down the
English Road of mercantile pragmatism, instead of striving for the metaphysical clarity of the
ideal. In a sense, Burns’s self-contradictory behaviour and utterances represented those
“irreconcilabilities and antinomies” which, according to George E. Davie, “the apostles of the
Enlightenment” were trying to ignore. Scotland was faced with a French as well as an English
option politically as well as intellectually, and Burns’s efforts at having his cake and eating it
should have struck David Hume as yet another example of the human mind’s “precarious
and perhaps impossible balancing-act, of alternating between two rival, incompatible positions”.

Although chronology makes the above point a speculative one, it is hard to disagree with Alan
Bold’s view that “the work of Burns is in accord with Hume’s naturalism and his affirmative
attitude;” likewise, it is evident that the work of both contains much of the subversive. If both
would have disagreed on the Jacobite cause, it must be remembered that by the time Burns wrote
“To Wm. Tytler, Esq., of Woodhouselee” in appreciation of that man’s attempts to clear the name
of Stuart, this name could already be used as shorthand for essentially anti-monarchic ideas.
Moreover, Burns comes to a staunchly pragmatic, tongue-in-cheek solution which might have
found Hume’s approval:

Still in prayers for King George I most heartily join,
The Queen, and the rest of the gentry;
Be they wise, be they foolish, is nothing of mine:
Their title’s avowed by my country.

What better proof of Hume’s tenet “that no two ideas are in themselves contrary”? And what
better evidence of the difficult nature of self-assessment than the apparent contradiction between
Burns’s assertion “I have long studied myself, and I think I know pretty exactly what ground I
occupy, both as a Man, and a Poet”, and his wish that we human beings had the ability “To see
oursels as itherse see us”? To Burns as well as to Hume, the pragmatic solution to the epistemological
problem was a social one, the mutual mirroring between “at least three objects which present
themselves as related by a system of partial resemblances”.

Burns’s system, as documented in his poetry and letters, consisted of a rather larger number of
types of both men and women in whose perceptions of him, and his behaviour towards him, he
saw reflections of what he was, and of what he was not. The extent of his womanising may well be
seen as related to his frantic need of approval, of recognition as a poet, and as a Scottish poet to
boot, in an “epistemological crisis” which had the Scots “wrestling with the problem of
reconstituting what had been a small nation.” His poetry shows that the process of mirroring
tended to accentuate the resemblances rather than the differences between human beings, and led
to a humane and broad-minded judgment of right and wrong, as in “Had I the Wyte?”, where the
male persona is seduced by a battered wife in her husband’s absence:
Could I for shame, could I for shame, 
Could I for shame refus’d her? 
And wadna manhood been to blame 
Had I unkindly used her?

If Burns’s letters, as Carol McGuirk suggests, are evidence of pressures exerted by a polite society which was dominated by the cult of sentimentality, they reflect the potentially negative effect of the mirroring process: 55

The constant need to anticipate one’s effect on others- and the continual need to revise one’s “affect” in order to secure sympathetic scrutiny- created stress, not peace for sentimental writers.

It is much to Burns’s credit, then, that he was a properly sentimental writer only in letters, where he found it much harder to express the genuine concern and respect for human beings that informs much of his poetry, even that of a caustic-satirical kind. Where he appears egotistic, egocentric and self-pitying, he probably still reflects not only his own personal identity crises which were perhaps inevitable under the circumstances of his background and his poetic career, but also the predicament of a country for which self-pity or self-denial could well have seemed to be the only, equally “unendurable alternatives.” 56 The corpus of Burns’s poetry, on the other hand, contains much that points towards the continuing existence of other, better options for Scotland’s future.

Notes
8 ibd., p. 125.
12 ibd., p. 49.
14 ibd., p. 252.
16 ibd.
19 The Secret Cabinet of Robert Burns: Merry Muses of Caledonia (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1979) p. 53.


*The Poetical Works of Burns. Cambridge Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974) p. 253; all quotations from Burns’s poems, unless otherwise specified, are taken from this edition, in which pages numbers may be found via the index of titles.


ibd.; Davenport-Hines cites no source.


to William Greenfield, December 1786, ibd., p. 74.

to William Chalmers, 27 December (the aforementioned Saint’s day) 1786, ibd., p. 76.


ibd., p. 208.


ibd.


ibd., pp. 7 f.


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At 10.00 a.m. on Saturday 28th September, Doors Open Day 1996, Tom McIlwraith, Past President of the Burns Federation, turned the key and the door to the Chamber of Edinburgh's Burns Monument was opened to the public for the first time in 15 years. One of the many Burns Memorials spread throughout the world the monument has had a chequered history. It stands in lonely isolation on Regent Road overlooking the old town of Edinburgh. The idea of a monument was first mooted in 1812 but it was not until 1824 that sufficient money was available to commission John Flaxman, R.A. of York to model a lifelike statue of Burns in marble. Unhappily the sculptor died before the statue was complete and it had to be finished by his pupil.

Of the £3,000 raised by the appeal about half went to the sculptor and the remainder was used to build the monument with a circular base chamber to house the statue. The architect was Thomas Hamilton of Edinburgh who had designed the Alloway monument in 1820 and Edinburgh's old Royal High School building, currently used by the Scottish Grand Committee. People are surprised to find the chamber to be deceptively spacious: it measures 20 feet from wall to wall and the central area within its pillars is 14 feet in diameter. Round the chamber at 12 feet from floor level were originally 12 tinted cathedral glass windows. Unfortunately, all but three windows have at some point been replaced with stone slabs.

By 1836 the soot and corrosive discharges from the Edinburgh gas works were affecting the statue and the only surviving monument committee member advocated its removal. In that year it
was placed in the care of Edinburgh Corporation and moved into the University Library. In 1861 it was again on the move, this time to the National Gallery at the Mound where it remained for 38 years. In 1899 it was moved into the entrance hall of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Queens Street where it now stands. Each year the Edinburgh & District Burns Clubs take part in a wreath laying ceremony at the Gallery.

Burns’s sons, William Nicol and James Glencairn visited the monument regularly. They donated at least 16 of more than 100 genuine relics of Burns and his associates acquired by James Ballantine, the then secretary of the Edinburgh Burns Club. The last visit was by William in 1866 when he was over three score years and ten. The relics were moved out of the monument in 1901 and can now be seen at the Writers’ Museum in Lady Stair’s Close, Lawnmarket.

A sketch submitted to an Edinburgh newspaper at the turn of the century, by a reader who suggested the monument was not a fitting memorial to the poet as it was, and thought that the Flaxman Statue of the poet should be mounted on the top of the monument.

The monument stood forlorn and empty from 1901 until 1960 when, after renovation of its interior by members of the Edinburgh and District Burns Clubs Association it was reopened as the headquarters and meeting place of the Edinburgh and District Clubs. The opening ceremony was conducted by the Lord Provost on 4th April, 1960 and so for a time the monument was back in use. Subsequently, up to the early 1980s, during the Edinburgh International Festival EDBCA members opened the monument to visitors. Owing to Edinburgh’s hostile winter climate and the difficulty of heating the chamber outwith the summer months it was always going to be a cool building in which to hold meetings and ultimately it was again to fall into disuse.

The EDBCA encouraged the Council to spruce up the monument’s interior for the bicentennial year and mounted an exhibition in the chamber for Doors Open Day 1996. The Monument took pride of place on the front of the pamphlet, Celebrating Literary Edinburgh, and was one of 59 buildings of architectural interest open to the public. Federation President Andrew McKee visited the exhibition and stayed to chat with many of the hundreds of visitors who entered the chamber. Having made it with the Monument into Doors Open Day 1996, the EDBCA intend to ensure that we repeat the opening every year. Meanwhile, we are looking for other uses to which the chamber can be put during the year.

John Clark,
Publicity Officer Edinburgh & District Burns Clubs Association
BURNS THE “STAMP” OF SUCCESS

by

Peter J. Westwood

As early as 1957 representation was made by the Burns Federation to the Postmaster General for the issue of a special stamp to mark the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns, and the extent of public interest was reflected in the following year by a deputation of Scottish Members of Parliament who approached the Prime Minister on the matter. The answer to both appeals was a definite No! — it was not the policy of the Post Office to commemorate an individual on a postage stamp. To say that considerable disappointment was felt in Scotland at this apparent lack of sympathy would indeed be the understatement of the year.

As the date of the bi-centenary approached, pressure was concentrated locally on the Head Postmaster at Ayr for the provision at least of special franking arrangements to cover the event, and eventually the authorities relaxed their attitude somewhat. They agreed that the small sub-office at Alloway, directly opposite the famous cottage in which Burns was born, should remain open on 25th January — a Sunday in that year — and that mail posted there would be cancelled by a handstamp inscribed “Alloway” instead of receiving the normal machine cancellation of Ayr within the boundaries of which Alloway now lies. For the purpose the old Alloway double ring handstamp was brought out of retirement. A small concession indeed to such an extensive public demand.

No doubt the Post Office authorities anticipated dealing with relatively few items of mail from postmark enthusiasts. They must certainly have been astonished at what did occur. On the morning of 25th January, a mountain of envelopes and cards awaited treatment, and this was constantly added to by the hundreds who besieged the little post office from the moment it opened on that memorable day. By this time it was realised that the service offered had a national and even an international appeal and not merely a philatelic one. According to the Press some 30,000 letters were dealt with. In view of the small amount of advance publicity this figure is remarkable when compared with the smaller totals recorded in the “first day” servicing of issues with the whole weight of the Philatelic Bureau publicity behind them.

The garage at Alloway owned by the sub-postmaster was pressed into service and accommodation provided there for post office operators working 3-hour shifts. Even so at the end of the day all the mail had not been dealt with and the residue had to be tackled the following day. It was essential of course that the cancellation remained dated “25th” and in order to identify mail actually cancelled on the 26th, the small star in the handstamp was moved from its central position to a position on the left above the figures 25 of the date.

A number of privately produced special envelopes were frequently embellished with labels which had been previously printed by the Scottish Secretariat and other nationalist organisations and private individuals. Some envelopes even “sported” stamps featuring Burns issued earlier by Russia. These special covers and labels are outwith the scope of this article however.
HONoured at last

The seven years which followed however, were marked by a complete change in the attitude of the postal authorities, not only in stamp-issuing policy but to philatelists themselves. In 1959 Philatelists were regarded as cranks with a high nuisance rating. By 1966 they had become favoured customers with a considerable profit potential. The 1966 "treatment" of Robert Burns was therefore in marked contrast to that of 1959.

Having produced an issue for Shakespeare — of course we were duly informed that it was not Shakespeare who was being thus honoured, it was the Shakespeare Festival! — how could Robert Burns now continue to remain in philatelic obscurity. Accordingly a set of two stamps was issued on the 207th anniversary of his birth. When the issue was first announced, officials at the Edinburgh G.P.O. requested London for permission to handle all the necessary arrangements at the Scottish capital. Few could deny the justification of this request.
as Edinburgh had already coped with the “servicing” arrangements in connection with
the Forth Road Bridge Issue and the relative special cancellations at North and South
Queensferry. The success of this venture can best be measured by the fact that more “first
day” items were serviced for the Forth Bridge
than for all the other 1964 issues together —
from all centres and including the Shakespeare
Issue.

The ball was therefore passed to the feet of
the Edinburgh team, and the Burns Federation
was at once consulted for advice in the design
of a special cancellation which would be
acceptable for the occasion. It was agreed that
the Poet’s coat of arms should provide the motif.

Where would the cancellation be used? In the
first place obviously at Edinburgh as all the
Philatelic Bureau “business” relating to the
Issue has been transferred north for the
occasion. The importance of the event to
Scotland called for more than one centre for
“first day” servicing, and with a degree of
business acumen which could not be faulted,
the Acting Head Postmaster at Edinburgh and
his assistants were ready to meet the situation.
“First Day” centres would be established at
Alloway (where Burns was born), at Ayr (the
adjacent town which he knew so well), at
Kilmarnock (where his poems were first
published), at Edinburgh (where he resided for
some time), at Dumfries (where he died), and
at Glasgow (where lived a large number of
people who might avail themselves of first day
facilities!) Each location would have its own
cancellation, that of Dumfries featuring the
poet’s mausoleum. At the last moment
Mauchline (where Burns farmed) and Greenock
(Highland Mary fame) asked for similar
facilities and two additional cancellations were
created. It was too late however for the inclusion
of Greenock and Mauchline in the servicing
arrangements of the Philatelic Bureau, and
collectors could only obtain specimens posted
locally — if news of the new-comers had
reached them in time.

Plastic dies were used for the hand-stamps,
and in addition at the Philatelic Bureau at
Edinburgh G.P.O., a machine developed by
Gestetner Ltd., handled about 1,600 items an
hour. The dies used on the machine for each of
the locations (except the two late arrivals)
differed considerably from those of the
author’s handstamps and are smaller in
size. A number of hand-stamps existed for each
centre, but there was virtually no variation in
the cancellations produced by them. The
Gestetner cancellations show quite a variation

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**The Robert Burns Bicentenary Horse Ploughing Match**

**Mossgie Farm, Mauchline, Ayrshire**

3rd March, 1996

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**WEE, flecker, cowran, tim’rous bairnie,**

**Robert Burns**

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One in a set of four stamps issued by Royal Mail on 25th January, 1996

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in the lettering of the inscription, but it must be pointed out that only a proportion of the Philatelic Bureau envelopes received this cancellation, a great number were cancelled by handstamps.

In addition to the official G.P.O. special envelope many "commercial" special envelopes exist. Nationalist and other organisations were quick to join in the fun, and Greenock Burns Club adopted the expedient of over-printing the G.P.O. envelope! The Burns Federation issued a special envelope for sale to members at 5/- each bearing the two stamps as did Kilmarnock Burns Club. All these were accepted by the Post Office with commendable tolerance. Cooperation by philatelists was welcomed at the Post Office.

The record number of items serviced brought the Post Office its own reward. We may well be permitted to speculate to what extent the enormous success of the Forth Bridge and the Robert Burns operations influenced the decision to transfer the Philatelic Bureau to its new and now permanent headquarters in Edinburgh?

BICENTENARY ISSUE

As early as 1992 the Burns Federation approached Royal Mail about the possibility of issuing a set of stamps to mark the bicentenary of the Poet's death in 1996. On 14th December, 1994 they received the following reply "The 1996 stamp programme has now been decided by the Post Office Board and I am delighted to confirm that a set of special stamps will be issued to mark this important anniversary."

The set of four stamps were duly issued on 25th January, 1996 and featured quotations from four of his best known works, a poem and
three songs. The 19p stamp bears the opening line of "To A Mouse." The 25p "O My Luve's Like a Red, Red Rose." 41p the words "Scots Wha Hae wi Wallace Bled" and the 60p stamp "Auld Lang Syne."

There was some disappointment that the design of the stamps did not include the portrait of Burns, however they were at least designed by a Scot, Andrew Wolffe from Gatehouse-of-Fleet.

As with the issue of stamps in 1966 the demand for the stamps was over-whelming, with over twenty different handstamps to cancel the many and varied special envelopes which had been privately and commercially produced, including a set of six envelopes for the Burns Federation, printed in full colour. A limited quantity having been personally signed by the Poet's great, great, great grandson and daughter (collectors items).

I, took advantage of the special handstamps and Burns stamps to commemorate a number of Bicentenary events, one in particular to mark the horse ploughing match at Mossgiel Farm, organised by the Ayrshire Association of Burns Clubs (see illustration).

UNIQUE COMMEMORATIVE ENVELOPES
Marking the Bicentenary of the Birth of Robert Burns, posted at Alloway on 25th January, 1959 and then posted at Dumfries on 21st July, 1996 to mark the Bicentenary of his death in 1796.

Only a limited number of these envelopes were serviced and are available from
ELIAS HARRISON, 32 CUMNOCK ROAD, MAUCHLINE, AYRSHIRE. KA5 5AW.
COST PER ENVELOPE £5 plus 26p postage

ROBERT BURNS’ RHEUMATOLOGY

I have known Existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of Sickness; and have counted time by the repercussions of Pain! Rheumatism, Cold and Fever have formed, to me, a terrible Trinity in Unity, which makes me close my eyes in misery, and open them without hope – Burns. (1)

Letter to Mr. George Thomson, April 1796
"I have now reason to believe that my complaint is a flying gout - a damnable business!" (2)

Letter to Mr. George Thomson, May 1796
It might be expected that Robert Burns who suffered from a severe migratory polyarthritis during his last two years of life (3, 4) might have referred to arthritis and rheumatic disease in his poetry. However, careful reading of his works reveals scant reference to such afflictions. In two poems he refers to gout. The first in his famous poem on “Scotch Drink” written in the winter of 1785-6, and probably inspired by Robert Fergusson’s “Caller Water”, where he hopes that he who disdains “a glass o whiskey-punch”:

“May gravel round his blather¹ 'wrench',
An gouts torment him, inch by inch,”
¹ bladder

Burns' second reference to gout occurs in
his epitaph to Thomas Samson (1722-95) of Kilmarnock, “Tam Samson’s Elegy”.

“In vain auld age his body batters,
In vain the gout his ankles fetters,”

It is of interest that Burns’ “elder brother in the muse”, Robert Fergusson (1750-1774), also refers to gout in two of his poems (5). In “Good Eating” he ascribes the cause of gout to overeating:

“And for gouty rheums,
Ever preceded by indulged excess?”

In the mock heroic, “A Saturdays Expedition” Fergusson considers vigorous exercise to be preventive.

“If you, like us, could brave the angry waters; be uproused
By the first salutation to the morn
Paid by the watchful cock; or be compelled
On foot to wander o’er the lonely plain
For twenty tedious miles; then should the Gout,
With all his racking pangs, forsake your frame.
For he delights not to traverse the field,
Or rugged steep, but prides him to recline
On the luxuriance of a velvet fold,
Where Indolence on purple sofa lolls.”

Although Fergusson’s references appear to address what we now know as gout it is by no means clear that Burns is really commenting on the disease. Gout can affect the “ankles”, but if the poet really knew his rheumatology surely he would have referred to “his taes fetters”. Burns himself was, as cited above, diagnosed as having the “flying gout”, which probably was due either to subacute bacterial endocarditis (6) or more likely brucellosis (3, 4). Although an acute attack of gout was the City of Glasgow’s first recorded disease (7), today in Scotland gout is relatively rare, and probably was also during the eighteenth century. Sir Archibald Baring Garrod (1819-1907) in his famous book, “The Nature and Treatment of Gout and Rheumatic Grout” in 1859(8) observed.

“In Scotland gout is much less frequently met with than in England... and when it does occur it is generally in the upper classes of society and in larger cities, where wines and ales have been largely substituted for whiskey... Sir Robert Christison* bears similar testimony, for he informed me he had met with only two cases of gout in the (Edinburgh) Infirmary although physician to it for 30 years, and both subjects were fat and overfed English butlers”.

Gout is by no means uncommon in the Scottish diaspora, and the reason for its relative rarity in Scotland remains to be explained. The serum uric acid concentrations in healthy men and women, matched for age and sex, and height and weight, are no different in the West of Scotland than in London, England (10).

**INJURIES, DISABILITIES & DEFORMITIES**

Burns knew only too well the soul-destroying toil of farming in Ayrshire prior to land drainage and crop rotation. In his song “My father was a farmer”, probably composed in 1782, he is doomed to “plough and sow, to reap and mow”, the only respite for his weary bones being death.

“Till down my weary bones I lay in everlasting slumber, O!” Burns would be well acquainted with injuries one was liable to sustain, especially those which were fatal, as in his famous tale “Tam O’ Shanter”, based on Douglas Graham (1739-1811) and his shrewish wife Helen McTaggart (1742-1798).

“Whare drunken Charlie brak’s neck-bane”.

In addition, Burns must have been aware of many untreated physical deformities. These are shamefully described in his outrageously amusing politically incorrect poem on the wife of the weaver of Linkum Doddie, “Willie Waste”.

“She’s bow-haugh’d, she’s ken-shin’d, 2
Ae limpin leg a hand-breed shorter,
She’s twisted right, she’s twisted left,
To balance fair, in ilka quarter;
She has a lump upon her breast,
The twin o that upon her shouther””

(1bandy legged; 2 shins like hams, 3 shoulder)

Clearly Willie’s wife had a severe scoliosis perhaps due to congenital architectural imbalance or growth asymmetry, or to infectious damage such as tuberculosis. The
lump on her back might simply have been the result of kyphosis and that on the anterior part of her chest to growth disturbances in the ribs (11). Willie’s wife’s bandy legs and shins like hams suggests either the sequelae of childhood rickets or possible Paget’s disease. The Past-President of the British Geriatric Society, Dr. John L. C. Dall, would, I am sure, suggest that:

“A whiskin beard about her mou1,
Her nose and chin they threaten ither”

(‘mouth)
is consistent with the moustache old women often develop and the effects of loss of teeth. However, there is nothing in the poem to suggest that Willie’s wife was elderly, and in all probability she was imaginary, since there is no reference to such a person in James Mackays’ recently published biography (12), or in Maurice Lindsay’s “Burns Encyclopedia” (13). Whatever the truth about poor Willie’s wife it is certain she should be included in books on freaks, such as the classic by Lesley Fielder (14).

Of Burns’ farm animals his Auld Mare, Maggie “(The Farmer’s New Year Morning Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie)” suffered severe lordosis, the result of old age:

“Tho thous’s howe-backit1 now, knaggie2.
1hollow backed; 2knobbly

The effect of ageing on the musculoskeletal system, as well as on other body parts and functions, were well known to the bard (15). In his ballad “John Barleycorn” he astutely recognises flexion contraction of joints, which especially occur in the knees in the aged:

“The sober Autumn enter’d mild,
When he grew wan and pale,
His bending joints and drooping head
Show’d he began to frail”

OBSERVATIONS ON PAIN

Pain Burns associates with growing old, presumably due to osteoarthritis. In his “Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn” (Jame Cunningham 14th Earl of Glencairn (1749-1791) he refers to

“a Bard,
Laden with years and meikle1 pain”

(‘much)
The pain of osteoarthritis is often worse at night and might conceivably be what the bard had in mind in “The Winter of Life”. “O, Age has weary days
And nights o sleepless pain!”

Most references to pain, however, relate to his love affairs, as in “Sylvander to Clarinda”.

“Who blames what frantic Pain must do?”

Clarinda was Agnes Craig McLehose (1759-1841), the estranged wife of a Glasgow lawyer. Burns met her in the winter of 1787 when he visited Edinburgh. They conducted a sentimental torrid courtship by letter using classical noms de plume. Fellows and Members of the College will be interested that Mrs. McLehose was a pensioner of the Faculty for some years after the death of her father Andrew Craig (?-1782), a surgeon (16a), who was elected to the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons as it was then known in 1745 (16b). The McLehoses changed their name to Hozier, and one of their descendants, Clementine Hozier, became the wife of Sir Winston Churchill (17).

Burns, however, knew not only pain in his joints in his terminal illness but also toothache, which he addressed as the “hell o’ a diseases”. Shortly after enduring a particularly severe bout he wrote to William Creech (1745-1815), his bookseller in Edinburgh, on 30th May 1795 (18).

“I had intended to have troubled you with a long letter, but at present the delightful sensations of an omnipotent tooth-ach so engross my inner man, as to put it out of my power even to write nonsence”. Later in the letter he describes the sensations of toothache as if:

“Fifty troops of infernal spirits are riding post from ear to ear along my jaw bones...”

In the poem Burns comments on the people’s attitudes to toothache and other illnesses.

“When fevers burn, or ague freezes,
Rheumatics gnaw, or colic squeezes
Our neebors sympathise to ease us, Wi pitting moan;
But thee! -thou hell o a’ diseases
They mock our groan!”

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Certainly toothache is one of the diseases which frequently amused audiences in music theatres in byegone times. Likewise, deafness, acute lumbar pain, and acute gouty arthritis, but never blindness, heart disease, or cancer. It has always seemed strange to me that certain illnesses should be the source of amusement, and as a consequence tend to be neglected. Thus, there is no Arthritis Society in the Western World which does not find it difficult to raise money for research. This in contrast to other diseases, especially those which are potentially fatal, such as heart disease and cancer. Amongst the sundry laws the Lord gave Moses for the children of Israel (19) was,

“Thou shalt not curse the deaf,
Nor put a stumbling block before the blind”.

The musculo-skeletal system is not represented in the human psyche, although one’s knees may knock with fear, as the poet records “On Meeting with Lord Daer” (Basil William Douglas-Hamilton (1763-1794)):

“My knees on ane anither knoited
As faltering I gaed hen”

There is no such thing as psychogenic rheumatism. One’s heart “may leap up” on beholding “a rainbow in the sky”, according to William Wordsworth (1770-1850), but not one’s semilunar cartilages!

One might jalous* that Burns was describing the so-called fibromyalgia syndrome in his poem to Bonnie Jean (Jean McMurdo (1777-1839)).

*Suspect

“And ay she sighs wi care and pain, Yet wist what her ail might be, On what wad make her wee again”

MEDICAL BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Burns’ knowledge of the Bible was extensive and he may have had in mind David’s complaint of his illness (20).

“Have no mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak; O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long?

“I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all my enemies. Depart from me, all ye workers, of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.”

Evidence of Burns’ extensive knowledge of the Bible is further testified by his three graces (“Burns Grace at Kirkcudbright” - The-so-called “Selkirk Grace”, “Grace after Meat” and “Grace before and after Meat”), his two paraphrases of the first and nineteenth psalms (“Paraphrase of the First Psalm” and “The Nineteenth Psalm Versified”), his own renderings of biblical quotations for two of his poems (“Address to the Unco Guid: or the rigidly Righteous” (21), and Scotch Drink (22), the subject of a comic and somewhat vulgar poem (“The Patriach” (23), and the title of a poem (“A Woe is me, my Mother dear” (24) (Table 1). In his “Holy Willie’s Prayer” (Probably the finest satire of all time) based on William Fisher (1737-1809), and auld licht elder of Mauchline parish, Burns’ knowledge of the Bible is most evident. As Thomas Crawford (25) has pointed out Burns demonstrates his genius by creative use of Biblical language to highlight Willie’s hypocrisy.

Table 1: Parallels in Burns’ Poems and the Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Address to the Unco Guid: or the rigidly righteous</th>
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| “My son, these maxims make a rule
An lump them ay the gither:
The Rigid Righteous is a fool,
The Rigid Wise anither:
The cleanest corn that e’er was dight
May hae some pyles o caff in;
So ne’er a fellow-creative slight
For random fits o daffin.” |

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<th>Scotch Drink</th>
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| “Gie him strong drink until he wink,
That’s sinking in despair;
An liquor guid to fire his bluid,
That’s prest wi grief and care:
There let him bowse and deep carouse,
Wi bumpers flowin o’er.” |
Till he forgets his loves or debts, 
An minds his griefs no more”.

Ah, woe is me, my mother dear

Biblical Reference
All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness
Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? (21)

Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more (22).

Woe is me, my mother, that thou has born me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! (24)

For Biblical sources in “Holy Willie’s Prayers” see reference no. 25.

Glossary: 1 dight = cleaned, 2 pyles = ears of corn, 3 caff = chaff, 4 daffin = flirting, 5 bowse = booze.

* Sir Robert Christison (1797-1882) was Professor of Medical Jurisprudence (1822-1832) and then subsequently Professor of Materia Medica (1832-1877) in Edinburgh and is best known for his “Treatment on Poisons” published in 1829, which was the first text of its kind to be written in English, and which established toxicology as a special branch of Medical Jurisprudence (9).

RHEUMATOID DISEASE
The possibility of ocular inflammation as a complication of a rheumatic disease, such as in the ode “Sacred to the Memory of Mrs. Oswald of Auchencruive” requires a great leap of imagination.

“Note that eye, ’tis rheum o’ erflows”.
Auchencruive it should be noted is from Gaelic Achadh na craoibhe, the field of the tree. It is to be remembered that Gaelic was still probably spoken in Ayrshire and Galloway in the eighteenth century (26).

Like William Shakespeare (27) Burns makes no reference to an illness which might be interpreted as rheumatoid arthritis. This is surprising in view of the very easily recognised deformities. Prior to 1800 when Landrè-Beauvais (28) in Paris first described the disease, there was no clear account of this common form of arthritis, although possible descriptions are present in the Indian text, “The Caraka Samhita” of the first century AD (29), in Roman and Greek (30) and in English medical writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (31, 32). Indeed, it was only in the nineteenth century that French and English Physicians described and illustrated the classical features of the disease we know today (33, 34). The disease was only named by Sir Alfred Baring Garrod, the “Father of Rheumatology” in 1859(8). Juvenile rheumatoid arthritis was also only first clearly described at the end of the nineteenth century (35). Only one historical person has been described prior to 1800 whose illness is reasonably consistent with rheumatoid arthritis (36), and only two possible examples of the disease have been illustrated in paintings prior to Landrè-Beauvais’ description (37-38). Interestingly there is a painting of the fifteenth century illustrating temporal arteritis (39).

Perhaps of greater interest to Glasgow University graduates is the absence of any example of the disease in William Hunter’s eighteenth century Pathology Collection in the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow (40) despite the fact that examples of rare diseases, such as osteitis fibrosa cystica, are present (41). It is therefore not surprising that Burns made no mention of rheumatoid arthritis, which if it existed may have been in a mild form (42). Recent American archaeological studies (43) have suggested that rheumatoid arthritis may be, like syphilis, another New world Disease (44), which appeared in Europe in the latter half of the eighteenth century.
Robert Burns probably wrote the best satire on iatrogenic illness, "Death and Doctor Hornbook”. The prototype was a schoolmaster John Wilson (c1751-1839). A hornbook was a nickname for schoolmasters, and referred to a child’s teaching aid used in schools. As a rheumatologist I am surprised that there is no reference to the willowbark, and also relieved to find no reference to adverse reactions to antirheumatic remedies! The patient who died of "want of blood" could not, as gastroenterologists might suggest (!), have bled due to salicylates, since these were not introduced until 1786 by Thomas J. Maclagan (1838-1903) of Dundee (45).

**BURNS’ FINAL ILLNESS & DEATH**

It has been suggested that the poet's death might have been accelerated by the advice for seabathing and the course of mercury prescribed by his physician Dr. William Maxwell (1760-1834) (46). Sea bathing even in summer in the Solway certainly would have been traumatic to a patient as ill as Burns was at the time. A sample of Burns’ hair was analysed by neutron activation analysis by Professor Lenihan and his colleagues: although the mercury contamination was twice as high as the normal content the amount was much less than found in dentists or laboratory workers (47). I am sure that Doctor Maxwell could have justified his recommendations. Physicians of times past, like those of today, try to bring order into experience. They do so by creating explanatory theories. Naturally any given period regards its theories as sound, while those of its predecessors as wrong or even absurd. An example would be blood-letting (48), although still in current use by haemotologists for conditions such as polycythemia rubra vera, and hemochromatosis. At the present time, at least in North America, it is fashionable to draw up treatment guidelines for various diseases. There has been concern regarding compliance with such guidelines (49), but my fear is that once such guidelines are published they will prove mantras difficult to change. Perhaps if such had been available at the time of Robert Burns’ terminal illness we might still be recommending seabathing for fever, and prescribing mercury to arthritis sufferers.

W. Watson Buchanan FRCP (Glasgow) Hamilton, Ontario.

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16. Duncan, A. Memorials of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. 1599-1850 Glasgow James MacLehose and Sons (a) p121 and (b) no 236 of the Roll of Members p255, 1896.


20. Psalm 6, 2-3, 6-8.


It was most appropriate that in Bicentenary year 1996 a new Burns Club in Alloway, birthplace of Robert Burns was instituted. Further interest is added when the Club concerned is Alloway Primary School. The launch took place on Friday 13 December 1996. Pictured above in front of the large mural are from left to right:- Michael Harratt, Stephen Bruce, Dr. Tom Morrall (President Alloway Burns Club), Sandy Hose (Deputy Head Teacher), Amanda Currie (First President Alloway Primary School Burns Club), Allan Goudie (Vice President), Mrs. Ann Wells (Head Teacher), Mrs. Margaret Morrall (Secretary Alloway Burns Club), Jonathan McPherson and Catherine Wilson.

During Bicentenary year the members of Grange Academy Burns Club, Kilmarnock took part in a variety of functions throughout Ayrshire. Pictured on the left with teacher, Jim Gibson are Laura Johnstone (President) and Jocelyn Nelson (Senior Vice-President).
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over the sea to skye

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Braw Braw Lads
Going Home
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Jock O'Hazledah
Sally Gardens
The Broom Of The Cowdenknows
Scots Wha Hae

over the sea to skye
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Skye Boat Song
The Road And The Miles To Dundee
My Mountain Home
Amazing Grace
My Love Is Like The Red, Red Rose (Instrumental)
Lewis Bridal Song (Mairi's Wedding)
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Robert Burns was the Scottish poet and humanitarian who became Scotland’s National Bard. His works achieved international acclaim in his lifetime and for more than 200 years have influenced people the world over. Regrettably, for much of that time a scurrilous perception of Burns as a drunkard, a debtor and a womaniser has persisted in Scotland; biographers and others have argued for its truth or falsity. In a recent edition of a Scottish Sunday paper a respected biographer was quoted as having said of Burns, ‘In 1792, in Dumfries, one of his friends was charged with being drunk and disorderly and laying hands on a servant girl. The girl testified there was another man with her assailant, but she didn’t recognise him. It was Burns’. This quotation is charged with innuendo: as the girl didn’t recognise the second man what evidence could the biographer possibly have to support such a damaging assertion? The general question that needs to be answered is: where did the scurrilous perception of Burns’s character come from and why has it persisted? Could it, I look back and wonder, have been a character assassination instituted by a British Government irritated by his conduct and worried about the impact his writing had been having on the people of Scotland. And about the possible martyrdom effect they might have after his impending death. Burns, as others before him, demonstrated that the pen is mightier than the sword. In 1795 a paranoid Government tightened the sedition laws in Scotland and Burns by his conduct, as we shall see, might have contributed to the need for this. Fanciful and far fetched? Let’s look at some of the evidence.

First, it has to be said that mankind owes Burns a great debt and we Scots are his greatest debtors. Before Burns, at the time of the Act of Union, Scotland’s file had been erased from the world’s memory and consigned to the archives. In the 18th century world, Scotland had lost her identity. The Scottish literati wrote in standard English and were accepted throughout the world as British. This gave little or no credit to Scotland and apart from the occasional Stuart inspired rebellion, which put Scot against Scot, all that remained was a space in the directory of nations. Then entered Burns the poet, writing poems and songs in the Scottish dialect. In a very short time he became champion of the common five-eights and achieved such stature in the world that our file was recalled from the archives. But that recall was not achieved by poetry and song alone, it was the philosophy contained in the poetry and songs that caught the world’s attention. It was achieved by Burns the humanitarian with his views on politics and human rights, including the rights of women, liberty and freedom, coupled with concerns for the environment. He communicated his views with great oratory eloquence as he travelled Scotland. In Edinburgh, as elsewhere, his masonic connection and a noble patron allowed him direct contact with men and women of influence. His audiences of academics, the legal profession, landed gentry and others were spellbound, and on occasions shocked, as he expounded on his chosen subjects. His presence was requested at the tables of the top echelons of society. He radiated a commanding presence and was the main attraction wherever he went. Scotland had not before seen the like of this man; he had to be heard and even the world sat up and took notice. His poetry, which at first had expressed his observations on nature and day-to-day living, had gradually became the means to publish his humanitarian views and attack the corruption, hypocrisy and privilege associated with the establishment and let there be no misunderstanding here – the establishment quickly recognised that he was rocking its boat.
While some of his work contains strong political overtones Burns had no known political party association, although he did assist in an election and wrote ballads for his friend who was the Whig candidate. Most damaging, however, was the recurring theme of liberty in so much of his earlier work. In an age when liberty was an unacceptable concept in Britain he may have seemed to have been taunting the Government. On at least one occasion there was a suggestion from friends that he stand for Parliament. He turned down the suggestion and for a time appeared intent on pursuing a literary career. Burns’s philosophy on life came from the heart, was tempered by his upbringing and refined by an independent mind. His humanitarian values are well known and shine through his work. Perhaps less well known are his environmental concerns. He dared to attack and incur the wrath of the mighty Duke of Queensberry who had destroyed woods at Drumlanrig and Neidpath to enrich his daughter, the Countess of Yarmouth. In the final lines of his poem deploring the former of those acts of vandalism, Burns wrote:

*The worm that gnawed my bonny trees,
That reptile wears a ducal crown!*

A mild attack by the standards of today, but not so by those of the 18th century. Burns had started along a route to where he would encounter powerful enemies. On another occasion, in his poem *The Humble Petition of Bruar Water,* after accepting hospitality from the Duke of Atholl he embarrassed his host by beseeching him to plant trees and shrubs around the Falls of Bruar to improve the scenic quality of the area. The nobility, in general, were irritated by Burns’s published meddling in their affairs. Here was a man who didn’t know his place and had the temerity to criticise the way they lived and behaved. Burns had written of them in derogatory terms:

*Ye see yon birkie ca’d a lord,
Wha struts, an’ stares, an’ a’ that!
Tho’ hundreds worship at his word,
He’s but a cuif for a’ that…*

Although the attacks were but minor irritations compared with what was to follow, Burns it could almost be construed, was looking for trouble. He had taken to carrying a diamond tipped stylus and had a bad habit of engraving lines on window panes, on occasions at inns where he stayed. These were sometimes contentious: his lines on a pane in Stirling praising the House of Stuart and condemning the House of Hanover were to land him in trouble and to delay his commission in the Scottish Excise Service, a post he had been trying to obtain for sometime. It was only through the patronage of a commissioner of the Board of Excise, met while a guest of the Duke of Atholl, that he was finally to gain a commission.

In the wake of the French Revolution the British Government was worried. Liberty and the right of both men and women were being advocated throughout Britain by their respective supporters and some agitators had been arrested in English cities. Into this arena had stepped Burns with his poem, *The Rights of Woman.* The opening stanza might give a clue to the furore he created in the all male Political Establishment:

*While Europe’s eye is fixed 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,
Amid this mighty fuss, just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.*

Burns had supported the Revolution; the last line of his poem carries the slogan of the revolutionaries, but the full extent of that support was only to be revealed after his death with the publication of another poem, *The Tree of Liberty.* Had it been published during his lifetime, because of the political discontent in Scotland, it could have been considered seditious by seeming to encourage the Scots to again seek liberty. The last stanza reads:
Syne let us pray auld England may
Sure plant this far-famed tree, man;
An’ blythe we’ll sing, an’ hail the day
That give us liberty, man.

The establishment having previously thought that Burns could be gagged, were he in a Government service post, had agreed to the excise commission he wanted. At the time his loyalty was placed in doubt he was working as an excise officer in Dumfries, with the carrot of promotion to a supervisory role at a higher salary if he were efficient and observed his oaths of loyalty, but by his conduct and utterances he was increasingly making enemies. On one occasion, by disregarding excise rules and assisting in the election campaign of a parliamentary candidate. On another, during an unruly protest by the audience in the theatre in Dumfries, he remained seated and wore his hat during the playing of the national anthem. As he had become a prominent figure, incidents such as those, and others, had not gone unnoticed and were feeding the irritation of the establishment. He must have known the risks when he gave his poem, *The Rights of Woman*, to an actress to speak the lines and sent a copy to an Edinburgh radical newspaper editor with a letter encouraging him to expose the corruption in politics. When his apparent disloyalty was reported he was subjected to an excise investigation to establish whether charges could be laid against him. With assistance from his patron he was able to extricate himself from the affair, but his conduct was not wholly overlooked by the commissioners. He was given a reprimand and his career prospects were probably set back, it was a close run thing.

He continued in the limelight and was later to propose a toast that gave grave offence to a military officer and almost resulted in a duel: a matter that had to be smoothed over. There was also suspicion in political circles that he was attacking the Government through articles and poems appearing in various newspapers. Although these were attributed to others, many thought they could see Burns’s distinctive style and political opinions in the articles and poems. The Government could not have been unaware of this and about this time decided to strengthen the law on sedition. Burns countered by writing his ballad, *The Dean of the Faculty*, supporting the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates who had spoken out against the new bills going through Parliament. This added to the irritation felt against Burns in legal and political circles. The period of decline in health that was to end with his death had already begun.

Burns had been difficult: he had caused a series of problems for the establishment and was considered a clever and dangerous man. He had for some time walked a tightrope: being restrained only by advisors from publishing the *Tree of Liberty* and *Love and Liberty*, both of which had the forbidden theme. The Government had not forgotten the embarrassment, a few years earlier, of the disastrous North American misadventure. The military withdrawal down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico was still fresh in the public’s mind. Burns had supported the colonists, written a political ballad on the war and ‘put the boot in’ by writing lines in praise of General George Washington on his birthday, again a poem with the theme of liberty. Coupled with his support for the French revolutionaries, this was too much for the Government. Burns’s high profile at home and on the international scene meant he would not have been as easy to discipline as someone unknown to the public. In any event, the discipline procedure was the responsibility of the Board of Excise which in the past had not done very much about his conduct; but a solution to the Burns problem had to be found. We can look back, with a 20th century view, at what that solution would be. Armed with knowledge of defamatory techniques used in public life in our time, we should be able to recognise the one used to damage Burns’s character. It should also be clear from the timing that it was orchestrated when he was in an advanced state of ill health and unable to properly defend himself.

In this context it’s not difficult to envisage that had MI5 existed in Burns’s time his home would have been expertly broken into and his manuscripts removed. The method in his time was
equally crude and the process that we can recognise as a **dirty-tricks campaign** was started. We know from the record that he was an efficient excise officer and as such would have had natural enemies in the community willing to repeat any defamation. Let’s start by looking at the facts on which the defamation is founded. We know that he had one extra-marital affair, was in ill health, was suffering a cashflow problem and was drinking — although ostensibly for medicinal purposes. An all too familiar twentieth century scenario. Knowing of his situation the establishment’s attack was launched using the standard defamation technique: that is to grossly exaggerate some known fact or event to give the illusion of a character weakness. By ensuring that the scurrilous attack contains a grain of truth it is made difficult to refute. In Burns case it was to label him as a drunkard, debtor and womaniser and by so doing attempt to turn the staunchly Presbyterian people of Scotland against him — and initially the threefold defamation appeared to achieve a measure of success. In the longer term it didn’t work well, as Burns had in his lifetime achieved international fame and respect which continued to grow after his death. However, as we know, dirt sticks and this could be the reason why the vilifying of Burns was later to be repeated by an Edinburgh newspaper and a Scottish magazine. During the past two centuries many writers on Burns kept the pot simmering by apparently accepting the defamation at face value; perhaps in this there was an element of follow my leader. First hand evidence, however, makes this point academic. Let’s look more closely at the three charges and the evidence for his defence:

**A Drunkard** — In a letter to his former tutor Burns had written: ‘...especially in tavern matters, I am a strict economist; not, indeed, for the sake of the money; but one of the principal parts of my composition is a kind of pride of stomach.’ In at least one other letter he commented that his stomach would not allow him to drink much as it made him ill and caused him to vomit. Gilbert Burns, also confirmed in a letter that his brother drank very little. He took a convivial glass and was in the tavern (the community meeting place) primarily for company and conversation (an ideal way to research material for his writing). Gilbert does acknowledge that towards the end Robert drank a bit more than normal, perhaps owing to the physical pain and mental anguish that he suffered (this was the medicinal aspect), but Gilbert insists that Robert was never a drunkard. The finding on this charge has to be **‘not guilty’**.

**A Debtor** — Burns would normally have had bills awaiting payment, but had always paid his way in the community. As a burgess of Dumfries he had high social standing. His commission as an excise officer placed him on the same level as the army officers stationed in the area and he was, at that time of his life, an officer and a gentleman. His excise renumeration of £70 per annum plus a percentage of any evaded excise duty he recovered was paid to him only eight times a year and not surprisingly he would have had accounts with domestic suppliers. Those accounts being settled at each renumeration period. Apart, therefore, from eight occasions in the year he would have had what was an ongoing and normal level of credit/indebtedness for a person of his station. His cashflow problem arose in the period when he was compelled to live on half pay, his excise sick pay, and was made public by an impatient and worried tradesman, himself in debt, taking out a summons for repayment. At the time of his death Burns’s total assets amounted to more than £200, the equivalent today of more than £50,000. The finding on this charge has to be **‘not guilty’**.

**A Womaniser** — As far as this charge goes, Burns was only too aware of the folly of the part of his life to which it refers, but semantically he never qualified for that label as the evidence suggests that before marriage his non-platonic relationships with the opposite sex, apart from possibly Jenny Clow, were genuinely love affairs. That some gave rise to illegitimate births was a consequence of the absence in the 18th century of what we today would call birth control methods. Of his extra-marital affair with Anna Park, there is no evidence available on which to base a judgement. The Child Support Agency, had it existed at that time, would have found it extremely difficult to make a better assessment than Burns, as it’s recorded that he acknowledged the illegitimate children he had fathered and ensured they were cared for and maintained. This charge, using that unique Scots Law verdict, would probably be **‘not proven’**.
Burns’s words from the memorandum to his poem, Address To The Unco Guid, although not evidence, are interesting and perhaps appropriate here. He wrote: ‘Let any one of the strictest character for regularity of conduct amongst us examine impartially how many vices he has never been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance, but from want of opportunity, or some accidental circumstances intervening; how many of the weaknesses of mankind has he escaped, because he was out of the line of such temptations; and how much he is indebted to the world’s good opinion, because the world does not know all; - I say, any man who can thus think will scan the failings, nay the faults and crimes, of mankind around him with a brother’s eye’. The penultimate stanza of the poem reads:

Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Though they may gang a kennin’ wrang.
To step aside is human.
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving Why they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far, perhaps, they rue it.

Even before the day of his funeral it was clear the dirty-tricks campaign had not been wholly successful as many of those who had turned against him were suffering remorse. It was a public funeral and the streets of Dumfries were lined with citizens and soldiers. Ironically, the commanding officer of the English regiment detailed to fire a volley across the grave was a man who had made no secret of his dislike for Burns, had refused to be introduced to him and who, along with another officer, still nursed offence at an infamous toast Burns had proposed. His outspoken and repeated condemnation of Burns must have played a part in defaming him. The colonel, who was there on duty and for no other reason, must have found it galling to discharge his duty for someone he so disliked. He was a politically motivated man who 16 years later was to become Prime Minister of Britain, his name - Lord Liverpool. To help counter the dirty-tricks campaign, Burns’s excise supervisor and other colleagues would later mount a robust defence of his character.

Robert Burns’s legacy to Scotland and the world is superb poetry and other works containing his wonderful philosophy, written in an age when it was unmentionable to hold and dangerous to speak out with such views. Long before Martin Luther King, Burns had a dream; during the past 200 years that dream – a vision of world peace based on a brotherhood of man has been translated into every notable language. In general, the world has seen only his public life and admired his independent mind and the philosophy it engendered. His range was truly incredible, he wrote on the rights of women at a time when women had virtually no rights. His views against what we now call racism, so often on hold or in limbo in the past, are gaining an unstoppable momentum as we approach the 21st century. His environmental concerns are said to have influenced John Muir, the Scot from Dunbar hardly known in his own country, who became America’s greatest environmentalist: the man whose ideas led to the creation of the great U.S. National Parks. He also wrote what has been described as the world’s greatest and most enduring love song, Ae Fond Kiss, which after more than 200 years is still considered an exquisite piece of work. His version of Auld Lang Syne is the natural finale to social evenings the world over. Burns has been described as a man ahead of his time and there can be no doubt that he was.

It therefore seems appropriate in this bicentennial year that we Scots should finally lay to rest some of the myths surrounding the man and concentrate on his genius.
TWA HUNDRED YEARS
AND AWA’

‘Twas in that place o’ Costa Mesa,
Where Golf is King and each man’s Lord and Master.
Some lads an evening there did gather,
To honour Scotland’s best and blether.

Now lest ye think I am referrin’,
To haggis, usquebae, an’ kipper’d herrin’,
Or to single malts they were inclined,
Or Cutty Sarks ran in their mind.

I canna say that’s true or no, or this they kent,
But this I’ll wager was their true intent,
To sing and praise that lad frae Ayrshire,
Whose works ay fill us a’ wi’ pride sir!

‘Twas Hugh, Norm & Tom,
Wi’ Les and Jo, and Ben & Glen,
An’ Milt who left last year ye’ ken,
An ta’en his social, friendly, honest heart,
That’s made it ay sae hard tae part.

Nae doubt he’s gathered in that bonie place,
Wi’ Rab the Rhymer tae say Grace,
Wi’ a’ the lads who’ve gone before,
To sing a song to the lasses O’
An’ tae a bottle and bonie Jo.

‘Twas from Auld Ayr in Eighteen One,
The Argyll Militia wi’ its wee band,
To his hame in Alloway did go,
To honour and respect his memory so,
Wi’ songs and tunes on his birthday o’.

The first Burns Club in that same year,
In Clydeside’s Greenock did appear.
And in the next at Alloway, wi’ amber dew,
Appeared Chief Haggis loyal and true.
In eighteen Five it was Paisley’s honour,
To spean the Daughter Club of Greenock’s Mother.

Is it no’ amazin’, just and fair,
That for two hundred years and mair,
There’s lads and lasses just like us
Have met tae share his love and trust,
Wi’ fellowship and friendly hand,
In ha’s and hames throughout the land,

Noo some hae served as presidents,
An’ mony others a hand hae lent,
Tae do their share in time o’ need.
An some are grand as speakers a’
And some wad sing, dance, pipe and blaw,

Sae here’s tae you oor members leal,
Ranting cocks, carls and chieft,
Who gather here each passing year,
From a’ the airts for songs and clatter,
Pipes and poems and haggis meals.

Now Hugh from Balloch, he’s the lad,
The very dab at speeches extemporare.
And Glen’s our factotum extraordinaire.
Young Gillen’s dry wit is fresh as air.

And we hae Ben with Janet bonie,
Who Lads and Lasses Toast sae rarely.
Frae Alva’s Hills comes Prophet Jimmy,
To spread the word throughout the country.

Oor Charlie’s a singer an’ dancer braw,
An’ aye the gentleman and scholar.
Lawyer Norm’s a lively Tam o’ Shanter,
And tenor basso profundo.

Sae here’s tae these twa hundred years,
HIS IMMORTAL MEMORY have nae fears,
Will endure for the sake of AULD LANG SYNE,
And in a thousand years his STAR will shine.

THE IMMORTAL MEMORY
of
ROBERT BURNS
by
David Shankland, M.B.E.

Given at the West Sound Burns Supper, held in the Hospitality Inn, Glasgow on 13 January 1996.

"Time, like and ever rolling stream
Bears all its sons away
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day"

These lines from a favourite hymn serve to remind us how temporary, how transitory, is our earthly being before, all too soon, we are whisked away to join the withered leaves of time. Once in every thousand years or so, however, there flickers into flame a light that does not dim or die, is not snuffed out, but burns brightly, ever more brightly, until it fills the whole world with the brilliance of its light. Such a light was and is the sheer genius of Robert Burns, Scotland's National Bard, whose natal day we are celebrating here in Glasgow tonight.

I have no need to tell you, however, friends, that we are not alone in our celebrations for at this time, and especially this year, the "Bard's Birthday" will be commemorated by a variety of people in a variety of ways.

Some will pay their tribute in an eloquent and elegant address doing scholarly justice to his many merits. Some will seek to bring him back to life for the moment so that he can comment on the world of 1996 – its politics, its permissiveness and its pathetic materialism. Some will be content to eulogise, some to analyse and laughingly some to moralise.

Saddest of all, there will be those who will use the occasion for their own superficial and selfish ends – the message will be lost, drowned in the whisky or by the ribald laughter of the revellers. Ladies and Gentlemen, when one considers the tremendous torrent of words that are written and spoken about the Bard at this time, is it not a tribute to his durability, his versatility, his staying power, that when the last word has been spoken, the last song sung and the last toast drunk, he emerges unscathed, his crown untarnished, his star shining more brightly than ever before?

Tonight, in the presence of this distinguished company, I should like to pay my own modest tribute but rather than add materially to that mass of verbiage I have alluded to, rather would I draw upon it and try to extract from it the essential elements, the essence if you like, of the poet's genius. How does one define "genius" however? In a sense, it is indefinable, like the gem it has so many facets. All I can hope to do, therefore, is to pinpoint or pick out one or two constituents of what is a complex chemistry.

Let me begin therefore by asking a fundamental question:- What kind of a man was Robert Burns? Obviously, intellectually he was alert and intelligent. He was well-informed on what was going on in the world and was capable of hammering out abstract ideas on the intellectual anvil of
debate. We are also aware that he was a master of words and these tools he used with devastating
effect to immortalise a humble mouse and to deify a daisy.

The thing that sets him apart in my view - and an Immortal Memory is a subjective opinion -
was his tremendous emotional intensity, his sensitivity to the world about him. Here was a man of
passion, a gentleman of compassion, a sensitive spirit able to feel the faintest flutterings of the
human heart. These then I submit were the seeds of his genius and planted as they were by sheer
chance in the barren soil of 18th century Ayrshire, they grew and flourished into the full flowering
of his Muse. Our presence here in such large numbers tonight would suggest to me that the fragrance
of that flower is still with us 200 years further on.

Like all men, like you and I, the poet felt the need to express himself and the only suitable
vehicle for the imprisoned splendour of his mind could but be those poems and songs which
poured forth in such profusion.

His pen a brush, each poem or song a picture painted in vivid colours, he spans the whole
spectrum of human experience; he runs the whole gamut of our emotions. He makes us proud and
patriotic; he makes us ashamed of man’s inhumanity to man; he shows us the beauties of nature;
he opens our eyes to the pathos of the human situation. Listen to these lines:-

"Still thou art blest compar’d wi’ me!
The present only toucheth thee;
But och! I backward cast my e’e
On prospects drear;
An forward tho’ I canna see
I guess an’ fear"

But Ladies and Gentlemen, when the poet’s words are added to the old tunes he picked up
from round about, he achieves a new stature. Here is a marriage of Beauty and Perfection. Here,
Burns is the master of our soul. Music you see expresses our innermost feelings, more eloquently
than any other medium. Burns’ music does that and more; little wonder then that a Burns’ evening
when properly orchestrated, is the perfect type of perfect pleasure. He writes the script, he chooses
the music.

Two other aspects of Burns’ genius I must mention before I sit down. The first of these is his
relevance for today. Why does this great physician of the heart, still sit eternally at the bedside of
our mind, although he has been dead for exactly 200 years?! Why are we here tonight?

In my opinion, the Bard is relevant for today not only for his contribution to our culture but
also because of his belief in the Brotherhood of Man. Now in matters material, the world is much
advanced from that which the poet inhabited. Burns lived in a rural rustic agrarian society, whereas
our world is one of automation, automobiles and the hydrogen bomb. Ironically, human nature
hasn’t altered since Burns’ day. We are still the same old type of people with the same faults and
failings, the same vices and virtues.

Because of this, there are still wars and rumours of wars. The only difference is that man has
now the capacity to destroy the whole world. In our time as in Burns’ time, there is still great
inequality - one half of the world has reached out for the moon while the other half reaches out in
vain for a crust of bread. There is still hatred, hypocrisy, bigotry and bloody-mindedness. For all
these reasons, there has never been a greater need for a belief in the brotherhood of man. It acts as
a beacon to lighten our darkness.

The second point I should like to comment on is Burns’ universal appeal. It is not only we
Scots who celebrate his birthday every January, but people of every class and creed, people of
every hue and colour, people of every political persuasion. Why is this?

First of all, I think the Bard speaks in a language we can all understand. Part of his genius lies
in his ability to distil great thoughts into simple stanzas - we don’t need to be a genius to get the message. Likewise, we can all identify with Burns the man. He is in fact a paradox. He is a Saint because he was a “sinner” - he is a success because he was a “failure” - he is internationally famed because he was a patriot. In summary, he is “immortal” because he was so very mortal. Burns had his faults but who are we to judge? It is difficult to carry out a full cup without spilling some.

At the beginning of this address, I related or compared Burns’ genius to the gem. As we know by the peculiar nature of its constitution, the gem will defy the ravages of time. I would respectfully submit that the poet’s genius will be equally durable.

In a minute, I am going to ask you Ladies and Gentleman, to drink the traditional toast with me but may I end with a personal postscript - a few years ago seeking much needed inspiration for a Burns address, I found myself walking up the steps of St Michael’s Church in Dumfries to stand before the Mausoleum. As I stood there, the sun came out bathing the dome of the Mausoleum in sparkling sunshine. This reminded me of a fragment of poetry I got some years ago from an old lady in Lochmaben and which relates to the poet’s last days.

As he lay dying in his home in Burns Street, he was attended by a young neighbour, Jessie Lewars, since his wife was close to childbirth. As Jessie entered the room, she noticed that the sun was shining directly on his fevered brow. As she tip-toed over to pull the blind, the poet held up a weak and protesting hand and uttered these perhaps his last poetic words -

“It was kindly meant but let it be,
Not long those bonnie blinks I’ll see;
For soon the sun will set for me,
On night that hath no morrow”

For once the poet was wrong. Ladies and Gentlemen, for soon a great light was soon to shine throughout the world carrying with it a message of hope, that some day man will learn to live in peace with man.

In conclusion, therefore, I cannot do better than remind you of these lines:-

“Then let us pray,
That come it may;
As come it will for a’ that,
That sense and worth
Throughout the Earth,
Shall bear the Gree
And a’ that
For a’ that
And a’ that
It’s coming yet for a’ that
That Man to Man the world o’er
Shall brithers be for a’ that”

---

**BURNS AND HIS WOMEN!**

By

Naiomi M. Forsyth (16)

Irvine Royal Academy

It could be argued that the female of our species is regarded by society as of less value than her male counterpart. Many women claim that sexist attitudes are not only displayed verbally and physically, but also through literature. To find out if this is true, I decided to study the work of one of the world’s most famous alleged chauvinists:- Robert Burns.

As I am looking at Robert Burns’s attitude towards women, I specifically chose to study poems either dedicated to, or written about women:
Generally beauty and overall appearance are two things of great importance to women. They feel that unless they are physically attractive, men will not take an interest in them. Burns’s opinion on Women in this way, is shown in many of his poems:

In “Last May A Braw Wooer”, Burns takes on a persona. He speaks as if he were the woman in the poem; which immediately brings us closer to the situation being written about. Quotations such as:

“He spak o’ the darts in my bonnie black e’en”
and
“Vowed for my love he was diein.”,

give me an impression that Burns finds something sparkling, special, and even inspirational about beautiful looking women. For example:

“The darts” (glimmers of light) in her eyes.

Here, Burns gives the impression that beautiful women are perfect, as light, is usually associated with a sort of religious theme, which almost implies perfection.

In stanzas two and four of “Last May A Braw Wooer”, Burns compares two types of women; a good looking woman and an ugly, dirty type of woman. The image of a dirty woman is created through words like:

“Deil”, “Black”, and “Jad”.

The words “Black”, “Deil”, and “Jad” suggest darkness, ugliness, and a dull atmosphere. In stanza four, the Wooer has left a beautiful woman and Burns shows the speakers distress at this by his repetition of:

“Guess you how, the jad! I could bear her.”

Here Burns suggests that the woman in the poem, cannot understand why a man would leave a beautiful woman to go to join an ugly, dirty, and what seems, unwanted woman. Through this, I get the impression that the speaker feels that no man would go near an unattractive woman; and that a woman’s looks matter more than her mind.

One area which was never addressed by many people of Burns’s generation, was the intelligence of a woman. Many men felt that all a woman needed to know, was how to be a mother and to do household chores. Did Robert Burns share this view?

Through his poetry, there are mixed views being expressed, as in “Tho Women’s Minds”, Burns says that women’s minds are like “winter winds” - constantly changing, indecisive, and very strong; which creates a negative image of male attitudes. But, from “But there is ane aboon the lave has wit, intelligence an a’ that.”, a positive image is given as it suggests that Burns finds pleasing and satisfying to discover an attractive woman’s intelligence. I detect a touch of surprise in this quotation - as if Burns did not expect an intelligent woman to be pretty. The implication of this is that Burns had been brainwashed into believing that all pretty women are unintelligent; and was amazed when he discovered the truth for himself.

Regardless of the fact that Burns held this attitude, it seems that he also portrayed women as devious, crafty beings, in many different ways. For example,

“A weel-stockit mailin, himself for the laird,
And marriage aff-hand were his proffers:
I never loot on that I kenn’d it, or car’d”

implies that the woman in the poem acts as if she does not care or know about the security offered to her by her lover; she is pretending that she is genuinely attracted to the man’s good
looks. Later on in the poem, a sarcastic tone is used to portray the woman as caring, compassionate and self-sacrificing; i.e.

“So e’en to preserve the poor body in life,
    I think I maun wed him to-morrow!”

This would be said as, “Of course, I’m really marrying him to keep him happy - not for his myself” The woman is implying that her own happiness does not matter, as long as her lover is happy.

“When awful beauty joins with all her charms,
    Who is so rash as rise in rebel arms?”

from “The Rights of Woman” suggests that when a beautiful woman is present, no man is going to complain about anything; i.e. her beauty makes up for all the ills of life. This quotation also insinuates that women use their beauty and charm to get their own way. The title of one of Burns’s poems - “Beware o’ Bonie Ann” immediately infers that a woman’s beauty is manipulative. This idea is continued throughout the poem in many quotations such as

“Her comely face”
“Your heart she will trepan” and
“Love enslaves the man.”

In these specific quotations, Burns is saying that Ann’s beautiful looks and perfect figure entice and even trap men - she can bind a man by her beauty; so much so that he will do anything for her! Because this view has been repeated all through the poem, this emphasises the fact that women use their beauty to bewitch men and get what they want.

Even though Robert Burns was captivated by the beauty of many women, this does not necessarily mean that he respected them: the question is, “Did he really respect women?” His attitude is conveyed in stanza one of “The Rights or Woman” where he says,

“While Europe’s eye is fix’d on many things -
    The fate of empires and the fall of kings -
    Amid this mighty fuss, just let me mention,
    The Right of Woman merit some attention.”

This can be interpreted as,

“Whilst all these grand, important things are going on (including the Rights of Man), stop for a moment and listen to the less important things of the world, i.e. The Rights of Woman. This automatically gives the impression that Burns regards women and their rights as unimportant and even trivial - something to discard, joke about and jest at. It leads me to think that the women of Burns’s time were given very little say in matters of importance and were kept under the rule of men.

In Stanza three,

“The second right - but needless here is caution -
    To keep that right inviolate’s the fashion;”

“... in far less polish’d days,
    A time when rough, rude man had naughty ways!”

Burns is saying that years ago men would treat women with no respect and wouldn’t even give them any privacy:

“Nay, even thus invade a lady’s quiet.”

The woman in the poem is saying that women deserve privacy and respect, AND, of course, this will not be gained as it is correct or normal;

“To keep that right inviolate’s the fashion.”

Stanza four:

“Now, thank our stars, these Gothic times are fled”
“... we are much the gainers.:
is saying that by luck all these old-fashioned ways have disappeared and all you wonderful
men think that invading a woman’s privacy is wrong and intolerable; because of this we have
gained so much! Obviously, these “Gothic times” have fled, as from stanza four it is quite clear to
see that the woman in the poem is given privacy which is respected. A thing which is seen today
as an automatic right which everyone deserves, regardless of their gender.

In stanza six
“But truce with kings, and truce with constitutions,
With bloody armaments and revolutions;
Let Majesty your first attention summon,
Ah! Ca ira! The Majesty of WOMAN!”

the woman is reinforcing what she has said previously in stanza four. In stanza six, she is
saying that the right of woman will come about in the end, and women will receive the protection,
decorum and admiration that they so rightfully deserve.

From this I am led to believe that Burns’s generation did not give women any authority, and a
right to lead their own lives in a way which pleased themselves. Instead, women were seen to be
of less value, and were therefore dominated by their male partners.

On the other hand, Burns was ahead of his time in predicting in the last line of “The Rights of
Woman”, that women would eventually win the day and achieve their true place in society. Overall,
Burns has shown a very strong and positive view of women. He appreciates their beauty, their
charm, and their crafty, devious ways. He understands that they enrich the lives of everyone and
admires their bewitching, beguiling ways of getting their own way in the end!

BURNS ON COINS

Every January the Manx Caledonian Society hosts one of the largest and most prestigious
Burns Suppers in the British isles. Interest in Burns has always been very strong generally,
for he was a major influence on Thomas Browne, the Manx national poet. And, of course,
there is a direct connection between Burns and the island, for the brig Rosamond was smuggling
brandy from the Isle of Man to the Solway Coast when Burns and his fellow-excise officers
intercepted her.

In 1988 the Isle of Man, which has been issuing its own coins since the 17th century, released
a set of crowns celebrating the bicentenary of steam navigation. The first coin in the series depicted
the maiden voyage of the paddle steamboat built to the specifications of Patrick Miller by James
Taylor and William Symington, mining engineers at Wanlockhead, Dumfriesshire.

On October 14 that year Burns, then engaged in building his farmhouse at Ellisland, downed
tools and crossed the Nith with his stone-mason Sandy Crombie to watch the fun on Dalswinton
Loch as Miller’s steam driven craft took to the water. A well-known painting of the event (reproduced
on the coin) places Burns as a passenger on the deck of the little paddleboat, although he never
mentioned this in any of his letters – far less wrote an ode to mark the occasion!

A set of four crowns have been released by the Isle of Man to mark the bicentenary of the
poet’s death. All four coins bear the Maklouf bust of the Queen on the obverse, with pictorial
motifs on the reverse.

The first shows Burns, the budding poet, reclining on a grassy knoll in Eglinton Woods near
Ivine, where he lived in 1781-82 while learning the craft of flax-dressing. He is depicted with
quill-pen and ink, in the throes of composition, derived from a mural painting by Ted and Elizabeth Odling which now adorns the walls of Irvine Burns Club.

The second coin depicts Burns in masonic apron as Depute Master of Lodge St James Kilwinning. In the background can be seen a view of Edinburgh with the Castle on the skyline, alluding to his sojourn in Scotland’s capital in 1786-87 while arranging for the first Edinburgh edition of his poems.

In September 1789 Burns entered the Excise service. It was after his transfer to the Dumfries Third Division in 1791 that the celebrated incident on the Solway Firth took place. On February 29, 1792 he led a party of excisemen and troops which boarded and seized the brig Rosamond. The sculptor has used some artistic licence in his interpretation of this dramatic event, pictured on the third coin.

The fourth crown shows a half-length standing figure of Burns, based on the statue by Sir John Flaxman which was intended for the Edinburgh memorial and which now stands in the hallway of the Royal Museum of Scotland. In the background, people link arms to sing “Auld Lang Syne”.

The crowns have been struck in cupro-nickel for general circulation, but proof versions in sterling silver and gold have also been produced by the Pobjoy Mint of Oldfields Road, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 2NW (Telephone: 0181 641 0370) from whom sets can be obtained.

James A. Mackay
See the Irvine Collection of Original Burns Manuscripts, the pencil drawing of the Bard by Naysmith, our beautifully bound copy of the Kilmarnock Edition, the original oil painting 'Burns in Edinburgh, by Charles M. Hardie, A.R.S.A., the priceless collection of holograph letters, the Burns Mural and many other treasures.

Irvine was in the vanguard of the Agricultural and Industrial Revolution and the Royal Burgh Museum gives an insight into the town's history and its attraction to the Bard to become a Flax Dresser during the formative period of his life.

Enquiries to:
George Watson, Honorary Secretary, Irvine Burns Club, Wellwood, 28 Eglinton Street, Irvine.
Tel: 01294 274511 (Club)
01294 312673 (Secretary)

(OPEN 2-4.30 p.m. MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, FRIDAY, SATURDAY)
(1st APRIL TO 1st SEPTEMBER)
A PRAYER
"WHEN SOON OR LATE THEY REACH THAT COAST,
O'ER LIFE'S ROUGH OCEAN DRIV'N,
MAY THEY REJOICE, NO WAND'RER LOST,
A FAMILY IN HEAVEN!"

BURNS
THE CHELTENHAM
CONNECTION

Pictured from left to right in St. Mary's Churchyard, Charlton Kings near Cheltenham, at the grave of two granddaughters and one great granddaughter of Robert Burns, The Mayor of Cheltenham Pat Thornton, Piper Iain Willcox, Piper Danny Stalker and Tina Pulford (Local Historian).

The event to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of Robert Burns was organised by the Cheltenham Scottish Society and took the form of a service in St. Mary's Church and laying of a wreath. The Mayor laid a rose for (England) and a spray of heather for (Scotland). The inscription on the gravestone reads:- Sacred to the memory of Sarah Burns Hutchinson widow of Berkley Hutchinson, MD and daughter of Lt. Col. James Glencairn Burns, died 12th July 1909 aged 87 years. Also of Margaret Constance Burns Hutchinson her daughter died 8th December 1917 aged 57 years. Also of Annie Burns Hutchinson, second daughter of Lt. Col. James Glencairn Burns, died 10th May 1925 aged 94 years. The following Prayer by the Poet is engraved on the base of the stone:- "When soon or late they reach that coast, O'er life's rough ocean driv'n, May they rejoice, no wand'rer lost, A family in Heaven!"

Left: The Poet's wife, Jean Armour with her granddaughter Sarah.
DALRY BURNS CLUB
(THE EARLY YEARS)

Not the oldest, but the first Burns Club to celebrate 150 consecutive Anniversary Suppers.

One night in December 1825 a number of cronies were gathered in Montgomerie’s Inn in Courthill Street. (Now the ‘Oak Tavern’) The majority of these were weavers. They were well read men who could, and did debate on almost any subject. This they did after their long and hard work of these days. On this particular night, however, the talk was of Robert Burns. Some of them recited his poetry and others sang some of his songs. During the night, Hugh Morris, a friend of Tannahill the Paisley poet, made the suggestion that a Burns Club be formed in Dalry. Andrew Crawford supported him in this suggestion and he and Hugh Morris were elected Secretary and President respectively. The innkeeper John Montgomery readily consented to the suggestion that the first supper be held in his inn on the 25th January 1826.

Andrew Crawford was appointed to draw up some rules for the club and this he did in the form of the following poem. He preferred not to call them rules but rather “a few hints for Dalry Burns Club.”

Dalry, eighteen hundred and twenty-six,
Assembled a few friends of Burns
To make regulations and yearly to fix,
What’s to be done when his birthday returns.

This year in Montgomerie’s, it first shall take place,
Where drink of the best, will be got
With a haggis and bannocks the table to grace
And a slice from the hip of a stot.

Political questions – all banished shall be
The song it shall circle in turns
Each shall have a glass of the barley bree
To drink to the memory of Burns.

No insulting language our lips shall defile
Let no man’s good humour be crossed,
But let every face be bright with a smile
When round goes the song and the toast.

Another rule which was afterwards added was “That non-attendance at a single meeting without a written apology forfeits its membership.” This rule used to be strictly enforced in the early days of the club.

The next thing to be agreed to was, who were to be asked to the supper. They would have to be men of some intelligence and standing in the village, and not too many, because the room that John Montgomerie said he would give them to hold their supper in, was not very big. This was the garret. It was quite a comfortable room, and it would hold twenty of them at a push, but no more. So they drew up a list of names of twenty intelligent men, and of those twenty, at least ten of them
were weavers, and the majority of others had something to do with the manufacture of cloth. None of these men, however, were wealthy. They were men, somewhat like Burns himself — intelligent well read men, lovers of Burns who could sing his songs, and recite his poetry, and who were not afraid to do so when asked. Many a time when the whole company sang a song, they all knew they would make the rafters ring.

**MONTGOMERIE'S INN**

The first supper of the Dalry Burns Club was in the garrat of John Montgomerie's Inn, in 1826. This garret was, 18 feet from front to back, and 15 feet wide. There were two beds in it with a passage between. This passage was about 4 feet 6 inches wide by 4 feet long, leading to a door at the top of the stair. Their table was 9 feet long by 3 feet wide, so that although there were 20 of them, they seemed to have sufficient room if perhaps a little crowded. The chairman had his back to the fireplace, and the Croupier had his back to the passage between the two beds leading to the door. But although they may have been a little bit crowded, it did not damp their enthusiasm. It did not matter in the least. What did matter was that they were in a comfortable place. A place where they could sing their songs, give their toasts, and tell their anecdotes with all the pleasure that a band of intelligent cronies had.

This place is very aptly described by one of the early members, Andrew Aitken, of Overton, Beith, who became a member of Dalry Burns Club in 1833, in the following lines:

*It's just theekit wi strae, an' but laigh o' the ceilin'*

*That we scarce, can stan' up straight within.*

*But there's aye something guid, baith for eatin' an' drinkin',*

*To be had at Montgomerie's Inn.*

The suppers were held in this garret from 1826 to 1850. In 1851 they moved downstairs to a larger room and a larger table. Here their table was placed from the front of the house to the back, and this table measured 14 feet long by 3 feet wide. The Chairman had his back to a window at the back of the house, while the Croupier had his back to a window at the Courthill Street side. In this room the table was 4 feet from the fireplace, the fireplace being on the Chairman's left and the Croupier's right. Here they held their suppers until the building was made into a two-storie building in 1875.
ANECDOTES

At the Club meetings many anecdotes were told about Burns. One being about the poet travelling to Stewerton. It must have been a very wet day, and the roads were in a terrible state. When Burns arrived at the inn at Stewerton, he wrote upon the window-shutter, the following epigram:-

I'm here arrived, thanks to the Gods,
Through roads rough, deep, and muddy.
A certain proof that making roads,
Is no' a public study
Although I', no' wi' scripture cram'd,
The gospel plainly says.
The people surely shall be  - - d
Who do not mend their ways.

At the supper of 1830, the following is noted in the records. "We met in John Montgomerie's and partook of a supper that might have graced the table of any nobleman in Scotland. After the cloth was removed, a portrait of the immortal bard, belonging to the President, was placed at the back of the chair. This was known as "Burns on the wall" and is still in possession of the Club.

During the night, Messrs. James Orr and Andrew Neil arrived as a deputation from the Junior Burns Club, and we sent John Hamilton and James Muir to the Junior Club in return. – There is early reference to this Junior Burns Club in the minutes of the club. No records are known to exist.

Here is an anecdote told in the year 1830.

One of the sons of the bard, Robert Burns Jnr. being in Ayr some time ago happened to be in company with a man named Stills, who being ignorant of the relationship of his companion to the Bard, in the course of conversation began to cry down the works of his companion's Immortal Sire. Mr. Burns with the greatest sang froid for sometime listened to the aspersions of the pretended critic. At last, however, he cut him short by remarking that he had many a time heard of Burns running down stills, but he had never before heard of Stills running down Burns.

In his memory of Burns for the year 1831, the proposer told an anecdote about Burns when he was in the Excise. He says it was told by Mr. Allan Cunningham.

Mr. Maxwell of Terraghty, an old austere gentleman who cared nothing about poetry, used to say when the excise books of the district were produced at the meeting of the Justices. "Bring me Burn's journal. It always does me good to see it for it shows that an honest officer may carry a kind heart about with him."

It was in the year 1832, where according to the records of William Logan in the Cairn, there were 21 sat down to the supper, and according to the records of Andrew Crawford (who was President that year) those 21 proposed no fewer than 26 toasts.

This is the only year in which Andrew Crawford has written some of the names of whoever proposed the toasts. He wrote their names in pencil opposite the name of the poet they toasted, and here are the names he wrote.

Andrew Crawford, President (Burns), Hugh Morris, Croupier (Tannahill), William Hamilton (Moore), James Steel (Shakespeare), Robert McArthur (Skinner), James McNair (Ramsay), James McDonald (Sir Walter Scott), John Stirrat (Byron), John Munn (McNeal), John Barbour (Campbell).

This year they proposed a toast to Robert Burns Jnr. In it a song written by Robert Burns Jnr. was recited.

In the year 1843, the last year Andrew Crawford was President, (he emigrated to America this year at the age of 71!) he opened the meeting with these words.

Freen's aroon the table sit,
Blythe am I tae see ye met,
See that your ills ye a' forget,
And sing your songs wi' glee.
Then tak' your toddy while it's warm,
A wee drap drink can dae nae harm,
It cheers the heart and nerves the arm
At least its so wi' me.

Man's life is but a wee bit span,
And is it no the wisest plan,
Tae feel as happy as we can,
And aye contented be.

The minute book of Andrew Crawford is full of very little known anecdotes and original poetry.

In the record book of the club now called the 'Cairn' William Logan started the task of writing in the names of all who attended the suppers since the institution of the club in 1826. The names of the members who gave toasts are not recorded until 1861. Since the institution of the club in 1826 the principle toast of the evening has always been given by the Chairman.

The Croupiers toast since 1861 has always been Jean Armour or the Family of the Poet. From 1883 it has been “The Memory of Jean Armour”.

Another toast which has lasted since the institution of the Club is the Songwriters. In the earlier days this was not given in this fashion because the songwriters were toasted individually. In 1862 for example 11 different songwriters were toasted.

Another toast which has become traditional since recorded in the ‘Cairn’ in 1861 is “The Deceased Members”.

In 1867 when there were 17 members present no fewer than 22 toasts were given and 28 songs sang.

A privately produced philatelic envelope (no postal validity) issued to members of Dairy Bums Club to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Poet’s death.

Extracts from the club’s 150th Anniversary Brochure, 1975.
BURNS'S "HIGHLAND MARY"
(Submitted to the "Greenock Evening Telegraph" 31st July, 1896)

By a member of Greenock Burns Club

"My Mary, dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?"

When Robert Burns on a memorable occasion, and under peculiarly pathetic and soul-searching circumstances, composed this immortal dirge, whether in the "barnyard," so often referred to by Cromek and other editors, or in his little study in the Wee Vennel of Dumfries, it is quite clear that he was not in one of the "Pleasures of Memory," but in one of the most uncontrollable agonies of recollection. Not agony of remorse, but the poignant and deep-set sorrow of a lost love. For after all that has been or may be written and said, it remains an incontrovertible fact that Mary Campbell was the true mistress of Burns' heart.

"She has my heart, she has my hand,
By sacred truth and honour's band."

Of the many towns in Scotland more or less associated with the great poet, Ayr, Irvine, Mauchline, Kilmarnock, Edinburgh, Dumfries, and Greenock, the last-named can claim a high place. Ayr had the unspeakable honour of having given him birth, Kilmarnock issued his first edition, Edinburgh lionised him and afterwards cold-shouldered him, Dumfries sheltered him in
his last weary years — there the “respectables” shunned him while he lived, and (oh, the irony of it!) gave him an impressive funeral when he died — and Greenock found a “place of blissful rest” for the dust of the one woman who really held his purest affections.

The main facts of Mary Campbell’s humble and all too brief career are well known. Her sad life-story has been told countless times, and is familiar to every schoolboy. Still, in view of the ceremony to be performed by Lady Kelvin at Dunoon to-morrow (1st August, 1896), unveiling of the Highland Mary statue at Dunoon, repetition may well be excused. Born in the year 1764 at the farm or thatched cottage of Auchamore, or Bigfield (Angl.ice) in the immediate neighbourhood of Dunoon, she was taken by her father and mother to reside in Campbeltown, where he had settled as the skipper and part-owner of a coal sloop which traded to and from Troon and Ardrossan. The family being poor, the future heroine had to go out to service. She received her first arles from a family of some consequence who lived in the quaint old Highland village of Ballochantee, about ten miles from “Whiskyopolis”, as it has come to be called. After leaving Ballochantee she entered the service of the Rev. David Campbell, parish minister of Loch Ranza, in Arran. By this time she was sixteen years of age, and as regards looks, amiability of disposition, and intelligence, seems to have been far beyond the maidens of her years and position in life in that part of the country. Under the minister’s roof she learned to write a little English and to speak the language, if not correctly, at least with that interesting accent which Celts generally do. How long she remained in Arran is not known. After a brief stay in Campbeltown with her parents she took service at Coilsfield or the Castle of Montgomery, near Tarbolton. In his recently-published book on Mary Campbell, Mr. Archibald Munro says: “At the adjacent Parish Church of Tarbolton Mary used to worship on Sundays with other members of the Coilsfield family, and it was about this time and while at Montgomery that she was first known as ‘Highland Mary.’ Other celebrities in Burns’s diary, such as John Wilson, the ‘whipper-in’ of ‘The Twa Dogs,’ James Humphrey and John Lees were numbered among the congregation in the Clachan Church. Burns, who resided in a farm almost equi-distant from the kirks of Mauchline and Tarbolton, seems to have divided his Sabbaths between these kirks. In the latter church, and shortly after her arrival, the poet saw the interesting young stranger, was charmed with her appearance and propriety of conduct, and was, of course, desirous of making her acquaintance. One of Mary’s noticeable habits during the church service was her close attention to her Bible while the minister was reading from it. It has been conjectured that her observance of this important duty may have suggested to the mind of the poet the exchange of Bibles which afterwards took place between them.”

Be that as it may, it is certain that the rhyming, roving, young farmer became greatly enamoured of Mary — not the rather loose love he had for Ellison Begbie, nor even the earthly, happy-go-lucky passion he entertained for
"Bonnie Jean," but a deep heartfelt attachment, pure and even spiritual in its character. At the time he attracted the attention and won the favour of the Campbeltown lass his heart was sore, he was morose, with the feelings of one who had been slighted, rejected, frowned upon by those with whom he would fain have been friendly. The Armours had relentlessly driven him from them. By "thoughtless folly," which he afterwards confessed in "A Bard's Epitaph" "stained his name," he had put himself in their power, and had been scowled at and threatened with pains and penalties. The innocent love, and sweet, artless companionship of Mary Campbell came as a soothing, comforting influence just at the psychological moment. Though but an unsophisticated domestic, rustic in her manners, and in the matter of genteel accomplishments or mental capacity not to be compared for a moment with numbers of women he afterwards met, such as Bess Burnett, Charlotte Hamilton, Peggy Chalmers, and "Clarinda," yet she loomed all at once in the eyes of the susceptible and heart-sore poet as a very goddess of beauty, devotion, and goodness. And so in Cromek's Reliques we find these words from Burns' own pen: "My Highland lassie was a warm-hearted, charming young creature as ever blessed a man with generous love. After a pretty long tract of the most ardent reciprocal attachment, we met by appointment on the second Sunday of May [1786] in a sequestered spot by the banks of the Ayr, where we spent the day in taking a farewell before she should embark for the West Highlands to arrange matters among her friends for our projected change of life."

Describing the intensely poetic, semi-religious world-celebrated parting of the poet with Mary, Cromek says "the adieu was performed with all those simple and striking ceremonials which rustic sentiment devised to prolong tender emotions and to inspire awe. The lovers stood on each side of a small purling brook; they laved their hands in its limpid stream, and, holding a Bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other. They parted - never to meet again." It was at this time that he indited the beautiful song, "Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary."

"I hae sworn by the Heavens to my Mary
I hae sworn by the Heavens to be true,
And sae may the Heavens forget me,
When I forget my vow!

Than this Highland Mary episode in the life of our national poet, this eternal parting of two hearts, linked together by the honest and most ardent affection, there is nothing more dramatic, more fascinating, and more pathetic in the annals of poets and poetry. If Burns had only written "To Mary in Heaven," and the lovely song beginning,

"Ye banks and braes and streams around
The Castle O' Montgomery."

these, and that famous parting on the second Sunday of May, 1786, would have sent his name down imperishable to posterity.

Mary presented her famous lover with a small copy of the Scriptures, while he gave her what would then be considered an elegantly-printed copy of the same, bound in two volumes. Upon the boards of the first volume is inscribed in the poet's bold handwriting — "And ye shall not swear by My name falsely, I am the Lord. Levit. xix. 12." On the second volume" "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. St Matth. chap. v. 33;" Burns, Mossgiel," with his mason mark. These Bibles were for many years in the possession of relatives of Highland Mary who had emigrated to Canada; but half-a-century ago they were brought back to the old country and deposited in the monument at Ayr (now in the Cottage Museum).

In a letter addressed by Miss Agnes Begg, from Ayr in 1850, to Dr. Robert Chambers, one of the most painstaking editors of Burns, that lady says:-

"Mr. Douglas [Mr. Scott Douglas, another eminent editor of the poet's works] is perfectly right with regard to Burns and his Highland Mary's short love passage. It was in 1786, just as he supposes; at least so my mother has all along thought, from a revulsion of feeling attendant on the heartless desertion of him by Jean Armour. He just then became acquainted with Mary Campbell, who was acting as nurserymaid in the family of Gavin Hamilton. He must have known her previously to that time,
though his love-fit had only begun then. My mother has no doubt that he meant to marry her.”

But, as all the world knows, that was fated not to be. Mary left Ayrshire in August or early in September, 1786, for Campbeltown. After a short period spent in her old home, she (to use Burns’s own words) “at the close of the autumn following, crossed the sea to meet me at Greenock, when she had scarce landed when she was seized with a malignant fever, which hurried my dear girl to her grave in a few days, before I could even hear of her illness.” The story of her untimely end, of the “brothering feast” at Peter Macpherson’s, the carpenter in Greenock, of her elder brother Robert’s severe illness, of her sisterly nursing of him, of her seizure by the typhus infection and its result, and of her burial in the same Macpherson’s lair in the Old West Churchyard, is so well known to all our readers that detail may well be spared.

Thus ended one of the most mysterious and beautiful love-passages to be found in the whole history of literature:-

“Wi mony vow, and locked embrace,
     Our parting was fu’ tender;
And pledging aft to meet again,
     We tore ourselves asunder;
But oh! fell death’s untimely frost,
     That nip’t my flower sae early!
Now green’s the sod, and cauld’s the clay,
     That wraps my Highland Mary!”

Mr. Archibald Munro, in the book from which I have already quoted, says:-

“After Mary Campbell’s mother removed from Campbeltown to Greenock, she received a visit from Burns. On that occasion the sympathising visitor is believed to have gone to Mary’s grave, and prostrated himself upon it in the frame of mind in which he subsequently composed his touching apostrophe--

‘See’st thou thy lover lowly laid,
     Hear’st thou the groans that rend his breast?’

In his interview with Mrs. Cambell, it was natural that the surviving lover should feel and express a wish to be possessed of a relic of the dear one that was gone before. He would be content, if he got nothing better, as he himself said, with even a handkerchief – perhaps the one in which he may have seen her carrying her bundle from Kilmalcolm to Greenock. Mrs. Campbell, however, could not see her way to grant even that small favour, though the suppliant begged it with tears in his eyes. Her refusal was likely the result of her inexorable husband’s interdict against all communication with the sarcastic censor of the ministers. That Mary’s mother did not share her husband’s aversion to Burns’s name is a fact that was cordially recognised by the majority of their relatives. When Mrs. Campbell was asked in later years by some of her kinsfolk whether she thought that Mary would have been happy with the poet for a life partner, she replied that she could not give an opinion as to how her sweet and gentle lassie could get on with a man whose views on many subjects were as wild as his conduct, but she would not complete the expression of her estimate of him without admitting that, after all, he was a real warm-hearted chiel. Such was the inference she drew from her conversation with him, and it is gratifying to be assured by her surviving grandson that her regard for the poet’s memory underwent no decay as years rolled on, as is evident from the fact that she taught her granddaughters, Mary and Annie Anderson, many years afterwards to sing the songs that were composed in honour of their celebrated aunt.”

The Rev. William Wye Smith, of Canada, one of the best informed writers on Burns and “Highland Mary,” has the following in Mr. John D. Ross’s book on the celebrated heroine:-

“As might be expected, no portrait of the original Highland Mary exists. We cannot, therefore, have her likeness, but we can in some measure answer the question, what did Highland Mary look like? Of her sister Annie’s two daughters, Mary was not only a namesake, but a perfect presentment of her celebrated relative. Now, by a fortunate turn of affairs, I got hold, among her Canadian relatives, of an old ambrotype of this second Highland Mary, but, alas! she was no longer young and beautiful. When the photographic art came in, by way of compensation, I also secured photographs of her two daughters. Just as Mrs.
Robertson (whom I have called ‘Highland Mary the second’) was the duplicate of her celebrated aunt, while her sister was not, so with Mrs. Robertson’s own daughter. One of them, Margaret Robertson was ‘Highland Mary the third; ‘the other was not. She is doubtless a very good representation of the original Highland Mary, and possesses the same sparkling glance that Burns speaks of regarding his Highland Mary.”

It may be added here that the picture of “Highland Mary” at the beginning of this article is based on that of her grand-niece, Margaret Robertson.

It was many years after the death of Scotland’s bard that the people of Greenock, or indeed of Scotland, paid much attention to the circumstance that the dust of Mary Campbell was laid in the Old West Kirkyard of this town. For two or three decades Robert Burns’ memory did not smell very sweet with our Calvinistic forefathers, and even the grave at Dumfries was not for many years the Mecca which it is now for the Scottish race at home and abroad. But Time, which has been the poet’s complete justifier, brought about a wonderful change of feeling, and within forty years after our supreme lyrist breathed his last his memory and the memory of those whom he knew and loved were cherished in the public mind. Tuesday, the 25th of January, 1842, witnessed the laying of the foundation-stone of the monument to Mary Campbell at the head of the grave in which she was laid. There was a public demonstration on the occasion. One account says: “In order to give all possible eclat to this ceremonial invitations had been sent to Masonic bodies all over Scotland to attend, and the response was very hearty. Not only was there a large attendance of ‘brethren of the mystic tie’ in their regalia, but Oddfellows and Foresters also turned out in large numbers, and the procession, which was marshalled by Captain Mann, superintendent of the burgh police, was quite imposing. The streets were crowded with sightseers. There were heralds on horse-back, guardians with drawn swords, brass bands, banners, and all the paraphernalia of a public fête. Fifteen Masonic lodges attended, and at their head was the Provincial Grand Lodge, consisting of Mr. Patrick Maxwell Stewart, M.P., the Grand Master; Mr. Robert Wallace, of Kelly, M.P.; and such well-known citizens and masons as Messrs Robert Ewing, Robert Steele, Rev. William Menzies, David Crauford, William Leitch, Alexander Rodger, John Scott Russell, Lieutenant Hill, R.N., and other office-bearers. The procession left St. Andrews Square, and marched along Rue-end, Hamilton, and West Blackhall Streets, down Ker, along Clarence Street, and down Nicolson Street to the churchyard. On arriving at the grave, the Masonic bodies opened up to allow the Grand Lodge to proceed up the centre to the platform erected near the grave. The Masonic and other
bodies having taken the places assigned to them, the Grand Chaplain offered up an appropriate prayer to the great Architect of the Universe, after which the band of the 10th Regiment, which accompanied the Grand Master’s mother lodge, Greenock St. John, 175, played the ‘Old Hundred.’ The Acting Grand Secretary then read a copy of the inscription, which, along with various coins and newspapers, were placed in a bottle sealed, which the Grand Treasurer deposited in a cavity of the stone. The stone was then lowered into its bed, and the ceremony of laying was completed by the Grand Master in the most impressive manner, following the whole with a benediction. The ceremony having been completed, Mr. Stewart delivered an oration, for which, on behalf of the community, he was thanked by the member for Greenock. The procession was then re-formed and marched to Cathcart Square, where, after much cheering, it, with the exception of the Masonic Lodges, dispersed. The Masons went to their lodge room and harmonised in the light.” The account from which we are quoting further says: “In the evening a large party dined together in the Coffee-Room, Catchart Square. P.M. Stewart, Esq., M.P., in the chair, and Robert Weir, Esq., Glasgow, and John Wharton, Esq., Greenock croupiers. The Grand Lodge met in the Assembly Rooms between eight and nine o’clock, presided over by the Provincial Grand Master. The Oddfellows supped in the Buck’s Head Hall, with Mr. Wallace, M.P., in the chair, and the Foresters met in the evening in the Gardener’s Arms. During the evening the streets continued crowded, bands of music paraded about, and the boys amused themselves with discharging fireworks.”

For a long period previous to the resuscitation of Greenock Burns Club the grave at the monument was neglected, and lying as it does in low ground, was in anything but a reputable condition. The committee of the club named took the matter in hand, and through the energy of Mr. Morison (Secretary) and others the place was recently put in a condition of order and beauty. If the Club had the rights of the place more would be done, but owing to non-ownership they are somewhat restricted in their action.

Since that 25th of January, 1842, the burying-place of “Mary Campbell” has been, as far as literature is concerned, the most classic spot in Renfrewshire. The tremendous ever-widening, ever-deepening influence and renown of Robert Burns all the world over has placed “Highland Mary’s” name and memory, high and enduring, in the gallery of immortals. From busy New York, Melbourne; from the snows of far-west Canada, and the prairies of Nevada and Illinois; from the isles of the Southern Seas, and the burning plains of India, come in large numbers every year Scotsmen and the descendants of Scotsmen to this hallowed spot where (as Professor Blackie has put it) “all who love the Scottish Muse never fail to drop their fervent tear.” It is wonderful to think of it, yet it is true that this blue-eyed, modest, self-respecting girl served to do more for the

The Highland Mary Statue on Castle Hill, Dunoon.
wayward, passionate Burns than all the ministers and kirk-sessions of his time – she struck the loftiest chords in his nature, she was the shrine of his best and noblest feelings, and his love for her was intensely ardent, as elevated as an Alpine peak, as pure as the snow on its summit.

The above pictures represent the two houses in Greenock, in one or other of which Highland Mary is said to have died.

Today it is generally accepted that Mary died in the house in Charles Street.

NOTE: When Harland and Wolff (Ship Builders) expanded their shipyard it was necessary to demolish the Old West Parish Church and Kirkyard. As a result it was decided that the remains of Highland Mary be removed and on 13 November, 1920 a coffin containing her remains was reverently placed in Greenock Cemetery.

THE OPENING OF THE
NEW ROBERT BURNS ROOM
AT THE MITCHELL LIBRARY

The new Robert Burns Room at the Mitchell Library was formally opened by Councillor Liz Cameron Vice Convener of the Arts and Culture committee of Glasgow City Council on 24th January 1996. When it first opened to the public in 1877 one of the library’s earliest decisions was to form a collection as a memorial to our national poet, the purpose being to collect all editions of Burns and all works about him or in anyway relating to him. The collection started in 1882 with the acquisition of the 700 volumes belonging to James Gibson of Liverpool, and by means of purchase and donation it has grown to over 5,000 items and is believed to be the largest in the world.
Following the reorganisation of the Mitchell Library in August 1994 the Burns Collection became part of the newly created Arts Department. Although it was a necessary move, it turned out to be fortuitous in that it gave us the opportunity to bring together our Burns collection and our extensive Scottish Poetry Collection into a magnificent and fitting new home—thus bringing together Scotland's poetic genius in one room.

Some refurbishment work was required to restore the room, in the original 1911 Mitchell library building, to its current splendid condition. The wood panelling was restored and repolished, the stained glass of the skylight cleaned and the magnificent plasterwork redecorated in shades of green and light purple, the colours of the thistle. We were delighted that the work was completed in time to celebrate the poet's birthday and we launched our Bicentenary program at the official opening ceremony in January.

The first event was a concert by Adam McNaughton and Stramash, a Glasgow based group of singers and instrumentalists, "From commonplace to cantata: the songs of Robert Burns."

Murdo Morrison, President of the Burns Federation and Peter Westwood, Editor of the Burns Chronicle, attended the opening along with many leading Burnsians and a large Glasgow audience.

Councillor Cameron said after the ceremony "I was delighted to open the new Burns Room, particularly so in this special bi-centenary year of Burns' death. I thoroughly enjoyed the evening, which had a really good atmosphere, with everyone singing along with Stramash. It's a very good start to what promises to be an exciting programme of events taking place at the library during the year."
few years ago in Scotland I heard John Inglis the then Secretary of the Burns Federation, talking about the worldwide reverence for Burns. He said that, to a certain extent, we can understand the commemoration of Burns in those parts of the world where Scots immigrants have settled. Along with tartan, the pipes, the songs and customs, Scots exiles have derived some emotional comfort and pride from celebrating a national figure whose words echoed their homeland.

Robert Burns is labelled Scotland's national poet. This is generally meant in the sense in which Burns put into words the deep feelings of Scots for their homeland, for love and beauty. He gives expression through words to what most can only feel in their hearts and souls. Some would criticize this as no more than maudling sentimentality, or as an excuse to drink too much in memory of a poet dead now two hundred years, but of whom they know little other than half remembered songs from their school days, 'A Red, Red Rose' or 'Scots, Wha Hae' and, perhaps, a line or two from 'To a Mouse' or, 'Is There For Honest Poverty'.

We can all, probably, put a face to such a description and maybe cringe in embarrassment at the memory of such individuals. But this is to present a gross caricature of those who gather to celebrate Burns' life, and even such examples of the critic's description above have this to commend them; however poorly celebrated, they are at least struggling to give expression to something which is deep within them. We should not mock the 'professional' Scot because his or her demonstration of national sentiment may not accord with our own. Even in the worst excesses of sentimentality there is, at root, an attempt to put into a tangible form what lies deep within the mind and the heart.

Nor should we mock or be ashamed of symbols such as tartan, pipes or heather. There is nothing wrong with symbols, even when artificially created. Before dismissing them with a sneer as false see first what it is that is being symbolized. Such symbols can help us focus our innermost feelings and they enable us to be aware of and to remember an identity which brings some assurance, some confidence and some pride. Burns himself wrote, after reading about an enduring Scottish symbol, William Wallace:

"The story of Wallace poured a tide of Scottish prejudice into my veins which will boil along there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest."

* Dr. Cumming was born a Scot and brought up in Dalkeith. His first job was with the Civil Service and he then went back to education, completing higher education research at Aberdeen and Edinburgh in the 1970's and 1980's. He has taught at Deakin University since 1990. In research, Dr. Cumming has examined the survival and transmission of Celtic culture in Australia, looking especially at 19th century Victoria. As well as writing articles on the subject, he has, with a colleague, just completed the manuscript of a book which considers the history of Scots in Australia - through their own words as they committed their thoughts, experiences and reactions to their new homeland, to written records such as diaries, letters and journals, as well as through their poems and stories.
To celebrate the Burns Bicentenary we are pleased to announce the publication of a new catalogue of the world's largest Burns Collection.

Edited by Joe Fisher, former Librarian of the Collection and author of the famous Glasgow Encyclopaedia. Published by Glasgow City Libraries with the generous assistance of the Burns Federation.

£10.00 (£11.50 inc. p&p) ISBN 0906169461 available from The Arts Department, The Mitchell Library, North Street, Glasgow G3 7DN. 0141 287 2933.
But Burns was not looking backward when he wrote this. He was not longing for the restoration of the time of Wallace or Bruce. The Scottish people had to remember and understand their history and what that history had contributed to the evolution of the notions of individual liberty and justice. Neither Wallace nor Bruce would have been able to gather Scottish support for their respective resistance to English domination if their struggles were simply to replace English oppression by that of a Scottish ruler. It was the prize which was the main thing and that prize, for Scotland at that time, was independence from English control but, just as clearly, it was also freedom under Scottish rule.

Burns ably demonstrates this notion in one of his poems. He had been a supporter of the French Revolution when it broke out in 1789. However when it looked like Britain was threatened by invasion, Burns’ sentiments were turned against France and he wrote the patriotic poem, ‘Does Haughty Gaul Invasion Threat?’ But while calling for loyalty to the king Burns puts a twist in the tail. Loyalty to one’s rulers was not to be given at any price.

**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.’

That flood of ‘Scottish prejudice’ to which Burns refers was a ‘prejudice’ in favour of that which Wallace, Bruce and the other Scottish heroes of civil and religious struggles fought and, in some cases, died for. It was a prejudice in favour of independence and freedom from unjust oppression. It was a prejudice in favour of equality and the right of every individual to choose, whether in church or state, those who would govern them. It was a prejudice in favour of people being regarded as God’s creation no matter what station in life they occupied. It was a prejudice in favour of care for the old, the needy, the sick, the helpless. But although this might explain the relevance of Burns to Scots wherever they had settled, this would not answer the question ‘Why Burns?’ in those countries where there is no, or no significant population of Scots or Scots descendants.

Inglis spoke, for example, of the great popularity of Burns in Russia where even the schoolchildren translated his poems into their own language. He mentioned the request he had from Prof. Louisa Lobos of the University of Rio De Janeiro who was translating Burns poems into the language of her country so that they would be more easily accessible to the people. Similar work was being done in Japan, China and in many other countries which do not contain any significant numbers of Scots.

In these and other examples it is clear that the question ‘Why Burns?’ in Russia, in South America, in China, in Japan, and so on, cannot be answered in terms of the need of homesick Scots to derive some comfort from a Scottish symbol.

And so I ask the question ‘Why Burns in Australia?’, in fact, ‘Why Burns anywhere outside of Scotland?’

Part of the answer to these questions explains why we are here today before this statue (the address was given at the poet’s statue in Melbourne, Australia on 21st January, 1996,) and why we gather year to year in our different ways and in our different societies to remember a man who urged us to remember our history. As a nationalist, whether in collecting, or himself composing, the songs and poems and tunes of Scotland, Burns was ensuring that part of Scottish culture which presented the sentiments, the hopes, the beliefs and soul of the people would be preserved. They were to serve not only as a record of literary contribution of Scots but also that those qualities of love, of concern for others and of the value of every human being, in short, a philosophy based upon the age-old maxim that every life has value and cannot be measured in terms of wealth or status, would eventually guide all people. Burns’ hope for the world is summarized in words which even the most disinterested person should have inscribed on his heart:
'The Golden Age we'll then revive:
Each man will be a brother;
In harmony we all shall live
And share the earth together.'

And it is because he wrote such universal truths that his message is relevant in any place and among any people, and because these truths are universal they are permanent.

In the early years of the State of Victoria, annual, and enthusiastic celebrations in commemoration of Burns were already being held. It is interesting to read of these gatherings throughout the 1840s and beyond, and of the sentiments which were expressed by the speakers and enthusiastically endorsed by the hearers. These Burns’ celebrations were times of great outpouring of Scottish national pride and national sentiment but they went far beyond that. They were not restricted to Scots and, indeed, became community affairs. But as well as the cosmopolitan composition of those attending, there was the reflection of the ethos of Burns which, one speaker at a Burns celebration in Melbourne said, included the desire to “unfurl the flag of freedom, and to fight for the truly glorious cause of liberty and independence of their own and other nations…”

The early settlers of Victoria did not have to wait long before being called upon to put these principles into action. In resisting the attempt by the NSW government, supported by the local political administration, to introduce transportation into the free colony of Victoria, it was Burns who was used as the inspiration for this resistance. In a speech given at a public rally to express opposition to the government’s arbitrary action, it was said:

“Many among us have recently celebrated the natal day… of Burns - the poet of the people - what would he have said had he been a denizen of Australia? Why he would have said ‘The King can mak’ a belted knicht; but an honest man’s beyond his micht’ let us then, my friends, catch a ray of inspiration from his spirit, and declare that no felon shall soil the land of our adoption.”

Nor was this a misuse of Burns for political purposes. Burns’ strong opinions regarding liberty and justice and the misuse of power and the right of all peoples to be free are too well spread throughout his poetry for this to be a misrepresentation of him. In the sad and moving poem, 'The Slave’s Lament', for example, Burns wrote of a practice which was still rife in his day, as it is still in ours – slavery, in all its forms. Some verses read:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{It was in sweet Senegal} & \\
\text{That my foes did me enthral} & \\
\text{For the lands of Virginia, -ginia, O!} & \\
\text{Torn from that lovely shore,} & \\
\text{And must never see it more,} & \\
\text{And alas! I am weary, weary, O!} & \\
\text{The burden I must bear,} & \\
\text{While the cruel scourge I fear,} & \\
\text{In the lands of Virginia, -ginia, O!} & \\
\text{And I think on friends most dear} & \\
\text{With the bitter, bitter tear,} & \\
\text{And alas! I am weary, weary, O!}
\end{align*}
\]

William Kerr, himself from Burns country, speaking at a Burns gathering in Melbourne in 1845, quoted, from a speech delivered by a Burnsian in Scotland, the key sentiments which explained why Burns was so loved and so highly regarded everywhere:

‘Was he worthy of their love? Taking it for granted, and we are entitled to do so – then why did they love him? They loved him because he loved his own order, nor ever desired, for a single hour, to quit it. They loved him because he loved the very humblest conditions of humanity… They loved him for that which he has sometimes been absurdly questioned - his independence … They
loved him for bringing the sunshine into the darkest places, not representing the poor hard-working man as an object of pity; but for showing that there was something more than is dreamed of in the world's philosophy among the tillers of the sod, and the humblest children of the land.'

Burns was imitated in verse in Victoria in the 19th century to an enormous degree. His style, his language and, more importantly, his sentiments were the basis of much of the poetry and prose contributed by the ordinary people to their local newspapers and magazines. While some of this poetry dealt with the inevitable feelings of exile and homesickness, not all of the writing was made up of self-indulgent sentimentalizing. Burns was presented, too, as a figure beyond simply Scottish interest or significance. He was a figure now whose sentiments belonged to the world just as the great truths belonged to the world.

A Geelong resident writing to a local paper in 1849 turned his hand to verse to extol the universality of Burns' sentiments. In the poem the versifier shows the reasons why Burns was revered beyond Scotland.

To him whom ev'ry Scot regards
As sweetest of his country's Bards,
Be never dying fame!
But not alone old Scotia's pride,
The joy of ev'ry land beside,
Where men of sense and worth, abide,
Rever'd shall be thy name.

O Burns, it was thy vivid page
Whence we imbid'd those maxims sage
Which have thro' each eventful stage
Of life with good been fraught.
'Twas there we learn'd to scorn with thee
The enemies of liberty;
And what we know of poesy
Thy thrilling numbers taught.

While servileness our spirit spurns,
We lack thy powerful genius, Burns,
To give our verse those pointed turns
Which teach th' obsequious clan
That 'Lords are but the breath of Kings';
That nobleness from virtue springs;
That 'title', 'birth', and such vain things
Do not denote the man.

As well as perpetuating the memory of Burns, these poems were also attempts to maintain the language and idiom of Burns in popular currency and to present his true sentiments. For example, in dealing with topical issues such as justice and liberty and oppression these people found inspiration in Burns for their struggles.

As he had used satire so did they. As he had used lyricism so did they. As he used tenderness so did they. And as he had used scorn so did they. Their targets, more often than not, were those that had been Burns' targets – hypocrisy, pomposity, discrimination, oppression and the misuse of political power. Their aims like those of Burns, included the proclamation of the worth of every individual, freedom, equality and the defence of the poor and powerless.

Well then, we have covered a reasonable amount of distance, too much in fact for the short time we have had to do any real justice to the man, but it is time to face up to the questions I raised at the beginning, 'Burns - Why Australia?; Why anywhere?'
My aim in the foregoing has been to lead us to see that it is the very need of the sentiments of Burns in every generation that makes him relevant - relevant in every country, in every time. The reasons are not hard to deduce. In fact they leap out at us in every television and wireless news bulletin and in every headline of every paper. Abuse of power, discrimination, lack of freedom, status judged by wealth or how many newspapers or television stations one owns, oppression of the poor and the powerless are features still of our society, let alone those countries where such things are a hundred times worse.

Our politicians, and others in public office or positions of influence, still fail to be equal to the responsibility entrusted to them. Lying is regarded as an acceptable policy, and openly boasted of, if it keeps you in power. The weak in society are still expendable. In our political parties and in our parliaments abuse is substituted for debate, arrogance for genuine concern and expedience and compromise for genuine statesmanship.

It would be wrong, of course, to tie Burns to any one political party. However his vision of brotherhood and dignity, freedom, and happiness for all sometimes seems as remote as it was in Burns’ day and we long for some humanity, for some integrity and for some moral courage in our politicians and other officials.

It would also be wrong, and a misunderstanding of his writing, however, to turn Burns into some plaster saint delivering beatitudes from the mountain top to the rest of us weak mortals.

‘God knows’, he wrote to a friend, ‘I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could - and I believe I do it as far as I can - I would wipe away all tears from all eyes.’

Burns’ letters, especially, show him as a religious man, albeit no respecter of some church ministers or their harsh interpretation of their creeds. In a letter to another friend he wrote that his religion, like that of Jesus Christ was practical.

‘Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others,’ he wrote, ‘this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.’

If politicians, governments and people measured their lives against this confession who among them today, in our country, in our state, could stand?

Here then is why Burns is relevant today, in Australia, and in the world. To be a Burnsian is to be enthused by this goal. To be a Burnsian is have our minds, our hearts and our whole lives permeated by this philosophy. To be a Burnsian is to commemorate these sentiments, which we most remember at this time, on a daily basis and not solely as an annual anniversary.

Robert Burns, Why in Australia? Surely an easy question to answer!

The Burns Federation’s Annual Conference will be held in Melbourne, Australia from 18-21st September, 1997. Organising Secretary: Robyn Buccheri, 128 Bay Street, Brighton, Victoria, Australia, 3186. Phone: (03) 9 530 6777 Fax: (03) 9 530 6526.
THE GENTLE SCIENCE AGAIN

There is nothing worse in the academic world than the perpetuation of mistakes and the continuity of theories which are not, or cannot, be substantiated by documentary evidence. I don't know who first propounded what has been known in the Burns movement as the "Campbell Theory" but it must now be close on two hundred years old. That an ancestor of our family of the name of Campbell should have come over from Taynuit in the County of Argyll because of some trouble there, taken his name from that place which is Tigh an Allt in Gaelic, translated it into English as House of the Burn, settled in the County of Kincardine, altered the name to Burnhouse which then got corrupted to Burnes (or Burness) is a romantic story and to some, a plausible one, too. However, there has never been a shred of evidence to confirm that it is correct.

James Burnes (1801-1862)
Physician General, Bombay, India.

Despite a number of occasions when this theory has been exposed as unlikely and other theories concerning our ancestral lineage have been put forward, we continue to be confronted from time to time by those who would believe in its authenticity. As recently as 1990 a well written article by Samuel K. Gaw appeared in "The Burns Chronicle" on this very subject in an attempt to erradicate this belief. However, two unfortunate mistakes crept in - one a minor one but the other a much more serious one. The minor one was that he had my name wrong but I think this had merely been copied from something which William Coull Anderson, the founder of the Library of Genealogy at Arbroath, had written. The major one was that the captions under the two emblazonments depicted had been switched.

In order to obtain a thorough clarification of the position in respect of the two grants of Arms to Sir James Burnes – one in 1837 and the later one in 1851 which replaced the previous matriculation - I visited the Court of the Lord Lyon where they kindly allowed me to copy out the description of the second matriculation as given in the Register of Arms and reproduce for the sake of ready reference both emblazonments.

The original grant of Arms to Sir James Burnes in 1837 showing a reference to the Campbell Clan:-
The second grant of Arms to Sir James Burnes in 1851:-

James Burnes, Knight of the Royal Order of the Guelphs of Hanover.

James Burnes, K.H., F.R.S., late Physician General and Head of the Medical Department of the Army at Bombay, having presented a Petition to the Lord Lyon showing that the Arms formerly conceded to him have proved too complicated and that from a recent investigation great doubt had arisen in regard to the origin of his Name being from that of Campbell, he was thereby induced to crave the authority of his Lordship to simplify and amend his Shield and likewise to sanction some allusion to the fate of his two Brothers who fell at Cabool on second November, 1841. The Lyon Depute by his interlocutor on said Petition of date the sixth day of May current 1851 in respect of the Statements thereon set forth Granted warrant to the Interim Lyon Clerk to Matriculate of New in this Public Register in the name of the Petitioner the Armorial Ensigns under blazoned as the proper Arms of himself and his Heirs and of the other lawful descendants of his paternal Grandfather with due and proper Differences according to the Laws of Arms in all time coming, and that in room of the Arms conceded to the Petitioner by Letters Patent from the Lord Lyon of date twenty second day of April, 1837 and recorded of that date in said Register volume fourth page eighteenth vizt.

Ermine on a Bend Azure an Escutcheon Or charged with a Holly bush surmounted by a Crook and Bugle horn saltyreways all Proper being the well known device used by the Poet Burns; and on a Chief Gules the White Horse of Hanover between two Eastern Crowns Or in allusion to the Civil Hanoverian Guelphic Order conferred on the Petitioner by his late Majesty, and to the distinguished Services of himself and his Brothers in India. Above the Achievement are set the following Crests, vizt. upon the dexter side as one of Augmentation in allusion to the devotion of their Country shown by the late Lieutenant Colonel Sir Alexander Burnes, C.B., and Lieutenant Charles Burnes. Out of a Mural Crown per pale Vert and Gules the rim inscribed CABOOL in letters Argent a Demi Eagle displayed Or, transfixed by a Javelin in bend sinister proper and 2nd. upon the sinister that hitherto borne vizt. Issuant from an Eastern Crown Or an Oak tree shivered renewing its foliage proper, and in an Escroll below the Shield this Motto “Ob Patriam Vulnera Passi”. Appended to the above the Petitioner bears the personal Decoration of the Guelphic Order.

Matriculated of New the Fourteenth day of May, 1851.

[signed] James Lorimer, Jr.
Interim Lyon Clerk.

It will be readily seen how the position stood in the mind of Sir James Burnes and I hope this matter can now be allowed to rest without further resuscitation.

Lawrence R. Burness
The Executive Committee thought long and hard about a suitable project to commemorate the Bicentenary of the death in Dumfries of Robert Burns. Various schemes were discussed and discarded, the Club Librarian, Bill Sutherland proposed the placing of markers at the graves of Burns' contemporaries in St. Michael's Kirkyard. This he said, would complement the indicator plaque installed in 1936 by Club Past President M. H. McKerrow and make it easier for visitors to identify the graves of Burns' famous friends. Perhaps at the same time Mr. McKerrow's plaque could be refurbished as well.

The proposal was adopted with enthusiasm, such was Bill's power of persuasion, and a project committee formed. Initially members decided to survey the Kirkyard to check the locations of the headstones and confirm the identity of the occupant. This was not always straightforward as many of the stones were in poor repair and sometimes the inscriptions were impossible to read. The committee however agreed that the scheme was feasible and plans were soon put in hand. It was decided to place tasteful oval shaped plaques, set in concrete bases, adjacent to the headstones of the forty-four known contemporaries of the poet who appeared on Mr. McKerrow's indicator. Each plaque would bear the name of the deceased and a number corresponding to that marked on the original indicator plaque. Costs were calculated, a budget was agreed and thoughts turned to fund raising.

It was decided to open a fund to which all Burnsians could subscribe and the Appeal was launched officially in 1992. The initial response was encouraging and a prototype plaque was ordered from the manufacturer. After discussion with the Kirk Session and Nithsdale District Council, the legal owner of the Kirkyard, approval was given to proceed. Preparatory work on the bases was put in hand and Autumn 1995 was fixed as the target date for completion.

Early in 1995, an Act of God prevented the project from proceeding. The Kirkyard was closed as a result of the dangerous condition of the Kirk steeple and it was not until August that year that work began in earnest and with a sense of urgency. At this time, concern was expressed by some residents of St. Michael's Street who, on observing a motley crew of characters, regularly emerge from the Kirkyard after dark, some carrying spades, some pushing a wheelbarrow and on one occasion a camcorder,
could be forgiven for fearing the worst. It took the considerable diplomatic skills of the Honorary Secretary to assure the Police that nothing sinister was intended. Public confidence having been restored, the work within the Kirkyard was completed by October 1995 with only the individual plaques to be affixed early in 1996.

On the 27th of March, 1996 Provost Jean McMurdo of Dumfries inaugurated the marker plaques at the graves. Our picture shows the Provost with the Burns Howff Club President Graham Davidson. The plaque in the picture being number 17 for James McClure.

Plan showing the position of the graves in St. Michael’s Churchyard of the friends of Robert Burns.

Key to Graves

1 Rev. & Mrs William Burnside
2 Thomas Goldie
3 The Cutlers & Wauchope Riddel
4 Dr. John Harley
5 William Hyslop & Jean Maxwell
6 John Bushby
7 James Gracie
8 Mrs Agnes Eleanor Perochon
9 Robert Jackson
10 John Lewars
11 Rev. William Inglis
12 Francis Shortt
13 David & Jessie Staig
14 George Grey
15 John Mitchell
16 The Mausoleum
17 James McClure
18 Jessie Lewars
19 Adam Rankin
20 Dr. James Crichton
21 Robert Mundell
22 Col. Archibald McMurdo
23 Gabriel Richardson
24 James McDiarmid
25 Col. De Peyster
26 George Haugh
27 Mrs Every Miller
28 William Smith
29 William Wallace
30 David Williamson
31 Capt. John Hamilton
32 Dr. Archibald Blacklock
33 John Blacklock
34 Thomas White
35 James McNiel
36 Mary McLauchlan
37 Samuel Clarke Jnr.
38 Maxwell’s veteran chief
39 Mrs John McMurdo
40 David Newall
41 William Clark
42 William Thomson
43 Crosbie of Holm
44 Mrs David McCulloch
45 Alexander Douglas
X Site of Burns original grave
£500,000 FOR A BURNS TEMPLE IN KILMARNOCK!

At a meeting of Kilmarnock Town Council on 10th February, 1904, Provost James Hood gave the meeting details of a letter the Council had received from Mr. Hew Morrison, who was agent for Dunfermline born multi-millionaire, Andrew Carnegie. The year previous Carnegie visited the town in order to lay the foundation stone of Loanhead School and had also received the Freedom of the Burgh.

The letter stated that he had been most impressed with what he saw in the town, and in return for free space was offering half a million pounds to build a lavish Temple to Robert Burns. The letter further stated that the Temple would contain statues of the Poet’s contemporaries and characters from his works, artistic panels would display scenes from his poems and songs, and under the Temple dome a magnificent statue of the Poet himself.

The site suggested was at the entrance to Kay Park, opposite Tam Samson’s house in London Road. It was a wonderful offer and the town lost no time in informing the local and national press.

Almost immediately, word reached the office of agent Mr. Morrison, and he lost no time in informing the Council and the press that no such offer had been made. The letter was in fact a rather sick ‘hoax’.

The story however was out, and spreading across the world as fast as the technology of the day would allow. In Kilmarnock there was a genuine public sympathy for the Council. An investigation was launched and the typewriter used to type the letter traced to the Burgh Police Station where a sergeant admitted typing the letter at the request of one of the town’s Magistrates.
Hoping to keep the situation as quiet as possible, the Provost announced that the culprit had been identified and that by way of an apology, had donated £50 to the local Hospital. The Provost hoping that it would be the end of the matter. It was not, for the public wanted to know who was responsible for the hoax. Eventually, Bailie William Munro admitted that he was responsible, and that the hoax had got out of hand. He resigned his seat on the Council and like the Provost hoped that it would be the end of the matter, but it was not to be. The hoax was still the talk of the town and indeed the country.

A local stationer, Thomas Rodger, who was also a publisher of postcards, a hobby with collectors and very much in vogue at that time. He decided to ‘cash in’ on the hoax by producing a number of ‘comic’ postcards on the subject. These postcards have now become collector’s items like the one reproduced above. What then happened to Bailie Munro? Towards the end of 1904 there were elections in the town, and the local residents had apparently forgiven the Bailie for perpetrating the hoax, for he was re-elected to the Town Council.

Andrew Carnegie was a lover of the works of Robert Burns and provided finance for the purchase of numerous statues to the memory of the Poet. He was an honorary member of Greenock and Irvine Burns Clubs, and an Honorary Vice-President of the Burns Federation.

Peter J. Westwood

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*Past President of the burns Federation Dr. Jim Connor of London, Ontario, Canada and his wife Elma have presented a Bench to mark the Bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns. The Bench is sited adjacent to the Burns Memorial Stone in the local Park. The inscription on the plaque in front of the Bench reads:- Presented by Dr. Jim Connor, Past President World Burns Federation and Mrs. Elma Connor on the occasion of the Bicentenary of the Death of Robert Burns, Scotland’s National Bard, July 21st, 1796-1996. Jim pictured above with his wife Elma is a Past President of the Can-Du Burns Club, London Ontario Burns Club and NAAFB.*
Scotland was the centre of a flourishing souvenir wood ware industry for most of the 19th century. Hundreds of thousands of high quality products were despatched to all parts of the British Isles, Europe, North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Like the family of Robert Burns it started in Kincardineshire and began in the late 18th century when the habit of snuff taking was at its peak. The perfecting in Scotland of the integral wooden hinge led to a new type of handmade wooden snuff box becoming the most popular of a range of small wooden articles made as souvenirs of Scotland.

The integral wooden hinge was perfected by James Sandy a bedridden genius who lived in Alyth, Perthshire. Charles Stiven a Glenbervie joiner, backed by Lord Gardenstone a commercially minded high court judge, using the hinge set up a snuff box making business about 1783 in Laurencekirk, Kincardineshire.

Stiven's shop was very cleverly placed in the Boars Head Tavern (where Burns stayed on 11th September 1787, now called the Gardenstone Arms), the stagecoach stopping place. The snuff boxes became very popular with coach passengers passing through Laurencekirk, and were also acquired by the now prosperous middle classes who were benefitting from the industrial revolution. These early snuff boxes were made either in plain amboyna wood, grained fruit wood with coats of varnish or of mixed woods, and most were inlaid with tortoiseshell.

Lord Gardenstone recognised there was an expanding market and hired a continental artist called Brixhe who had experience in hand painting papier mâché ware at Spa in Belgium. Stiven then launched a new range of integral hinged wooden snuff boxes in sycamore with hand painted scenes associated with our national poet, hunting scenes, well known beauty spots, buildings or places with historical associations. This new range was an immediate success and not only extended their customer base but was very much sought after in high society. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were among the new clientele and Charles Stiven & Sons were awarded the Royal Warrant in 1848.

By the middle of the 19th century the habit of snuff taking was in decline having been overtaken by tobacco. Stiven diversified into checker, tartan and other finishings and made tea caddies, work boxes, visiting card cases and cigar boxes. However, they could not compete with the very competitive souvenir woodware industry now flourishing in the west of Scotland and ceased trading in 1868.

The first commercialisation was, therefore, in the east of Scotland but the development into a worldwide souvenir woodware industry came from Ayrshire in the west of Scotland. It started there in 1807 when Sir Alexander Boswell, the poet son of James Boswell the biographer of Samuel Johnson, was entertaining guests at his Adam designed family seat, Auchinleck House near Cumnock. Among his guests was a Frenchman who had broken the wooden hinge of his Laurencekirk snuff box. The box was sent to a local gunsnight called Wylie, whose employee Crawford executed the repair and in so doing, unearthed the secret of the wooden hinge.
Wylie and Crawford set up a partnership making and selling wooden hinged snuff boxes. Very quickly others followed and by the 1820’s there were over 60 box makers in Scotland with about 50 of them in the Ayrshire villages of Auchinleck, Cumnock, New Cumnock, Ochiltree, Catrine and Mauchline. These little companies all employed artists and at least three became very famous painters – William Leighton Leitch, Horatio McCulloch and Sir Daniel Macnee. Boxes were decorated in Indian ink or coloured paints the most popular being Robert Burns scenes, landscapes, well-known buildings, hunting scenes, risqué cartoons, classical figures and portraits.

The businesses thrived for many years but, like the east of Scotland, were affected by the tobacco trade, did not extend the range of products and, with two exceptions, had closed down by the 1880s.

The two exceptions were Mauchline companies - Davidson, Wilson and Amphlet and W & A Smith. These box makers had commenced business in the first quarter of the 19th century with wooden hinged sycamore snuff boxes and tea caddies and like their competitors diversified into checker and tartan ware. The Smiths were also renowned for beautifully finished, french polished razor strops first produced in 1810. The two partnerships expanded south of the border, Smith opening a sales office in Birmingham in 1829, quickly followed by a showroom and warehouse – their competitors followed in the 1850’s. In 1832 W & A Smith received the Royal Warrant from King William IV and although snuff taking was declining moved into Scots - Russian Niello ware. This technique used gold foil on black enameled varnish and Smith exhibited these upmarket costly snuff boxes at the Glasgow Exhibition of 1851.

The two firms mechanised the manufacturing processes, replaced wooden hinges with metal hinges and extended the range of woodware applying tartan varnishes and most ingeniously using the technique of transfer printing depicting places associated with Robert Burns and quotations from his works on many of their wares. This new range included cigar cases, money boxes, books of all kinds, toys and a wide range of needlework, stationery, domestic and cosmetic items. In addition an incredible range of boxes in every conceivable shape and size was introduced.

This vast range of goods in tartan or with Burns scenes was tremendously successful and was sent to all parts of the British Isles as well as overseas. Again the wood used was sycamore and frequently the origin was specified i.e. made of wood which grew on the banks of the River Doon.

Recognising that the industrial revolution allowed the middle classes to go on holiday on the
Tartan Ware, Fern Ware and Lacquer Ware: Prince Charles Tartan, Book of 120 coloured photographs of Scotland, Royal Stuart Tartan, Clark & Co., Thread Box, Fern Ware Stud Box, Coloured Fern Ware Clothes Brush, Lacquer Ware, Jewel Box with Floral Decoration, Book of Burns Poems, Lacquer Ware Bodkin Holder with photograph of Stirling Castle.

Photographic Ware: Money Box, Dumfries Mausoleum, Clock Money Box, Burns Cottage, Trinket Box, Burns Statue, Dumfries, Cuff Link Box, Burns Monument, Alloway, Lacquer Ladies Purse with Burns Quotation, Prince Charles Tartan Case containing Six Volumes of Burns Poems, Barometer, Sea Weed Pattern, Aide Memoire, Burns Cottage, Needle Case, Auld Haunted Kirk, Alloway.

improving railways, the range of products was further extended to transfer scenes of holiday resorts, pretty landscapes and notable buildings in the British Isles. Smith's, in particular, recognised there was an export market and produced views of France, Belgium, USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

The souvenirs sold in hundreds of thousands and the second half of the 19th century was the boom time in the sale of Mauchline Ware. W & A Smith at their peak employed over 400 people and were the largest employer in Ayrshire. Davidson, Wilson and Amphlet (also Royal Warrant Holders) were based at what is now the curling stone factory in Mauchline and employed 300 people, 200 being boys working at home applying up to 36 coats of varnish over a period of several days. The firms also had travellers or appointed selling agents. At Dunkeld in Perthshire, Davidson, Wilson and Amphlet's outlet was Anderson, a bookseller while Smith's agent was C. McLean, publisher at the Corner Shop, Athole Street.

An employee of Smith's, Archibald Brown, formed the Caledonian Box Works at New Lanark in 1866 concentrating on lacquer ware and applying photographs instead of transfer scenes and making advertising novelties for the very thriving and competitive thread and ribbon industry. The Mauchline firms also added photographs and advertising novelties to their range as well as introducing cheaper products such as fern ware, lacquer ware and floral ware.

The new product lines with advertisements were sold in very large numbers to thread manufacturers including Coats, Clarks, Ashworths, Chadwick, Medlock and M.E.Q. An advertisement would be displayed inside the lid or on the base and filled with reels of thread; these new lines proved to be very attractive.

The souvenir woodware industry started to decline in the 1880s as mass produced glass and porcelain products became available and the smaller thread companies were absorbed by the larger ones. Competition got even tougher. W & A Smith took over their Mauchline competitors now Wilson & Amphlet in 1884.
and Brown sold out to Mackenzie and Meikle in 1891. The sale of advertising novelties which had been the main reason for companies buying tartan ware virtually stopped with the amalgamation of Coats & Clarks in 1886.

The New Lanark firm ceased production in 1907 and the Smiths, now down to 25 employees, continued making their established products in decreasing numbers. Children’s wheelbarrows, plates, small items of furniture and “poker” ware were added to the range and were made until 1933 when a fire partially destroyed the factory. The firm finally closed at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Ironically, the site of the factory is now the fire station in Kilmarnock Road.

Mauchline was the focal point of a flourishing woodware industry for 130 years. During that time the Smiths in particular, with Scottish craftsmen, produced quality products, showed ingenuity in manufacture, enterprise, innovation and skill in marketing. Their achievements were most remarkable and it is easy to see why Scottish souvenir woodware is known familiarly as **Mauchline Ware**.

For further information on Mauchline Ware contact Alex Wilson, Mauchline Ware Collectors Club, Unit 37, Romsey Industrial Estate, Greatbridge Road, Romsey, Hampshire. SOS 10HR.

Collections of Mauchline Ware are on display in the Burns House Museum, Mauchline and The Baird Institute Museum, Cumnock.

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**Support the Burns Federation**

By Purchasing from the **FEDERATION SHOP**

See Page 14

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**TO ROBERT BURNS**

by

Jessie Mushett McCrea

Here’s ta ye, Robin, whaur ye lie,
Ye canna reck o’ warldly things;
Nor ken hoo high o’er warldly strife
Thy name in loving cadence rings.

Sae lang sin’ syne, O happy Rob!
’Tis love past comprehension maist,
That gars men stop their strife for gold
Ta laud a poet’s ghast.

For wae’s me, ‘tis the same auld warl
There’s want and woe where’r we turn,
“Man’s inhumanity to man,
Makes countless thousands mourn.”

It’s lang o’ coming, yet we hope
That is may come, for a’ that,
“When man ta man, the warld o’er,
Shall brithers be and a’ that.”

“The rank is but the guinea stamp.”
How few now join the grand refrain
Yet, lover of your fellow man,
Ye did na’ sing in vain.

Frae lowliest cot or grandest ha’,
Ta’day to thee ilk Scotsman turns,
And far and wide, wi’ honest pride,
We shout the name o’ Burns.

O’ a’ the sons proud Scotia boasts,
There’s nane we pit before ye,
Here’s ta ye, Robin, poet prince!
Here’s ta the land that bore ye!

And for a loving legacy,
Amang the links that bind us,
We’ll dedicate thy memory
To those we leave behind us.
HUGH CUNNINGHAM
(HON. PRESIDENT THE BURNS FEDERATION)

Hugh Cunningham – for many years, one of the best known names in Dumfries and Galloway, and one of the great stalwarts of the Burns Federation.

A native of Sorn in Ayrshire, Hugh arrived in Dumfries in 1929 as a trainee Sheriff Officer. In due course he was granted his commission as Messenger-at-Arms and set up in business in town. For over 50 years he practised throughout Dumfries and Galloway acquiring a reputation for fairmindedness, tact and great probity. Stories are legend of Hugh Cunningham’s kindness towards those who found themselves down on their luck and many people were helped to find housing and employment, often at some cost to himself. A lifelong supporter of good causes, Hugh with his good lady, Mattie, was happiest working quietly behind the scenes and his countless acts of charity, in general were unrecorded.

From his earliest days in Dumfries, Hugh immersed himself in local affairs and organisations which today, present a proud record of achievement. 60 years, member and past president of Dumfries Bowling Club. 50 years member, past president and treasurer of Dumfries Burns Club. Over 40 years service to Dumfries Infirmary League of Friends. 40 years enthusiastic service to Dumfries Old People’s Welfare, now Age Concern, each year responsible for organising the annual coach outing when often he would be the oldest person present. 50 years membership of the Guild of Players and in 1960, he was one of the key figures involved in securing the famous old Theatre Royal, with its unique Burns’ connections, for the Guild when its future was in doubt. The list goes on and on but Hugh was particularly associated with Dumfries Burns Club. As a committee member, he was for many years responsible for transporting the club’s priceless historic punch bowl from the bank to the County Hotel for the Anniversary Dinner.

Mr. Cunningham was a distinguished president of the Southern Scottish Counties Burns Association from 1970 to 1980 during which time he welcomed and conducted countless parties of visiting Burnsians to the places associated with the poet in Dumfries and district.

Hugh was elected district representative to the Burns Federation in 1965 and served on the Memorials Committee with responsibility for reporting on the local monuments and buildings with a Burns connection. In 1981, the Federation recognised Mr. Cunningham’s lifetime commitment with the confirmation of an
Honorary Presidency. For over twenty years Hugh and Mattie Cunningham with their friend Albert Finlayson were familiar faces at the annual conference, where their presence enlivened many a social gathering.

Modest and unassuming by nature, Hugh Cunningham was in the best sense of the word, a perfect gentleman and his passing at the age of 86 was felt by many, both in Dumfries and far outwith the region. Only a few weeks before his death, Hugh although in poor health, was the proud recipient of a Scroll Award for Lifetime Achievement, presented by Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council, thought by many to be long overdue.

WILLIAM JACKSON
(HON. PRESIDENT THE BURNS FEDERATION)

Coldstream Burns Club, the Burns Federation, and many friends from all over the world mourned the passing of William (Bill) Jackson of the Homestead in the Hirsel at Coldstream, who died at the Borders General Hospital on Wednesday 17th of July, 1996, at the age of 91 years.

Bill, was the youngest of a family of seven, born in the Homestead at the Hirsel, where his parents William and Jeanie Jackson had lived and worked since 1884. He followed his father as a joiner on the estate, and save for a few years after the second world war, when he went to London to help in the repair of bomb damage, he worked all of his life at the Hirsel.

Bill’s father was a member of Coldstream Burns Club for some 50 years, and Bill followed in his father’s footsteps when he joined the club in 1929, and remained a member of the club for 67 years, and a worthy secretary for 38 years.

Bill and Molly’s home at the Hirsel has been a Mecca over a long number of years for Burns enthusiasts, where they provided a warm welcome to all who visited.

In recognition of the diligent and conscientious work carried out over many long years, Bill was honoured by the Burns Federation in 1985 by being made an Honorary President at the Federation’s Annual Conference in London.

While Bill was widely known and respected as a “Burns man”, he was also much involved in many other facets of Scottish Borders life, such as football, which he played for Coldstream in the East of Scotland league, and Golf, which he played at Lennel, before that golf course was closed. It was Bill who approached Lord Home about the possibility of building a new golf course in the Hirsel, and Bill played a large part in the design of the first nine holes at Hirsel Golf Club, and as all the work was voluntary, the total cost was only £40. For his efforts he was made the first Captain of the Club. Together with his wife became life members.

When the second nine holes of the course were completed one of the holes was named “The Bill Jackson Hole” in his honour.

The list of Bill’s voluntary works in the
Borders is legend – Captain of Coldstream Boy’s Brigade, Chairman of Coldstream Community Council, Chairman of Coldstream Hospital league of friends, a long serving member of the local Cancer Relief Committee, a gardener with a great love of flowers and a much respected judge at many horticultural shows, and an untiring chauffeur ferrying patients to and from the hospitals in Edinburgh.

Bill loved life, and lived a full and active one, and his many friends will remember him with pride and pleasure.

Deepest sympathy goes out to his dear wife Molly in her irreplaceable loss.

Archie McArthur

(Hon. President The Burns Federation)

A. NORMAN WATTERS

With the death of Norman Watters on 5th January 1996, the Burns Movement in general and the Bowhill People’s Burns Club in particular lost one of the great Burns enthusiasts. Although the best part of a year has passed, those of us who knew him well are still coping with our great sense of loss.

Norman was a retired dentist, having graduated from Glasgow Dental College in 1947. After National Service in the RAF he practised in South Africa for three years before settling down, with his wife and family, in Kirkcaldy in 1953. For over twenty years Norman held the position of secretary of the Fife Local Dental Committee. He was a founder member and a Past President of Kirkcaldy Round Table. A keen sportsman is his day, Norman captained Kirkcaldy Cricket Club and was a member of Kirkcaldy Rugby Club.

However, it was as a Burnsian that we will remember him best. He joined the Bowhill People’s Burns Club in 1972, holding the position of Vice-President from 1985-1988 and taking over as President from 1988-1991. He led the club during its 50th anniversary celebration and was the driving force and inspiration behind its concert parties, providing entertainment for old folk, church organisations, bowling clubs and other groups. He was a Burns enthusiast par excellence and he infected the other members with his enthusiasm. If he knew of a place in Scotland associated with Burns’s life or mentioned in one of his poems, Norman visited it with other members and took numerous photographs of the occasion.

"The social, friendly, honest man.
Whate’er he be,
’Tis he fulfils great Nature’s plan,
And none but he”.

These lines might have been written for Norman, His ease with people, whether old friends or new acquaintances, was marked by laughter and story-telling. It was impossible to meet Norman without realising his inherent goodness.

“A correspondence fix’d wi’ Heaven is sure a noble anchor”.

We remember Norman rendering many
Burns songs, particularly “Ay Waukin O” and “The Deil’s Awa wi’ the Exciseman”. And we remember how he liked to dance as he sang the verse beginning “There’s Threesome Reels” or the verse from “The Ploughman” beginning “Snaw-white stockins on his legs”.

We, who were privileged to know Norman Watters and were so often the recipients of his very lavish hospitality, have an empty gap in our lives. Norman is survived by his wife Ann, his children David and Fiona, and his four grandchildren.

Wilf Allsop,
President, Bowhill People’s Burns Club.

MY GRANDPA

My Grandpa is so special, like no one else can be
There is no one as special, as my Grandpa is to me
No one could ever take his place. There is no possible way
To explain how special my Grandpa is to this very day
His funny laugh, his smily face, the way he walks, at his own pace
The way he’s always late for meals, because he has to record
And even though he sleeps till lunch, he never seems to be bored
The fun we’ve had, the laughs we’ve made
They’ll follow me to the grave
I could make a big long list on all the things about him
But one thing I’ll always know in my heart
Is that I’ll never doubt him!

– Jenni Watters

The above poem was composed by Norman’s granddaughter and recited at his funeral service in Kirkcaldy.

On Friday 5th January 1996 Norman Watters L.D.S. R.F.P.S., one of Fife’s well known and much respected citizens passed away in the Victoria Hospital Kirkcaldy. Norman Watters was the embodiment of brotherhood. He lived right up to the end loving his dear wife Ann, his family and venerating his friends. He believed intensely in the goodness of his fellow ‘Man’. His personal concern was always for the happiness for friends irrespective of class or creed. His character was full of natural simplicity, life-like and true, - aye a truly worthy Burnsian. Our loss to all who knew Norman was visually expressed by the packed to overflowing attendance at the memorial service in the West-End Congregational Church, Kirkcaldy. Many people travelled frae ‘A the Airts’, to pay their humble respects. Norman had been an exemplary member and President of Bowhill People Burns Club and the club paid their own tribute with their choral group singing his favourite Burns songs at the service.

Norman spared no effort and personal philathropic generosity to encourage and motivate his fellow Burnsians and friends locally and throughout the world, principally in Australia, South Africa and Zambia.

For eight months of the year, regularly every week he was host to the choral groups of the B.P.B.C. in his house. This group of singers, musicians and speakers is inundated with request from numerous organisations in Fife, Lothian, Falkirk, Dundee and as far north as Stonehaven. By his resolve and sincerity during his period of office as Vice President and President of B.P.B.C. longstanding friendships were made with clubs as far away as Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and Japan.
He spared no effort in supporting me when I organised the Young Peoples Burns Supper ‘Frae a’ the Airts’, in the Bachelors Club Tarbolton and the unbroken continuity of the annual Young Peoples Burns Suppers in Bowhill Cardenden for fourteen years.

His name is synonymous with schoolchildren’s competitions in Fife. Since his retirement he gave much of his free time to teach and encourage the learning of the Works of Robert Burns in Fife schools and clubs. Whilst not a member of the Burns Federation executive he willingly, actively shared in the workload of running the National Competitions in Fife.

Not only his family have lost a dear father who was widely known and respected but certainly the Burns movement are the poorer from his passing.

Our warm and sincere condolences go to his wife and family.

We have lost a friend. His presence will be missed by us for a very long time to come.

‘Know thou o stranger to the fame
Of this much lov’d, much honoured name.’

Charles Kennedy,
Past President The Burns Federation.

HOME LIFE IN BURNS’ TIME

by

F. Marian McNeill

The first half of the eighteenth century was one of the gloomiest in the history of Scotland. The burst of prosperity promised by the “paircel o’ rogues,” as Burns designates them, who negotiated the Treaty of Union, had failed to materialise. Instead, taxation had increased, and the loss of trade with France had been balanced by no appreciable expansion of trade with England and the Colonies. The grass that grew in the deserted High Street was symbolic of the stagnation into which the whole country had subsided.

But towards the middle of the century there came to the dispirited people new hope. It was not that England was moved to bestir herself on behalf of her new but already neglected province; it was simply that Scotland and England alike were caught up in the wave of prosperity that was sweeping across Europe. To that, and to the inventive genius of her sons, Scotland owes the period of prosperity that was dawning when Burns was born. The industrial and commercial expansion of the country naturally wrought great changes in the style and tone of the domestic economy. This is true of all classes; but it is with the cottage, where the bulk of the nation dwelt, that we are here concerned.

Burns’s own home was typical of his class and period. A generation earlier, the homes of the people were often no more than hovels, built of stones and turf without mortar, the holes being stuffed with heather or moss to keep out the draught, but these were now superseded by the snug but-and-ben — a two-roomed cottage with a passage or small mid-room between, and maybe a loft. The but-end, or kitchen, was the centre of the family life. The furniture was simple, but well-made — for the Scot is unexcelled as a craftsman in wood — and though designed purely for wear and comfort, possessed something of the simple natural dignity of the crofter himself. It consisted of the aumry or cupboard, a skelf (a wooden frame containing shelves) for the crockery, a kist for clothes, a box-bed built into the wall with shelves at head and foot, a muckle chair for the gudeman, and plainer chairs and creepies for the wife and bairns. There were also a plunge-churn, a spinning-wheel, and other domestic implements, with a barrel of oatmeal and another of salt fish.
Before the introduction of the eel-dolly, or oil-lamp, the dark winter evenings were lit by fir torches or rush-light from the crusie-lamp. The cooking was done over an open fire with a “swee,” or hook and chain, on which was hung the kail-pot for the porridge or broth, or the girdle, for the bannocks of oats and barley which were then the staple bread. Very good meals were turned out with these primitive utensils - stovies (potatoes cooked gently in butter till soft and melted), tatties-an’-herrin’, a haggis, or a fowl braised with onions, to mention but a few. Burns makes frequent reference to the homely fare on which he was reared – “the hale-some parritch, chief o’ Scotia’s food” in “The Cotter’s Saturday Night”; the breakfast dish of crowdie (meal and water) in “Crowdie Ever Mair,” sowans (a sort of flummery made from the fermented sid of the oats) in “Hallowe’en,” the barley bannock in “Bannocks o’ Bere Meal,” and the haggis in his immortal “Ode”; whilst his appreciation of the universal Sunday dinner, a singed sheep’s head, is indicated in his “Grace before Meat.”

During Burns’s life-time, the practice of tea-drinking spread from the houses of the gentry to the simplest homes, despite the fulminations of ministers and doctors and even despite its price, which was then four shillings a pound.

Earlier in the century the flutter of the rok and the reel had given place to the whir of the spinning-wheel. Every household spun and wove its own linen and its own woollens. Scotswomen, besides being the world’s best knitters, took the greatest pride in their linen, which was of fine quality and (through constant bleaching) of a snowy whiteness even in houses where the standard of cleanliness was in other respects not high. A travelling tailor used to come round and make up the gudeman’s suit, and the packman brought buttons and tapes for his wife and ribbons and falkals for his daughters.

Life on the land was laborious, particularly between March and October, when the day usually began at four and ended at seven or eight, or even later in harvest-time. The return of the labourer from his darg is depicted in a memorable stanza in “The Cotter’s Saturday Night”:

“At length his lonely cot aparets 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 hearthstane, his thrifty wifie’s smile,
The lisp in’ infant rattlin’ on his knee
Does a’ his weary kiaugh and care beguile,
And mak’s him quite forget his labour and his toil.”

The poem gives a vivid and faithful picture of family life in the humbler Scottish home — its kindliness, its hospitality, its reverence; but it shows the family in Sabbath mood, with the “natural man” in the safe custody of the Calvinist! In “Hallowe’en,” which admirably complements this picture, we get the rollicking fun of a rustic festival. The truth is that though family life in the eighteenth century was austere, sometimes even harsh, the normal effect of the grim creed of the Kirk was to a large extent counteracted by the humour, intelligence, and good sense of the people — not excepting many of the ministers themselves. There was, moreover, a curious dualism in the mentality of the folk, whose devotion to the dogmas of the Kirk was rivalled only by their devotion to the superstitious beliefs and practices of an earlier age. Druidism and Calvinism, one might say, sat one on each side of the ingle-neuk.

That Calvinism never succeeded in suppressing the natural man the cottage library of the period bears witness; for there, side by side with pious chap-books, tracts, and dreary doctrinal discourses, there were to be found songs and ballads in rough broadsides, together with the works of our rude Doric Boccaccio, Dougal Graham, which depict with healthy coarseness and much boisterous humour the life of the Scottish peasantry of the period — “how they drank, how they courted, how they wed, and how they forgot to wed.”
Holidays were few, Yule, popularly known as the Daft Days, being the one recognised holiday season of the year. The rural worker celebrated “the hinner end o’ yule,” which embraced Hogmanay or New Year’s Eve, Ne’er Day, and Auld Hansel Monday. Then the bonfires anciently lit on the Celtic Quarter Days — Candlemas, Beltane, Lammas, and Candlemas — still blazed in many parts of the country, and each festival retained some of its curious rites and customs, though Hallowe’en eclipsed all the rest in popularity. In addition, there was Eastern’s E’en (Shrove Tuesday), which was celebrated with cock-fighting and the baking of pancakes. Then there were domestic occasions. The kimmers forgathered for a lying-in, performed pagan rites to protect the new-born infant before baptism, from the fate of a changeling or the influence of the evil eye, and ate their merry-meat around the fire. Weddings and funerals were occasions of great festivity, and sometimes the revellers returned not clear in mind which they had been to! Habitual drunkenness was, however, rare among the poorer classes.

Life was hard — often far too hard — in those days; but we need not pity our eighteenth-century forebears overmuch; for they were “contented wi’ little and canty wi’ mair,” and then, as now, happiness depended far less on material circumstances than on the character and will-to-happiness of the members of the family.

THE BARD OF CALEDONIA

Almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, is its native literary product — when that native product is fine and noble and alluring.  
— Mark Twain

He loved and made the world his lover.  
— Bliss Carman

Robert Burns woke up one fine morning and found himself acclaimed as “the Bard of Caledonia”. Burns, “who walked in glory and in joy/following his plough, along the mountainside” (Wordsworth) shot into literary celebrity when he was just 26. Robert was born on January 25, 1759, in Ayrshire, Scotland to William Burnes (so he spelt his name) and Agnes Brown. This day is celebrated by many Scots with feasting and rejoicing, as a day of commemoration. William Burnes, a cotter or tenant farmer, suffered from grinding poverty. Robert and his brother Gilbert had to assist him in his farm labour. But the father did not neglect their education. Besides teaching them himself, he employed John Murdoch to give them lessons at home. The instruction which was intermittent and did not extend beyond two years was limited to grammar, elementary mathematics, handwriting and the rudiments of French. “Though I cost the schoolmaster some thrashings”, said Robert in a letter, “I made an excellent scholar and against the years of ten or eleven, I was absolutely a critic in substantives, verses and particles.” For his knowledge of literature, history, theology and philosophy, he depended on self-study.

On their father’s death, the brothers had to continue their toil on the farm for their livelihood. Burns’s first volume of “Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect” was published by one John Wilson of Kilmarnock (hence called the Kilmarnock edition). His intention was to use the money realised to go to Jamaica where a job was awaiting him. But the stars decided otherwise. The volume was an instant success and took the literary world of Edinburgh by storm. “Rab, the rhymer, was
Caledonia’s bard”. He was lionised in the Edinburgh literary circles—during his first visit. He also distinguished himself as a brilliant conversationalist.

Thanks to his literary reputation, he was appointed excise officer or tax inspector and he settled down with his wife Jean Armour at Ellisland, near Dumfries. He combined his official work with farming which, however, turned out to be a failure from the monetary point of view. In his later years he collected and wrote songs for James Johnson’s “The Scots Musical Museum” (a collection of old favourite songs of the Scottish countryside) and Thompson’s “Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs”.

Burns was fearlessly articulate about his sympathy for the revolutions in America and France. His satires against the established, formal institution of religion alienated him from the supporters of the orthodox Scottish kirk. Besides, he made himself notorious by his promiscuous ways. The general antipathy towards him might have provoked Carlyle’s statement, “Burns asked for bread, but people gave him stones.” A promotion as Excise Collector was within view. Burns looked forward to a “life of literary leisure and decent competence”, when rheumatic fever attacked him leading to his premature death at 37, on July 21, 1796. His body was removed to the Midsteeple and on July 25 he was buried with military honours. Ten thousand persons are reported to have taken part in the funeral testifying to their acknowledgement of their countryman’s genius.

Though Burns is not, in the strict sense, in the mainstream of English poetry—one cannot speak of him in the same breath as one would do of Shakespeare, Browning and Wordsworth—he is included in the category of the progenitors of the Romantic poets along with William Blake, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Gray and James Thomson. His interest in rustic life, his democratic sympathies, his passion for freedom and respect for the dignity of the common man, his love of Nature and his emphasis on emotion and the true voice of feeling rather on reason and intellect foreshadowed a new spirit, characteristic of the Romantics.

In the second half of the 18th Century, a favourite and popular concept—the cult of primitivism—developed. One aspect of his cult known as ‘cultural primitivism’ (Wordsworth’s poetic theory has affinity with this) is the belief in the existence of an order of ‘natural poets’ born with the divine gift of song who take to poetic composition, like ducks to water, or birds to air, independent of the rules of art, formative training and the impact of literary tradition. It was believed that such ‘untrained’ poets could be found among the peasants and the common people. They are free from the corrupting, contaminating touch of civilisation and artificial life. Their rural habitation and natural, simple life are believed to be a fertile soil in which they compose spontaneously like the natural spring from which water gushes forth. They “lisp in numbers for the numbers come.”

Burns was glorified by the Edinburgh literati as an instance of the natural genius, a “heaven taught ploughman”. One of the myths surrounding the life of Burns is that he was an untutored farm labourer, prompted by an afflatus to pour forth his soul in song. That he was an unlettered genius is far from fact. The truth is that his native talent was nourished and...
nurtured by the Scottish literary tradition. He broke free from the conventions of the effete 18th Century neo-classicism. He turned for literary models and inspiration to the oral tradition of Scottish folklore and folksong, and the rich, unbroken Scottish tradition dating back to the Middle Ages.

One day in November 1785, Burns turned up the nest of a field mouse, while ploughing. His servant took a stick to kill it. Burns prevented him saying, "He's done ye no harm." The same evening, he composed "To a Mouse" which is an apostrophe, in a tender, friendly tone of concern for the mouse. Creatures in the fields and the forests also have feelings (if only one has the wavelength to understand) similar to those of humans. Burns regrets that man has made inroads into the world of Nature instead of preserving harmony with it.

I'm truly sorry that man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union.

The uncertainty and danger to which the mouse is exposed provoke his general reflections.

The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley,
an lea' e us nought
but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy.

Niggardly, fault-finding critics might censure the poem for its morbid sentimentality, self-pity, attitudinising tendency but we had better conclude that the poet is giving expression to those sentiments which are "just the native, querulous feelings of a heart." "Two Dogs" is a dialogue between Caesar, an aristocratic dog and Luath, a street mongrel. Burns beautifully exploits the old Scottish tradition of the animal fable by setting it in a mock-heroic dialogue form. The rich-poor syndrome is deftly handled, avoiding crude and cheap propagandist postures. There is a tonal shift when the dogs reverse their roles. The bored existence of the rich is pitted against the soul-filling life of the poor. The poem presents a 'dog's-eye view' of man's condition. In the end, the beasts "rejoic'd they were na men, but dogs." Every dog has his day.

"To a Louse" is a dramatic monologue on a loathsome insect which Burns discovers crawling on the bonnet of a gorgeously dressed woman in a church. It is a social satire that pricks the social pretensions of the woman. The aphoristic conclusion clinches the argument.

O wad dome Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!

Burns was familiar with sight of the heads of Scottish peasant families leading the family worship every night. This scene has been immortalised in "The Cotter's Saturday Night." The poem, reminding us of Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village," is a picture of rustic simplicity and innocence. The family gathers round the big Ha'-Bible and "the priestlike father reads the sacred page" reiterating virtues like honesty and faith in God: "Princes and lords are but the breath of kings;" "An honest man's the noblest work of God;" "they never sought in vain that sought the Lord aright." The simple piety and devotion by the cottage hearth are contrasted with the public demonstration of faith.

Compared with this, how poor Religion's pride
In all the pomp of method and of art
When men display to congregations wide
Devotion's every grace, except the heart.

The poems carries an autobiographical interest and is Burns's poetic homage to his father. It has been translated into twelve languages.

Burns made no secret of his hatred of cant, snobbery, hypocrisy and distinction based on birth and wealth. He exalts honesty, dignity, independence and genuine worth in human and moral terms. In the poem "A Man's a Man for a 'That,'" he says that power and pelf are only 'tinselshow.' Rank is "but the guinea's stamp." A poor, but honest independent person towers above the prince
and the duke. He visualises with hope a world order where “sense and worth” will reign and where, “man to man, the world o’er/Shall brothers be for a’ that.” One of Burns’s songs “Auld Lang Syne” is a tender, subdued, affectionate recollection of ‘auld acquaintance,’ of the memorable days spent together wandering, paddling and drinking. The Chorus:

For auld lang syne, my dear
For auld lang syne
We’ll take a cup o’ kindness yet
For auld lang syne

has – a haunting quality, all its own.

Burns said that his aim was “to sing the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and his rustic peers around him in his and their native tongue.” He was in his element in his treatment of his chosen rustic themes, in his depiction of the customs, circumstances, idiosyncracies, beliefs and superstitions of his fellow peasants. His poetry has what Matthew Arnold calls “truth of substance.”

David Daiches declares that “Burns was canonised for the wrong reasons,” and that was his “posthumous misfortune.” He wrote during the period of the pre-industrialisation of Scotland: hence the pastoral mode. It is only in recent times, the real worth of the poet is identified. He is the loyal inheritor of the native Scottish literary tradition. It is in his poems and songs dealing with the rough and tumble of mankind, the scattered remnants and broken elements of the pre-industrial Scotland are gathered and brought to a unified shape. The Scottish folk tradition would have remained a thing of the past, had it not been for his restoration by reshaping the folk-tales and ballads, by fertilising them.

BUT YET THE LIGHT

Let us not celebrate death
But rather a life, lived gaily.
Mark well the day of his death
But honour his life lived, daily.

Burns was a creature of life:
Vitality, humour, passion.
Death was his only true strife
Steeped in the waters of fashion.

No other poet commands
Such universal affection.
Life made its fullest demands
But love was its total direction:

Love - for a daisy; a horse;
Love - for all lasses; all men.
Love was the fountain, the source
Of all the dear flow from his pen.

Love was the core of his world;
Hypocrisy, scourge of his wit.
Liberty’s flag he unfurled;
Brotherhood’s beacon he lit.

Love, then, the man and his creed,
He to whom all were as brother.
Nothing for malice or greed.
Each for the good of the other.

Humanity kindled his hopes -
Freedom for all mankind!
Where you can, loosen those ropes.
When you can, broaden a mind.

Dwell not two hundred years,
Death, and a vision of Heaven.
Remember his Life - hopes and fears -
Remember the thirty seven.

Then as you celebrate Burns,
Not in his death, but his living,
Pray that Humanity learns
The sweetness of love, and forgiving.

Rebecca Pine
July 21, 1996

The above poem was 3rd in the Glasgow Maltman’s Bicentenary Poetry Competition, 1996.
Hale and Weel and Cantie – A Burns Celebration
by Jeremy Fletcher

-is a work for symphony orchestra, based on
music associated with the poet

-was commissioned by the Royal Scottish National
Orchestra, and first performed in their Proms in June 96

-lasts some 20 minutes, and adds the glorious sound of
the orchestra to the timeless beauty of a selection of
melodies, arranged so that audiences can join in with
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Persons or Societies interested in promoting
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details from the composer c/o R.S.N.O.
73 Claremont Street, GLASGOW G3 7HA

DOONBRAE COTTAGE

BUILT 1810 BY D. AULD. WHY NOT COME AND STAY WITH US BETWEEN THE “BONNIE BANKS” AND THE “AULD KIRK”.
YOU WILL BE WITHIN AN EASY WALK OF HIS BIRTHPLACE, MONUMENT AND THE AULD KIRK, BRIG O’ DOON AND NOW THE TAM O’ SHANTER EXPERIENCE. WE ARE A PRIVATE HOUSE AND OFFER A HOMELY EXPERIENCE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE COME TO SEE THE BARD’S BIRTHPLACE.

FOR DETAILS - CONTACT:
John Pollok-Morris or Moira Johnston,
Doonbrae Cottage, 40 Alloway, Ayr, KA7 4PQ. Telephone: 01292 442511
A Bicentenary Research Conference entitled “Robert Burns and Literary Nationalism” hosted by Prof. G. Ross Roy and Prof. Patrick Scott of the University of South Carolina was held in Columbia, South Carolina from March 27 to March 31, 1996. The only academic event of its kind held in North America during the Bicentenary year, the Columbia Burns Conference featured scholars and speakers from all over the world, primarily the United States and Scotland.

There were 14 Conference sessions and 36 speakers in all with related topics ranging from “Burns and his Scottish Predecessors” to “The Influence of Burns Worldwide.” The Scottish novelist Alasdair Gray whose groundbreaking book *Lanark* was published in 1981 was the principal guest speaker for the weekend. Noted for his ebullience and wit, Gray gave a brief talk entitled “Robert Burns and Small Republics.” Another special guest was professor of Agriculture, Emeritus at Colorado State University, Tom Sutherland, who, with his wife Jean, has co-written the book *At Your Own Risk* detailing his six and a half year captivity at the hands of the Islamic Jihad in Beirut, Lebanon. Sutherland’s remarkable and moving story was made all the more empathetic when he told of how in great measure his sanity and spirit were kept alive during his imprisonment by the poems and songs of Burns he was able to remember, recite, reconstruct and even teach to his fellow prisoners.

Familiar Scottish scholars and professors speaking at the Conference included Donald A. Low of the University of Stirling, Kenneth Simpson of the University of Strathclyde, Ronald D. S. Jack of the University of Edinburgh, Margery Palmer McCulloch of the University of Glasgow, James Mackay of Glasgow as well as Alec Finlay of Edinburgh.

The United States and Canada were represented by Carol McGuirk of Florida Atlantic University, Peter Murphy of Williams College in Mass., Suzanne Gilbert of the University of Georgia, Donald Westing of the University of California at San Diego, Jeffrey Ritchie of Arizona State University, Jeffrey Skoblow of Southern Illinois University, Ronald L. Kindrick of the University of Montana, James Connor of London, Ontario, Thomas C. Richardson from Mississippi University for Women, Rodger L. Tarr of Illinois State University, Patricia Talbert of Charlotte,
North Carolina, James Montgomery of the Atlanta Burns Club, Robert Hay Carnie of the University of Calgary, Robert D. Thornton of SUNY-New Patz and Esther Hovey of California State University-Long Beach.

Other international participants included Peter Zenzinger from the Technical University of Berlin, Dietrick Strauss from Johannes-Gutenberg University of Germersheim Germany, Norman Elrod from Kreulingen, Switzerland, Lazlo Marx from Budapest, and Luiza Lobo from the University of Rio de Janeiro.

In addition to state level and university sponsors, the Columbia Burns Conference was supported by the enthusiastic members of the Atlantic Burns Club who made a contribution toward the attendance of Scottish scholar and speaker Liam McIlvanney of Oxford University. The opening night reception was hosted by the St. Andrew’s Society of the City of Columbia and a Saturday afternoon tea was prepared by the Robert Burns Society of the Midlands (South Carolina). A great disappointment was the absence of singer Jean Redpath who was to have opened the conference with a special concert but was ultimately unable to attend.

An impressive part of the conference was the extensive display in the Thomas Cooper library of books and ephemera from the Ormiston Roy Burns Collection. The display included a first rate Kilmarnock edition, a rare first edition of The Merry Muses of Caledonia from 1799, unusual foreign translations of Burns, contemporary notices of the Kilmarnock Edition, letters from Clarinda, George Thompson and Burns’ publisher William Creech, as well as rare editions of volumes displayed under the categories of Early Editions, Chapbooks, Scholarship, Religion, Burns’ Reading, Clarinda and Burns and Scottish Song.

All papers and lectures from the conference will be published in a special edition of Studies in Scottish Literature (SSL) available in the spring of 1997 through: Studies in Scottish Literature, Dept. of English, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29208, USA.

Thomas Keith

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BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATED IN NEW YORK CITY

Saturday October 26, 1996 was a beautiful, cool and sunny autumn afternoon on which a public ceremony to honour the Burns Bicentennial in New York City was held at the Burns Statue on the Mall in Central Park. Co-sponsoring the event with the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation were the Burns Society of the City of New York, The American Scottish Foundation, St. Andrew’s Society of the State of New York, The New York Caledonian Club and Scottish Heritage, USA.

The Mt. Kisko Pipes and Drums lead a processional followed by a welcome from Commissioner of Parks Henry J. Stern who read a greeting from Mayor Rudolph Guliani and introduced a representative from each of the sponsoring organizations as well as two special guests, singer Jean Redpath and a lineal descendant of Robert Burns, the Rev. James Burns of Tennessee. The proceedings, which lasted two hours and were attended by over 200 people, included speeches, poems and a concert of the songs of Burns given by Ms. Redpath. Thomas Quigley, Public Relations Manager for Schiefflin and Somerset (distributors of Dewars, Glenffidich and other Scotch Whiskys) presented a check for $5000 towards the Burns Statue Maintenance Endowment.
In 1993 the statue was repaired and restored through the Adopt-A-Monument Program, a joint venture of the Municipal Arts Society, City of NY Dept. of Parks and Recreation and the Art Commission. At maintenance endowment was established by the St. Andrew’s Society for the annual care of the sculpture.

Designed by Sir John Steele, Central Park’s Burns Statue was the first monument to Burns erected in North America and the first outside of Scotland. Unveiled in a ceremony on October 2, 1880, the statue is seated at the south end of the Mall, just east of the Sheep Meadow, along with statues of Christopher Columbus, William Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott and Fitz-Greene Halleck— the latter’s most famous poem being a tribute to Burns entitled “The Rose of Alloway”.

About halfway through this year’s festivities Commissioner Stern remarked what a good time he and everyone else was having, how impressed he was with the scope and power of Burns’ influence in America and then proposed that a new tradition be started of gathering every year at the Central Park statue to celebrate the Poet’s birthday on October 2nd. Firmly but politely corrected as to the date of Burns’ birthday by several vocal members of the audience, Commissioner Stern concluded regretfully that the weather on any given January 25th would be too cold and bitter to ask people to assemble outdoors. He then asked, “On which date did Burns die?” whereupon a number of cries of “July 21st” came from the crowd. The general consensus was that the heat and humidity of any given 21st of July in Central Park would not be conducive to a pleasant gathering in dress clothing and kilts. So it was agreed by all present that the first Saturday in October (coinciding with the statue’s original unveiling date of October 2nd) would be a fine time to start a new tradition and Commissioner Stern promised to be the principal instigator.

Thomas Keith
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