APPENDIX II

SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

Recommendations for writers in Scots

These recommendations represent a consensus view on the spelling of Scots agreed at a meeting of Scots Makkars in the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh in 1985. The recommendations relate to specifically Scots words which are not found in English, and to words with related English equivalents which have a distinctive Scots pronunciation (e.g. frein, ma, ir, out, pour and wyfe). It is not suggested here that words used in Scots in common with English which have the same pronunciation, such as field, sleep and nation, should be altered if the English spelling system leaves no doubt as to the pronunciation.

In general, in writing Scots, it is desirable that there should be traditional precedents for the spellings employed and that writers aspiring to use Scots should not invent new spellings off the cuff. A serious problem of Scots orthography is that there are already too many spelling options for many words. For example, some current writers employ the spellings, fer, fir or fur for the word for, which is used in common with English. Since the vowel here is unstressed and hardly differentiated, such spellings serve no useful purpose.

If the following recommendations do not give guidance as to the spelling of any word, reference may be made to one of the Scots dictionaries, such as the Scottish National Dictionary, the Concise Scots Dictionary or the Concise English-Scots Dictionary.

A, AU, AW for the vowel sound in awa, wha, gar; auld glaur, waur, maut, saut; aw, awbodie, braw, caw, faw and snaw. The word ca, meaning call, may be distinguished from caw meaning drive. Where this sound begins or ends a word, AW is normally used.

AE, AI, A(consonant)E for the monothongal vowel sound in, brae, faem, maen; dwaible, hain, sair, baith; hame, bane and vase.

E normally represents the vowel sound in ken, gled, ben, snek, ferm, herm, hert and yett.

EE, EI, IE for the sound in wee. Where EE is firmly established, as in ee and een, it is retained, but EI is the preferred internal digraph and is used, for example, in deid, reik, weil, feim, yestrein and seivin. EI is also used in words (often of French and Latin origin) where this vowel is represented by ‘i’ in the corresponding English word. For example, eidiot, freil, feinish, television, veisit, abeitte, poseition, etc. IE is used terminally in monosyllabic words such as brie, die, gie, grie, hie, etc.
TERMINAL –IE in place of final ‘y’ generally, for example, in bonnie, clamjamfrie, cuddie, lassie, sairlie, etc.

I is reserved for the short vowel in brig, finnd, kist and shilpit.

Y, Y(consonant)E, EY for the common diphthong in gey and aye (always), for example, in tryst and wynd; wyfe dyke, syne, clype, styte, etc. EY is used to represent this sound in words where it occurs initially or finally, for example, in eydent, cley, stey and wey.

EU for the sound in aneuch, speug, neuk, etc., pronounced variously, from north to south and from east to west.

OU mainly for the sound of French ‘ou’, in cou, fou, boul, soum, down, stour and flower. In certain words, spelt as in English, such as, out, about and our, there may be a case for using OO for this vowel to avoid confusion with English pronunciation.

U as in dubs, lug, bul, wul, drumlie and hunder.

U(consonant)E is employed for the ‘ou’ sound in a few words, such as dule, bure, hure and wure.

UI for the modified ‘o’ sounds as in guid, ruif, buik, fuil, tuim, spin, pur, uise, uiss, juist, buit and truth.

OW, OWE always for the diphthong in, growe, growthe, thowe, howf, dowie, fowk, lown, cowp, lowp, rowp, etc.

CH is a velar fricative, except at the start of a word, as in chap, chitter or when it follows ‘n’, ‘r’, or ‘t’, as in runch, airc, pouch, etc. For example, lauch, fecht, bricht, loch, bucht. Use laich for laigh, hauch for haugh, hoch for hough, souch for sough. The ending, ‘-gh’ can profitably be dropped in though and though, to give throu and tho.

K replaces ‘-ct’ in words like, expek, objek. K is suggested in preference to ‘c’ after initial ‘s’, to give, for example, skart, skelf, sklim, skreive and skunner.

TERMINAL –IL is suggested in words commonly spelt with the endings, ‘-el’ and ‘le’ to give: kittil, morsil, mukkil, soupl, taigil, traivil, warsil, etc. but kittlie.

TERMINAL –SS is used to represent the final sound in kiss, except where ‘-se’ follows a consonant, as in mense, merse. Thus, crouss, fauss, houss, mous, lowss, poliss, galluss.

TERMINAL –ND: The ‘d’ is sometimes not pronounced and there is no reason why it should be represented in many words: an (and), len, staun, thousan, frein, for example. It may be necessary to retain ‘d’ in haund, round, sound, stound, grund, because the ‘d’ may be pronounced in derived forms, such as haundit, roundit, stoundin, etc.
VERBAL ENDINGS: ‘-in’ for present participles and verbal nouns: be-in, giein, cairriein, swallaein, ginnin, raxin; biggin, steidin, plenishin, dounsittin.

Past tense and past participles of weak verbs ending in ‘-b’, ‘-d’, ‘-g’, ‘-k’, ‘-p’, and ‘-t’, add on ‘-it’; for example, bebbit, gydit, biggit, howkit, flypit, rowpit, veisittit. Verbs ending in –il’, ‘-en’, ‘-er’, ‘-ch’, ‘-sh’, ‘-ss’ and ‘-f’, usually add on ‘-t’, for example, hirpilt, fessent, foundert, laucht, fashit, blissit, dafft. Otherwise, ‘-ed’ may be used, for example, beiled, kaimed, hained, coloured: or ‘d’ when the infinitive already ends in silent ‘-e’: breinged, chowed, loued, lowsed, etc.

ANE is suggested for yin, een, wan, one, etc. Ae or yae before nouns.

PRONOUNS: A may be used for I, ye for you, except where the word is stressed; hir for her, yeir for your, thai for they, thaim for them. Use wha, wham, whas, interrogatively, and that as a relative pronoun in preference to wha or whilk. Whatna, rather than whilk as interrogative adjective.

TI, TIL, TAE, TILL: Ti is normally used for to, and invariably with the infinitive. Til may be used before nouns preceded by the definite or indefinite article, or more commonly, before words beginning with a vowel or the letter ‘h’. She’s no speakin til him the-day. Tae is equivalent to too, meaning also, and toe, and is used as a stressed form of ti, as in, Pul the door tae! Till means until.

APOSTROPES should not be used to represent letters which would have been present if related English words had been used instead. Thus: hert, not he’rt; wi not wi’; himself and hirsell, not himsel’ and hirsel’.

NEGATIVES: ‘-na ‘ affixed to verb (canna, isna, wesna), or no used separately (A’m no that fou), are equivalent to English, not; nae before nouns is equivalent to English, no (The’r nae luck about the houss).

DOUBLED CONSONANTS: In disyllabic words in which the first syllable is stressed, the consonant following the vowel in the first syllable is doubled when the vowel is short. For example, in cokkil, fremmit, wumman, donnert, verra, blatter, dizzen. The consonant, ‘n’ is also doubled in blinnd, finnd, to indicate the Scots vowel. The internal consonant is not doubled in, telt, spelt, kent.

AFFIRMATIVE: Ay is used for yes, and is distinguished from aye, meaning always.