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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for January 22nd, 2016

To see what we've added to the Electric Scotland site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/whatsnew.htm>

To see what we've added to the Electric Canadian site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/whatsnew.htm>

For the latest news from Scotland see our ScotNews feed at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/>

Electric Scotland News

Updated my biography and Canadian Journal

I did a bit of an update on my own biography and Canadian Journal. I decided to expand a bit on my biography to more reflect the time of the BBS era and the start of the Internet. And as I am due to retire at the end of this month I thought I should reflect on the steps you need to take when due to retire.

You can see my biography at: <http://www.electricscotland.net/alastair.htm>

You can see my update on my Canadian Journal at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/canadandx.htm>

Now here are stories from the Scottish Press this week...

I might add that by providing these stories in some way I'm also providing an archive of news in Scotland so hope the links will still be available down the years.

Number of students in Scottish colleges falls by 152,000
Prompting warnings that the further education sector is in crisis.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/education/number-of-students-in-scottish-colleges-falls-by-152-000-1-4000847>

Brexit: the golden opportunity that could become Sturgeon's nightmare
England voting to leave the European Union could break up the United Kingdom. But Scotland voting to remain is far from certain

Read more at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/14/brexit-golden-opportunity-nicola-sturgeon-nightmare>

Judiciary backs calls for not proven verdict to remain
Under the Criminal Verdicts (Scotland) Bill, the so-called third verdict would be removed.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/judiciary-backs-calls-for-not-proven-verdict-to-remain-1-4002646>

Unfair council tax kept for fear of voters
Scotland's local government services, from schools to social care, are suffering from the shackles of council tax.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/brian-wilson-unfair-council-tax-kept-for-fear-of-voters-1-4002581>

Call for action to save North Sea oil and gas jobs

Six thousand jobs have been lost offshore - 30,000 in support industries and 30,000 in the service sector, according to one union estimate.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-35338631>

Battle of Culloden: myths debunked

SCOTTISH historian and author Trevor Royle examines troubled Culloden

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/heritage/historic-events/battle-of-culloden-myths-debunked-1-4004122>

A snapshot of Scotland's eating habits

The latest report by Scotland's new food body offers an intriguing glimpse into the eating habits of the nation.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-35361241>

Is this the shape of pubs to come?

A new scheme aimed at allowing rural pubs to provide a wider range of services for their communities has been launched in the Borders.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-south-scotland-35365470>

Jim Sillars to campaign for EU exit

Former SNP deputy leader Jim Sillars has revealed he will campaign for the UK to leave the European Union.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/jim-sillars-to-campaign-for-european-union-exit-1-4007425>

Number of overseas visitors to Scotland sees sharp fall

The number of overseas tourists to visit Scotland slumped last year, new figures have shown

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/number-of-overseas-visitors-to-scotland-sees-sharp-fall-1-4007721>

Electric Canadian

Pioneer Life Among The Loyalists In Upper Canada

This is an audio recording so a wee departure from our normal text and videos.

You can listen to this at <http://www.electriccanadian.com/pioneering/pioneerlifeaudio.htm>

Electric Scotland

Beth's Newfangled Family Tree

Got in Section B of the February 2016 issue.

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/bnft/index.htm>

Edgar Allan Poe

Found an old web site that has been deleted but available in the web archives which I've added a link to from his page.

See http://www.electricscotland.com/history/men/poe_edgarallan.htm

Early Frisian Settlements in Scotland

Found this paper and have added a link to it from our Dumfries page.

This was a result of getting in a comment where Frisian was mentioned and I confess I didn't know who they were and so used my

site to locate any information. There were several references and one in particular mentioned this paper and I managed to find a copy of it.

You can get to this link at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/dumfries/history1.htm>

Snippets from the Glasgow Herald Archives
Added a few more snippets...

The Miracles of Dunkirk & Scotch Broth which you can read at:
<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/snippets/war/index.htm>

Death of Mr Stewart A. Robertson
<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/snippets/education/19330124.htm>

Hope-Scott, James Robert
Advocate, friend of Gladstone,, Cardinal Newman and many others and added to our Significant Scots at:
<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/hope-scott.htm>

Songs from John Henderson
I have been working a fair bit with John this week as he'd been adding music track to many of his earlier songs so have now added around 30 music tracks for him.

He's also sent in a couple of new songs...

Logie (Stirling) at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/poetry/doggerel603.htm>
Physical Education at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/poetry/doggerel604.htm>

A Century of Scottish Life
Memorials and Recollections of Historical and Remarkable Persons with Illustrations of Caledonian Humour by the Rev. Charles Rogers, LL.D., FSA Scot. Second edition (1872).

I also added another book from this author: "Familiar Illustrations of Scottish Life" and you can read both of them at:
http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/rogers_charles.htm

THE STORY

There are actually many very interesting stories on the site that are really too long for including in here so like last week I've given you a great start to this story of George Thomson with a link to continue reading it on the site. This story of course continues our Burns theme.

George Thomson, the Friend of Burns
By J Cuthbert Hadden from The Scottish Review

MUSICAL Thomson (memorable, more so than venerable, as the publisher of Burns's songs): him I saw one evening sitting in the Reading-room; a clean-brushed commonplace old gentleman in scratch-wig; whom we spoke a few words to, and took a good look of.' Such is Carlyle's reference to George Thomson, speaking of his own visits to Edward Irving at Annan, somewhere about the year 1821. To any one who did not know the circumstances of the case, there would be something misleading in the description of Thomson as 'the' publisher of Burns's songs; for Burns's songs were being published before Thomson had anything to do with the poet, and Thomson's collection contained, after all, but a very small proportion of the lyrics which make up the Burns total in that department of verse. But Thomson has been rather unfortunate in the matter of designations. In Mr. W. K. Leask's recent monograph on Boswell he is referred to as 'the composer' (it is Mr. Leask who buries John Knox in St. Andrews!) while in Sir George Grove's Dictionary of Music he figures as 'the music-publisher of Edinburgh.' In the strict sense of the terms, he was neither composer nor music-publisher: he was an enthusiastic amateur musician, whose hobby was the collection and preservation of national music and song; and it was for this, as well as for the connection with Burns to which it led, that he desired and expected to be remembered. Having recently had his correspondence placed in my hands for editing with a view to publication, I propose in this article to revive his memory and to tell some things about him which will probably give a new interest to the well known letters of Burns addressed to him.

Writing to Robert Chambers in 1838, Thomson, then an octogenarian, declares that he cannot believe himself to be so old as the 'information' regarding the year of his birth would make him out to be. As a matter of fact, he was a couple of years older than even his 'information' led him to suppose. He gives his birth year as 1759, but he was really born on the 4th of March, 1757, as appears from the local registers. His father, Robert Thomson, was then a schoolmaster at Limekilns, in Fife; but soon after George was born the family removed to Banff. Here, as it appears, the dominie had somewhat of a struggle to maintain an increasing family; and after

trying 'some mercantile means of enlarging his income,' without success, he, about 1774, resolved upon going to Edinburgh. He became a messenger-at-arms in the capital, but I can find nothing further regarding him.

Young Thomson had reached his seventeenth year by this time, and had received a fairly good education, first of course from his father, and then at the local grammar school. He speaks himself of having learned 'the dead languages' at Banff; and from his correspondence afterwards I find that he could read both French and Italian, in which languages Beethoven and Haydn, notwithstanding that both were Germans, wrote their letters to him. In Edinburgh Thomson got into the office of a Writer to the Signet; and in 1780 he was lucky enough, through the influence of John Home, the author of Douglas, with one of the members, to secure the post of junior clerk to the Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Art and Manufactures in Scotland. Not long after, the principal clerk died, and Thomson succeeding to his post, remained with the Board until his retirement in 1839, after a service of fifty-nine years. In his official capacity there is very little of interest to tell regarding him, though one or two circumstances connected therewith may be brought out in the course of this paper. He seems to have found both his work and his superiors entirely to his mind, and no doubt his duties were light enough to enable him to give a good deal of office time to the subject which so engrossed his attention. When he was twenty-five he had entered upon a very happy union with Miss Miller, the daughter of a lieutenant in the 50th regiment. By this lady he had two sons and four daughters. One of the latter, Georgina, became in 1814 the wife of George Hogarth, the musical critic and historian, and a daughter of that union, Catherine, became, as everybody knows, the wife of Charles Dickens. The novelist's children are thus the great grandchildren of the old gentleman in the scratch-wig whom Carlyle had 'a good look of' at Annan. There is a letter of Burns written to Thomson in July 1793, in which the poet, speaking of the first volume of Thomson's collection then recently published, says:

'Allow me to congratulate you now as a brother of the quill. You have committed your character and fame, which will now be tried for ages to come by the illustrious jury of the sons and daughters of taste—all of whom poesy can please or music charm. Being a bard of Nature, I have some pretensions to second sight; and I am warranted by the spirit to foretell and affirm that your great-great-grandchildren will hold up your volumes and say with honest pride: "This so much admired selection was the work of my ancestor."

It would be interesting to know if Burns's prediction has been fulfilled in this particular. Personally, I am somewhat doubtful!

I have said that Thomson was an enthusiastic amateur musician, and the phrase in his case covers a great deal more than it usually does in these greedy utilitarian days. It was not his time only that he gave towards the furtherance of the art; he gave much of his means for the same cause, and in one case of which I shall have to speak he involved himself in a serious pecuniary difficulty simply in order that a talented girl might not want for a proper musical training. As a musical amateur, his great hobby, apart from his interest in national song, was the violin. In his leisure hours he used, as he puts it himself, 'to con over our Scottish melodies and to devour the choruses of Handel's oratorios, in which, when performed at St. Cecilia's Hall, I generally took a part. ... I had so much delight in singing these matchless choruses and in practising the violin quartettes of Pleyel and Haydn that it was with joy I hailed the hour when, like the young amateur in the good old Scotch song, I could hie me hame to my Cremona and enjoy Haydn's admirable fancies.' Whether Thomson ever possessed a 'Cremona' I am unable to say: the term is sometimes used in a loose way as merely a synonym for violin. But if such an instrument was not among his belongings, it was not because he had made no effort to obtain it. In the year 1819 he was trying to sell the copyright of certain compositions which Beethoven had written for him, and in a letter to Messrs. Breitkopf & Hartel, the music publishers of Leipzig, he says:

'I have long wished to possess an old violin of the best quality by Stradivarins or Joseph Guarnerins. If you have a violin of either master of undoubted originality and in good preservation I would give you all the MSS. of Beethoven above-mentioned in exchange for the violin.'

As the manuscripts 'above-mentioned' were valued by Thomson at the low figure of a hundred and twenty-five ducats (say £62), it is evident that cremona violins were not then the costly things that they are now, when an instrument 'of undoubted originality and in good preservation' can seldom be procured under £1000. The Leipzig firm, unfortunately, did not care to have the Beethoven MSS., and Thomson, for the time being at any rate, had to do without his cremona. From one of his letters I see that he sent 'Hogg a violin as 'a small return' for some of the songs the Ettrick Shepherd had written for him.

The St. Cecilia concerts, of which Thomson speaks, were a notable institution in the Edinburgh of a hundred years ago and earlier. Thomson had a good deal to do with them in his time. He calls the undertaking 'one of the most interesting and liberal musical institutions that ever existed in Scotland, or indeed in any country,' and allowing a little for excusable exaggeration, the claim may be admitted. The concerts, to quote Chambers, were attended by 'all the rank, beauty and fashion of which Edinburgh could then boast;' and in addition to the professional performers, 'many amateurs of great musical skill and enthusiasm, such as Mr. Tytler of Woodhouselee, were pleased to exhibit themselves for the amusement of their friends, who alone were admitted by ticket.' In their first form the gatherings were known as the 'Gentlemen's Concerts.' In Guy Mannering it will be remembered that Scott speaks of Counsellor Pleydell as 'a member of the Gentlemen's Concert in Edinburgh,' 'scraping a little upon the violoncello.' At first the place of meeting was the upper room of St. Mary's Chapel in Niddry's Wynd; but by the year 1762 the Society had so increased in popularity that a hall, named after the patron saint of music, was specially built at the foot of the Wynd. The structure was designed on the plan of the Grand Opera House at Parma, but of course on a smaller scale. Arnot, the historian of Edinburgh, says it was excellently

adapted for music, and had a seating capacity of about five hundred. The orchestra, he remarks, is at the upper end ' which is handsomely terminated by an elegant organ.' In its time the building would seem to have been given up to some rather doubtful doings. Its palmiest days were the days when convivial knights-errant used to 'save the ladies' by toasting their idols in a bumper. The deepest drinker ' saved his lady,' and Thomson, speaking of the old place in Niddry's Wynd, declares that the bold champion had often considerable difficulty in ' saving' himself from the floor in his efforts to regain his seat.

The concerts of the Society went on until the spring of 1798, by which time, owing to the attractions of the New Town, it was beginning to be felt that Niddry's Wynd was not quite a convenient locale for a concert hall. In addition to that, it appears that the building of the South Bridge was believed to have done harm to the Society's hall; for we find the Improvement Trustees handing over certain areas adjoining the building' 'to the Directors of the said Musical Society, as a recompense for their having agreed to the widening of Niddry Street, by which the entry to the hall was much hurt.' The Society, at anyrate, was formally wound up in 1801, and next year the hall was sold to the Baptists. In 1809 it was purchased by the Grand Lodge of Scotland; in 1844 by the Town Council as Trustees for Dr. Bell's Trust; and now it is occupied as a warehouse. It has, of course, seen a good many changes since George Thomson and other grave amateurs of his time made music within its walls, but enough of the original remains to show how admirably the place was adapted for concert purposes.

It was in Niddry's Wynd that Thomson got his first incentive towards making a collection of national song. On this point it will perhaps be best to quote himself. He says:

'At the St. Cecilia concerts I heard Scottish songs sung in a style of excellence far surpassing any idea which I had previously had of their beauty, and that too from Italians, Signor Teuducci the one and Signora Domenica Corri the other. Teuducci's "I'll never leave thee," and "Braes o' Ballenden," and the Signora's "Ewe-Bughts, Marion," and "Waly, waly," so delighted every hearer that in the most crowded room not a whisper was to be heard, so entirely did they rivet the attention and admiration of the audience. Teuducci's singing was full of passion, feeling and taste, and what we hear very rarely from singers, his articulation of the words was no less perfect than his expression of the music. It was in consequence of my hearing him and Signora Corri sing a number of our songs so charmingly that I conceived the idea of collecting all our best melodies and songs, and of obtaining accompaniments to them worthy of their merit.'

It is certainly not a little curious that the beauty of Scottish song should been first revealed to Thomson by a couple of Italians; but the musical Edinburgh of his day, as indeed it has always been to some extent, was dominated mainly by foreigners. There was Christoff Schetky, the principal 'celloist of the St. Cecilia Society; there was Pietro Urbani, of whom more by and bye; there were various members of the Corri family; there were Teuducci and others—all continental artists, and all more or less intimately associated with the music of the capital; while only the Gows and Stephen Clarke and such like had a footing as representing the native element in art. Teuducci was very fond of singing Scots songs, and there is a unity of testimony to the fact that he sang them uncommonly well. He came to Edinburgh to take part in the St. Cecilia concerts in 1768, and he appeared regularly before the Society for some time after. All the time he was giving lessons in singing; and one of his pupils, it is interesting to note, was the Alexander Campbell who so miserably failed to teach psalmody to Sir Walter Scott, owing to the 'incurable defects' of the novelist's ear.

You can read the rest of this story about a quarter down the page at:
http://www.electricscotland.com/history/articles/george_thomson.htm

And that's it for this week and hope you all enjoy your weekend.

Alastair