



ELECTRICCANADIAN.COM
AGRICULTURE & WILDLIFE
ARTICLES
BETH'S FAMILY TREE
BOOKS
BUSINESS
CHILDREN'S STORIES
CLANS & FAMILIES

CULTURE & LANGUAGE
DONNA'S PAGE
ELECTRICSCOTLAND.NET
FAMOUS SCOTS
FAMILY TREE
FORUMS
FOOD & DRINK
GAMES

GAZETTEER
GENEALOGY
HISTORIC PLACES
HISTORY
HUMOR
JOHN'S PAGE
KIDS
LIFESTYLE
MUSIC

NEWSLETTER
PICTURES
POETRY
POSTCARDS
RELIGION
ROBERT BURNS
SCOTS IRISH
SCOTS REGIMENTS
SERVICES

SHOPPING
SONGS
SPORT
SCOTS DIASPORA
TARTANS
TRAVEL
TRIVIA
VIDEOS
WHATS NEW

HELP TERMS OF USE CONTACT US

Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for March 17th, 2017

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

Today the Queen has granted royal assent to the article 50 bill, giving Theresa May the legal power to start Brexit negotiations with the European Union.

The European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill was passed by MPs and peers on Monday.

It allows the prime minister to notify Brussels that the UK is leaving the EU, with a two year process of exit negotiations to follow.

Mrs May says she will trigger the process by the end of the month.

It is unlikely to happen next week to avoid a clash with an informal summit of EU countries.

The meeting will mark the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, which established the European Economic Community, and in turn became the European Union.

David Davis, the secretary of state for exiting the EU, said: "The Queen has today given royal assent to the article 50 bill, giving the government the formal power to trigger article 50 and deliver on the will of the British people.

"By the end of the month we will invoke article 50, allowing us to start our negotiations to build a positive new partnership with our friends and neighbours in the European Union, as well as taking a step out into the world as a truly global Britain."

Scottish Independence

Lots of discussion this week with Brexit being passed in the UK and thus giving permission for May to start article 50 which looks to be activated by the end of this month.

Then we have the SNP calling for a second referendum which looks to go through next week. Problem with this is there is now some confusion on whether the FM wants to go for EU membership or pursue EFTA and EEA membership.

We also hear that May is likely to refuse the referendum until after the UK has left the EU.

Also various polls showing both increase and decrease in the wish for Independence so difficult to decide who to believe.

And so interesting times ahead.

Scotland's Pre-Eminent Bardic Family to Gather in Scotland to Elect First Leader in 800 Years

In August 2017, members of the worldwide Currie family (anciently MacMhuirich, "MacVurich"), once influential poets and historians to

the Lords of the Isles and other prominent families and clans, will gather in Scotland to take part in two special events. They will hold a Family Convention to select their first Commander and later join, at the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, with other honoured families and clans to celebrate the Scottish Diaspora as part of the Tattoo's "Splash of Tartan" celebration.

Family Convention

In a process regulated by Dr. Joseph Morrow, QC, Lord Lyon King of Arms, family members will meet at The Trades Hall of Glasgow on 15 August 2017 at 2.00pm for a Family Convention to select a Commander who would act as Head of Family in the anticipation of a later selection of a Chief of the Name and Arms of Currie. As part of the procedure to find that person, the family has conducted an international search for Representatives. The closing date for nominations is noon, 30 June 2017.

The Court of the Lord Lyon, which has jurisdiction in such matters, said there are a number of reasons why a family might hold a Family Convention. Most appropriately for the Curries, it's, "Where neither blood link to a past chief nor Representer of a cadet line can be identified but it is wished to propose a particular person of the surname as Commander." The proceedings in Glasgow will be overseen by Liam Devlin, Unicorn Pursuivant, as the appointed Presiding Officer.

Professor Hugh Cheape from the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture added, "This kindred [Currie] as 'bardic dynasty' with such a remarkable history ought now to be recognised on the wider stage of Scottish culture as a family with an independent role at the centre of a widely connected and well-ordered culture..."

Will this family, descended from the 13th century Irish bard, Muireadhach Ó Dálaigh (O'Daly) ever be considered a Clan? Well-known genealogist, heraldist and historian Dr Bruce Durie said, "Historically there never was a Clan Currie or Clan MacMhuirich, with territories and a quasi-military structure. The term 'family' is probably inappropriate for Currie, as it indicates the Lowlands. The MacMhuirichs, however, were proud Highlanders, and hereditary bards to a number of clans. They were truly a 'learned kindred', which may be the best designation for Currie."

Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo

On Saturday 19 August at 10.30pm, as part of an exciting new partnership between the Scottish Diaspora and the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, the Curries, one of a number of honoured clans and families, will march up the Royal Mile onto Edinburgh Castle esplanade and be recognized in a pre-show ceremony. A proud moment for all involved.

The Rev. Dr. David Currie said, "As chaplain of the Clan Currie Society, I have had the privilege of meeting hundreds with my surname from around the world at our 'Pipes of Christmas' concerts, 'Tartan Day on Ellis Island,' and other events. One of the most memorable events for me was marching up the Royal Mile as part of the Gathering of the Clans event about a decade ago. As we Curries took our place alongside other Scottish families, the only thing that I thought could make it better would be if we could take our place as formally recognized by the Lord Lyon with a commander or chief."

"After our Family Convention on the 15th of August I look forward to retracing our steps on the 19th having fulfilled that hope as a recognized 'Learned Kindred' with a Commander leading us to the castle as one of the honored clans for the Edinburgh Tattoo."

For further information (United States) contact:

Rev. Dr. David Currie, Clan Currie Society Chaplain: currieconvention@gmail.com

Neil Gunn (Scotland) currieconvention@ngwriting.com

Scottish News from this weeks newspapers

Note that this is a selection and more can be read in our ScotNews feed on our index page where we list news from the past 1-2 weeks. I am partly doing this to build an archive of modern news from and about Scotland as all the newsletters are archived and also indexed on Google and other search engines. I might also add that in newspapers such as the Guardian, Scotsman, Courier, etc. you will find many comments which can be just as interesting as the news story itself and of course you can also add your own comments if you wish.

What's inside Scotland's baby boxes?

We unbox one of Scotland's new baby boxes to see what new arrivals can expect.

View this at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-39225542>

Ptarmigan in camouflage - a daunting quest

We've tried to spot this mountain dwelling grouse in its white-feathered finery, but it's elusive

Read more at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/mar/10/ptarmigan-in-camouflage-a-daunting-quest>

What's holding them back?

Recent constitutional debates in the UK have had the tendency for wild proclamations of superior outcomes with no practical detail on how said outcomes are to be achieved.

Read more at:

<http://sceptical.scot/2017/03/whats-holding-them-back/>

Children interrupt interview live on BBC News

A bit of fun

View this at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/odd/children-interrupt-interview-live-on-bbc-news-1-4389260>

Over-60s independence poll shows 70% would back another No vote

NICOLA STURGEON'S hopes of a successful second independence referendum have been dealt a major blow after 70% of mature voters revealed they would continue to back the Union.

Read more at:

<https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/scots-deeply-divided-as-over-60s-firmly-say-no/>

Growing prospects for trade across the Commonwealth

The Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty The Queen, with more perspicience than many of her Ministers, has described the modern Commonwealth as 'in many ways the face of the future'.

Read more at:

<http://brexitcentral.com/growing-prospects-trade-across-commonwealth-becoming-especially-attractive-important/>

Sturgeon announces she will seek authority for indyref2

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announces independence referendum will be between Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/live/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-39255256>

Parliament clears way for Brexit talks

The House of Lords has passed the Brexit bill, paving the way for the government to trigger Article 50 so the UK can leave the EU.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-39262081>

Dementia the biggest health challenge Scotland faces

There are around 90,000 people living with dementia in Scotland and it is esimated that 20,000 people will be diagnosed with the condition each year by 2020.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/health/dementia-the-biggest-health-challenge-scotland-faces-1-4392073>

The Russia Insinuation Collapses

Trump wins again, but now faces policy challenges by Conrad Black

Read more at:

<http://www.conradblack.com/1276/the-russia-insinuation-collapses>

Scotland leaving EU no matter what - PM

The prime minister has claimed that Scotland will be leaving the European Union regardless of whether or not it votes for independence.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-39282094>

Richard Murphy, GERS Denier

Twitter has been rife with GERS denial over the last 24 hours, triggered by a bizarrely ill-informed blog written by "the man behind Corbynomics", Richard Murphy.

Read more at:

<http://chokkblog.blogspot.ca/2017/03/richard-murphy-gers-denier.html>

Electric Canadian

We are finally ready to tackle our cruelly dysfunctional 'justice' system — for the wrong reason
by Conrad Black

Read this article at:

<http://www.conradblack.com/1275/we-are-finally-ready-to-tackle-our-cruelly>

Chronicles of Canada

Added Volume 22: Pioneers of the Pacific Coast: A Chronicle of Sea Rovers and Fur Hunters.

I might add that I've found text copies of these volumes so have added a link to them on the page. I also found a page where you can get audio copies so have placed a link to these as well.

You can read this at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/chronicles/index.htm>

D. C. Beard

Author of many books on bush craft for the Boy Scouts of America. I thought I'd bring you a few of them as having found them I enjoyed them and so hope you do as well.

Added another book, "The Book of Camp-Lore and Woodcraft" in which you get to read about making a fire, the use of saw and axe and lots more which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/pioneering/beard/>

Electric Scotland

The Forfar Directory and Year Book

A most interesting publication with lots of wee stories and articles. I have now added the 1893 edition which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/forfar/direct/>

Beth's Newfangled Family Tree

Got in section 2 of the April 2017 issue at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/bnft/index.htm>

A Topographical and Historical Account of the Town of Kelso

And of the Town and Castle of Roxburgh with a Succinct detail of the occurrences in the History of Scotland connected with these celebrated places and an appendix containing various official documents, etc. by James Haig (1825)

You can read this book at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/gazetteer/vol4page343.htm>

Scottish Pageant 1513-1625

Edited by Agnes Mure MacKenzie

You can read this at: http://www.electricscotland.com/books/pdf/scottish_pageant-1513-1625.pdf

My Own Fairy Book

Namely certain Chronicles of Pantouflia, as notably the Adventures of Prigio, Prince of that country, and of his son, Ricardo, with an Excerpt from the Annals of Scotland, as touching Ker of Fairniee. Added a link to this book at the foot of his page.

You can read this at: http://www.electricscotland.com/history/fairy/andrew_lang.htm

An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of Emigration

From the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland with Observations on the means to be employed for Preventing it by Alexander Irvine (1802).

You can read this book at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/emigration.htm>

The Story

BURNS LEAVING SCHOOL

“My talents they were not the worst,
Nor yet my education, O;
Resolved was I, at least to try,
To mend my situation, O.”
—Burns.

IF size were an index of age, the little village of Kirkoswald might be taken for one of the youngest in Scotland. It happens, however, to be one of the very oldest. If you count its lintels or lum-heads you will probably set it down as including some five or six score of households, and these, you think, cannot have taken many twelve months to gather. They have taken — if you look at the matter in this light - more than twelve centuries! In other words, we must go back to the middle of the seventh century to find the commencement of the history of that little roadside Carrick hamlet which keeps its youth at such an advanced age. What particular reason King Oswald of Northumbria had in planting a Christian Church in a secluded and boggy hollow of western Ayrshire, neither on the coast nor yet inland, it is impossible at this late date to say. His reason in a general way we know — for he was burning with all the zeal of a masterful neophyte. But round the holy edifice in that particular site grew up the clustering cottages in social community, whose representatives bear to this day the topographical name of Kirkoswald.

Its interest to the antiquary lies, of course, in its age. To the general reader its sole attraction is probably to be found in its connection with the earlier personal history of Burns, and with one of the later and most popular of his poems. For here the national bard — even then a poet, though a young one— at last brought his school-days to a close; and here in the populous old churchyard are said to rest the mortal remains of the eponymous hero of “Tam o’ Shanter.” Young Burns was a few months over his sixteenth year when, probably towards the end of May, and certainly — no matter what Currie and the “Encyclopaedia Britannica” and Blackie have said to the contrary—in 1775, he came from his home at Mount Oliphant, south-westward some ten miles as the crow flies to the parish school of Kirkoswald to learn mensuration, surveying, and dialling — whatever that last mentioned branch of knowledge might be.

[I am indebted to a correspondent of the Scotsman for the following note... I have no doubt that the term ‘dialling’ simply means the use of the magnetic compass in land surveying. The compass fitted with sights which is used in mining surveying is known as a ‘miner’s dial,’ and surveyors are still in many districts popularly spoken of as ‘diallers.’ The Kirkoswald course of instruction would probably also include the use of the sextant as a means of calculating distances and altitudes, so that Burns’ occupation taking the sun’s altitude ‘in the garden one charming noon’ is easily explained. I may add that similar courses of instruction were regularly given in the country parish school which I attended twenty years ago.]

Two considerations guided his father, old William Burnes, in making choice of the school at Kirkoswald rather than Dairyple or Ayr, which were both in the neighbourhood, and, indeed, comparatively quite near. One was the reputation of the schoolmaster of Kirkoswald — a Mr Rodgers — for mathematical attainments, and the other the residence in Kirkoswald of Samuel Brown, the maternal uncle of the young poet, with whom he could lodge. The Browns appear to have belonged originally to Kirkoswald or the neighbourhood, and we must not forget that it was at Maybole Fair, four miles from Kirkoswald, that William Burnes first met and made the acquaintance of Agnes Brown, his future wife. It was, almost certainly, in the farm-house of the bride’s father, near Kirkoswald, that the marriage took place.

A village of the Kirkoswald type is conservative of its appearance and customs, and, even allowing for the inevitable signs which mark the lapse of years, Kirkoswald probably presents to-day all the main, and many of the minor, features which distinguished it a hundred and fifteen years ago. The landscape lying around it is certainly little altered. There is the same close and even confining horizon, where the sky all round rests on low arable hills, huddled together somewhat unpicturesquely. Probably there is more wood. The line of road is the same. Running from Maybole on the north, it passes between hedge rows of hawthorn, hung here and there with bramble or boor-tree, into the heart of the village, where it curves suddenly onwards past the old churchyard, past the marsh at the town end, and out into the primitive country, with a descending sweep, and by-and-by an open prospect towards the sea. The dip of the road in its course of a little over two miles from the village to the sea is between three and four hundred feet. A lovelier walk in summer time it would be difficult to find or even imagine. Rough, broken banks, bushy here, there clad with copse, are on one side; on the other are hedges of hawthorn, with green braes rising above them; song-birds and singing burns are all about, and make a continual trebling in the ear against a fine background of ocean bass. The shore of Ayr lies like an etching before you; and far to the south, at the back of Girvan, are the famous hills behind which u Stinchar flows, ‘mang moors and mosses many, O!’ The sea is invisible at Kirkoswald, but its voice fills the street on a lown day, or when the wind is westerly. The houses are still for the most part what they were in Burns’s boyhood — little whitewashed cottages with thatched roofs and heavy, hospitable lum-heads, sitting in a social row by the roadside together, like cottar wives in clean mutches gossiping sedately in the sun. Each cottage has its little trimly-fenced kailyard in front or behind it, with a bed or border of the scanty plot bright with sweet-william and fragrant with apple-

ringie or thyme. There want but the appearance of a black-eyed, swarthy-faced youth in one of these garden plots, and a Peggy Thomson beside him to confound his trigonometry, and the illusion would be tolerably complete. We should then have both scene and dramatis personas, with the re-enactment of a charming love-idyll well known to all students of the early life of Burns.

The episode here referred to, one of several which brightened the rather sombre if not quite sunless youth time of Burns, is best told in the poet's own graphic prose. The account is given in the autobiographical letter to Dr Moore:—

"I spent my seventeenth" [this is the word in the original manuscript, and not nineteenth, as is commonly supposed]—"my seventeenth summer on a smuggling coast a good distance from home, at a noted school, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling" [not drilling, as Blackie prints it], "&c. in which I made a pretty good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were till this time new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here though I learned to fill my glass and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand with my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month [August] which is [1787] always a carnival in my bosom, when a charming fillette, who lived next door to the school, upset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the spheres of my studies. I, however, struggled on with my sines and co-sines for a few days more; but stepping into the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel

"1 Like Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower."

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I stayed I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless. I returned home very considerably improved."

There are several points in this brief but comprehensive record of young Burns' experiences at Kirkoswald that we should like to dwell on. In the meantime, the history of the love adventure must suffice. The charming fillette was, of course, Peggy Thomson. She was the poet's second sweetheart. One autumn before, in 1773, he had fallen in love, for the first time in his life, with Nellie Kirkpatrick, the blacksmith's daughter, near Mount Oliphant. The expression of love with Burns required lyrical aid from the very first. He sang her praises in his earliest composition, "Handsome Nell." In 1775 he tried to sing the praises of Peggy Thomson in the song commencing — "Now breezy win's and slaughtering guns." It was his second attempt at verse, and, like the former effort, it was also meant to be sung. It was thus with song that the poetry of Burns, very characteristically, began. Everybody knows that it was with song it ended. It should also be known that he wrote more songs than non-lyrical poems. The song in praise of Kirkoswald Peggy, begun in August 1775, and of which at that time only some eight suggestive lines were got through, was completed — it runs to forty lines in all — eight years later, at a time, August or September 1783, when a renewal of his early passion for Peggy seems to have occurred. He was then living with his father at Lochlie. Little more than a year after the last-mentioned date, more particularly on 11th November 1784, he wrote from "Mossgavil" to a certain Thomas Orr, an honest rustic belonging to the neighbourhood of Kirkoswald, that he was "very glad Peggy" [for her own sake, not for his] "was off his hand, as he was embarrassed enough without her." Shortly afterwards we find Peggy married to a Mr Neilson in her native village — "my old acquaintance," said Burns of him in the Riddell MS., "and a most worthy fellow." One interview of some interest took place between Mrs Neilson and Burns in 1786. The poet describes it in the same MS.:—"Poor Peggy! . . . When I was taking leave of my Carrick relations, intending to go to the West Indies, when I took farewell of her, neither she nor I could speak a syllable. Her husband escorted me three miles on my road, and we both parted with tears." On this occasion he left with Peggy, as a parting gift and memento, a copy of his Kilmarnock Poems, with the inscription:—

"Once fondly loved, and still remember'd dear,
Sweet early object of my youthful vows!
Accept this mark of friendship, warm, sincere —
Friendship I 'tis all cold duty now allows.

And when you read the simple, artless rhymes,
One friendly sigh for him—he asks no more,—
Who distant burns in flaming torrid climes,
Or haply lies beneath th* Atlantic's roar."

The intelligent peasantry of Scotland, and they comprise the majority of their class, have a traditional respect, that might almost be called instinctive, for knowledge and education. They have always been keenly alive to the benefits of book-learning. They have painfully sought it for themselves, in many cases with marvellous success; and they have pinched and pared to procure it for their children. It has often been the best and, indeed, the only legacy they could leave them. In sending his eldest son to Kirkoswald school, William Burnes was no doubt actuated by the laudable desire of having him equipped for the battle of life with a good general education. But he must also have had some special end in view in setting him at the age of sixteen to the study of mensuration and land surveying with Mr Rodgers. He was probably bent on getting him fully qualified for the post of factor or land-steward, or some such situation, which, while connected with farming, should yet lift him a little above the precarious prospects of a farmer's life.

How precarious those prospects generally were the old man well knew, and was yet more bitterly to know. Such a post, but of a kind, one may venture to say, which the old man neither expected nor would have desired, his son did afterwards fill. Burns's actual appointment to the duties of an excise officer was not made till the autumn of 1789; and the discharge of those duties, as is well known, was found in his case to be incompatible with the business of farming. He tried to combine the two employments for about two years, but in 1791 he took final leave of the farm and rural work, and removing from Ellisland to the port of Dumfries, lived for the last five years of his life a burgher and a gauger. There can be little doubt that his studies in mensuration in his seventeenth summer at Kirkoswald had a direct bearing upon his future choice of a profession, or rather upon his destiny to the work of an exciseman. Those duties were a necessary part of his training for the post; they were the basis of his professional preparations.

It is worthy of notice how soon he began to turn his attention to a situation in the excise. It divided his mind in 1786 with the desperate scheme of emigration to the West Indies — only it was more desirable than attainable then. The success of the Edinburgh edition of his poems in 1787 put it for a while out of his head, but in the second winter of his sojourn in Edinburgh the old idea returned, and the poet, apparently encouraged by Clarinda, began to take active steps to have it realised. Its realisation seemed to the aimless poet (it is his own repeated designation of himself) to be the only respectable refuge from the fear of want or a degrading dependency. Its ultimate realisation to a man constituted as he was, and circumstanced as, for the greater part of thirty years, he had been, was ostensible ruin. It was not only that it brought him into perilous neighbourhood with the common means of conviviality, but it demanded the sacrifice of healthful rural conditions, and entailed the loss of kindly rural influences.

The few months of his residence at Kirkoswald brought Burns into contact with a new world in respect of both scenic and social surroundings. At the same time he enjoyed a freedom, hitherto unknown, to move about very much as he liked in this new world. It was his first prolonged absence from home and a rather strict paternal discipline. He was not, indeed, a total stranger to the scenery of the seaside when he came to the smuggling coast of Kirkoswald. He was not far from the sea at Alloway as a boy, and during his three weeks' stay at Ayr in 1773 he had perambulated the beach with his schoolmaster, Mr Murdoch; at Mount Oliphant, too, he had a charming glimpse of the distant sea any time he chose to lift his eyes from the furrows or the harvest-field. But at Culzean Bay, or from the low, ling-covered strand stretching southward from Turnberry Point, he probably saw for the first time, in a poetical sense, "the wan moon setting ayont the white wave." It is noteworthy, but scarcely wonderful, that Burns sings so little of the sea. The little that he has sung about it is perhaps best represented by the suggestive line just quoted. He was a true landsman. His vocation was where busy ploughs were whistlin' thrang. He had, upon the whole, a landsman's horror of the uncertain sea. There was no doubt a delight to be drawn from the dashing roar of breakers heard safely from the sounding shore; but he shrank from a closer acquaintance with the stormy wave.

"The whistling wind affrightens me,
I think upon the raging sea,
Where many a danger I must dare,
Far from the bonnie banks of Ayr."

His horror of the sea meant an increase in his love for the land.

It was, however, the society of the locality that constituted the more novel part of young Burns's experience at Kirkoswald. The coast was as well adapted for contraband traffic in brandy and other commodities as the more notorious Solway; and, probably, every crofter or cottar within sight of the sea for miles on both sides of Turnberry Tower smuggled if he could. Smuggling, indeed, was regarded as a praiseworthy and even patriotic breach of the law, especially by Scottish smugglers. It was not only universal, but carried on with soul, and strength, and mind; and it was, we are assured, "very successful"

The inequality of the duties, it is well known, gave great encouragement to the smuggling trade between Scotland and England; it was only recently (1855) that the duties were equalised. Into this wild, nocturnal smuggling world of adventure, and riot, and roaring dissipation young Burns was propelled, partly by accident and partly by natural temperament. The swaggering scenes rather startled him at first, but he was "no enemy to social life," and "soon learned to fill his glass and mix without fear in a drunken squabble." His sympathies were doubtless with the smugglers; he was to know them long after in a different relation on Solway side.

Making due allowance for the difference of locality, one cannot be far wrong in picturing Burns in scenes in the neighbourhood of Kirkoswald in the summer nights of 1775, similar to those in which Alan Fairford is represented to have found himself in the smuggling port of Annan somewhere about the same year — as narrated in the delightful pages of "Redgauntlet." Specimens of the Tom Trumbull type on land, and of the Nanty Ewart species on sea, were doubtless to be met with on the Carrick coast, and may have been known afar off by young Burns; and his ears may have heard the clatter of hoofs and rattling of chains in the moonlight, as the contra* band kegs and barrels were conveyed on pack saddles from the sandy downs to inland places of concealment. He mixed, at all events, with the smugglers in the village inn; and if he did not share in their adventures, he at least heard them narrated at first hand.

That a cantata of jolly smugglers lay sleeping and unsung within his memory, who can doubt? Whether Douglas Graham belonged to the fraternity of illegal traders it is impossible to say definitely, but that his figure and habits and history were well known to young

Burns is highly probable if he was, as a steady tradition in the village avers, the prototype of Tam o' Shanter. The farm of Shanter is near Kirkoswald, and Graham's last resting-place is in the sloping churchyard at the south end of the village. From all that is reported of him one may well believe that he was at least a suggestive study for Tam. His wife, too, would seem to have been well fitted to enact the part of Kate —

“Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.”

It is interesting to note, on the authority of the stone record in the churchyard, that the tenant of Shanter survived all the evil prophecies supposed to have been uttered in conjugal warning for Tam's reformation, and died at the patriarchal age of seventy-two. By the way, there is no portrait of Tam in the poem — an omission that is a little remarkable if Burns really did draw from personal knowledge of Graham. That Burns could paint a portrait is of easy proof. He has given us the figure of Harry Erskine; Grose lives before us as "a fine, fat, fodgeg wight;" Creech is "a little upright, pert, tart, tripping wight" A well-chosen word or two, and the individual is limned.

It was in the house of his mother's brother, Samuel Brown, that Burns lodged during his stay at Kirkoswald. Thirteen years afterwards — in May 1788 — he wrote to this uncle in a style which shows how the staple trade of the village lived in his recollection, and coloured the very talk of the villagers. Of course this latter statement presupposes on the part of Burns a perfect sympathy, even in language, with his correspondent — a sympathy which the letters of Burns, taken altogether, undoubtedly reveal. At the date of this particular letter the poet was on the eve of his marriage with Jean Armour, and was making preparations for furnishing their future home at Ellisland.

"Dear Uncle," he writes, "this I hope will find you and your conjugal yoke-fellow in your good old way. I am impatient to know if the Ailsa fowling be commenced for this season yet, as I want three or four stones of feathers, and I hope you will bespeak them for me. It would be a vain attempt for me to enumerate the various transactions I have been engaged in since I saw you last; but this know — I engaged in a smuggling trade, and no poor man ever experienced better returns, etc." [He refers allegorically to his private marriage, which the Church, represented at Mauchline by Daddy Auld, refused to sanction; and goes on to intimate that he means to be a fair-trader in future.] "I have taken a farm on the banks of Nith, and in imitation of the old patriarchs, get men-servants and maid-servants, and docks and herds, and beget sons and daughters. — Your obedient nephew, Robert Burns."

We have Samuel Brown's disposition reflected in this letter. Like his sister, the poet's mother, he was apparently frank, easy-going, humorous, and contented. The contrast to old William Burnes is well-nigh perfect. Samuel Brown is addressed as "dear uncle;" his own father is "honoured sir." In his uncle's house Burns enjoyed a latitude of speech and behaviour to which he had been a stranger. Mrs Brown seems to have been a worthy helpmeet to her husband. She had no children of her own, but assisted in her function as howdie in bringing many children into the world. So, at least, reports William Marshall, the aged occupant of a farm in Canada, who, if we are not misinformed, has occupied in his youth the same saddle with Luckie Brown in several moonlight, midnight scampers on hasty summons to the house of birth.

Burns returned home from Kirkoswald to Mount Oliphant, as he says, "very considerably improved." Previous to this visit he had been "perhaps the most ungainly awkward boy in the parish," and as unacquainted with the ways of the world as a hermit. The parish he refers to was the united parishes of Alloway and Ayrnot, as so many editors copying each other state, the parish of Tarbolton. In the original MS. of the autobiographical letter to Dr Moore it is distinctly written that the summer spent on the smuggling coast was his seventeenth. Dr Currie, in 1800, misquoted the passage so as to read nineteenth, and subsequent editors went on repeating the error till the correction was made by, we think, the late Mr Scott Douglas. On his return to the farm Burns mixed more freely in the rather scattered society of his neighbourhood, and to give his manners a brush — as he phrased it — began to attend a country dancing school, in conscious opposition to his father's wishes. This school was probably at Dalrymple. Unfortunately for both father and son, this act of disobedience on the part of young Burns produced an estrangement which was never afterwards removed. William Burnes was not, at least in theory, the strict and strait-laced Calvinist that many believed him to have been. The Catechism of religious belief which Murdoch wrote to his dictation is proof of this. But he was "irascible and subject to strong passions," and was not likely to forgive in his eldest son any disregard of his will, even though the natural instinct of youth for social recreation should prompt it.

The iniquity of promiscuous dancing may have been bad enough in the eyes of the elder Burns, but the deliberate disobedience of a son was worse; it was unpardonable. It was a miserable enough matter to differ about, but in its results it was scarcely less than tragic to both. With the forfeiture of his father's esteem, young Burns became regardless and dissipated; his disobedience and dissipation were thorns in the pillow of his father, which the old man, as he lay on his death-bed, may have thought were of his own placing. He might so reasonably have granted the permission. In a short time the young poet lost all his awkwardness of demeanour, became self-possessed, bold, and easy of address, and was the acknowledged king of every rustic gathering.

And that's it for this week and I hope you all have a good weekend.

Alastair