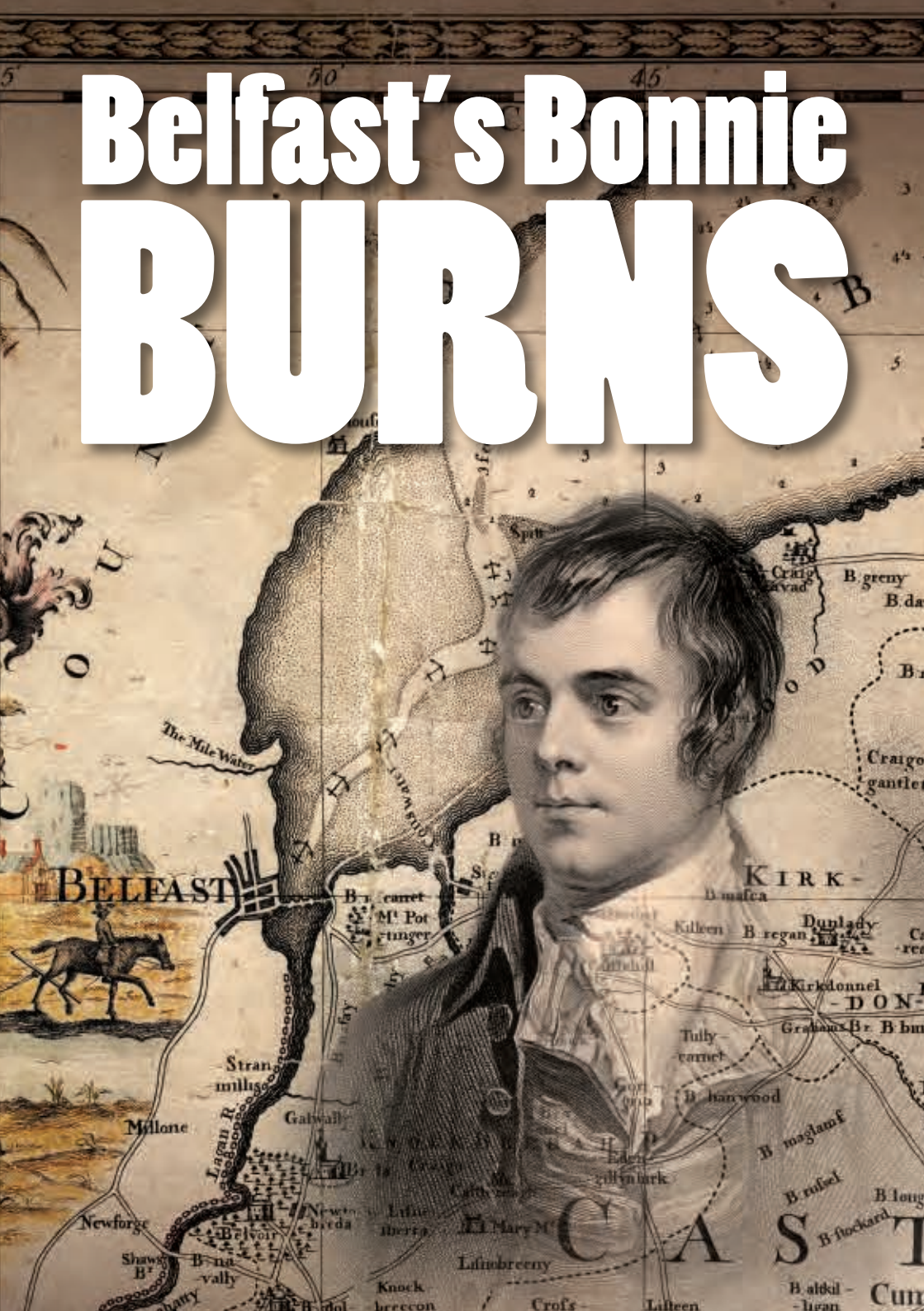
Belfast's Bonnie BURNS



The story of Robert Burns and Ulster is one of an

AULD ACQUAINTANCE

that should never be forgot.

It is just one of our many historic connections with Scotland, expressing our shared heritage of the Scots language and literature on both sides of the narrow North Channel.

"From the start, Burns' birl and rhythm,
That tongue the Ulster Scots brought wi' them
And stick to still in County Antrim
Was in my ear.
From east of Bann it westered in
On the Derry air"

Seamus Heaney, A Birl For Burns, 2009

A selection of Robert Burns Belfast artefacts, 1896–1966

Introducing Belfast's Bonnie Burns

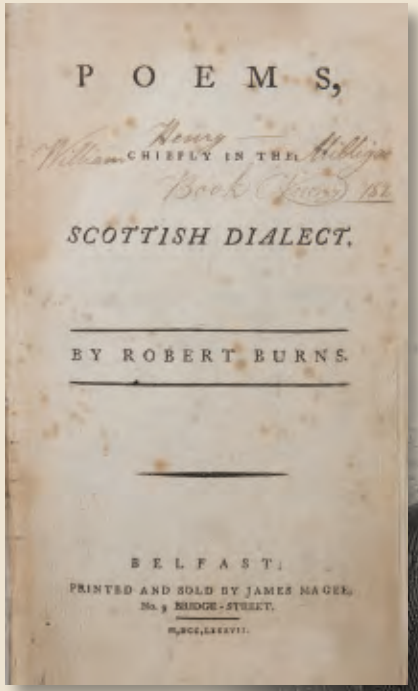
Belfast is a city with many cultural influences, and the Ulster-Scots dimension is a proud part of that. Our history, our oldest buildings, many of our placenames, and our daily speech all still display an undeniably Scottish *skirl* and *birl*. So it's no surprise that Robert Burns' poetry has been enjoyed here for centuries, and his song collections include one that he acquired from Belfast, entitled 'To A Rose Bud'.

In 1792 when the Belfast church organist Edward Bunting organised the first Belfast Harp Festival which famously celebrated and preserved Irish traditional music, Robert Burns was already a superstar in our city. The Ulster-Scots community was by then almost 200 years old. Earlier Scots language poets had already been printed and read in Ulster. Local poet Samuel Thomson of Carngranny near Mallusk wrote a poem to Burns that same year:

> *Sweet Scottish Bard! still as I read*
> *Thy bonie, quaint, harmonious lays,*
> *I aft exulting bless thy head,*
> *That weel deserves to wear the bays.*

The next year, in 1793, Thomson published the first collection of Ulster-Scots 'Weaver Poets' poems. Many of these were also songs, to be sung to tunes popular in Ulster, like 'Humours o Glen' and 'Lochaber', which Burns would also use for some of his own songs. But the story begins a few years earlier.

Edward Bunting (1773–1843) was raised at Scotch Street, Armagh. The family were Church of Ireland but in later life he moved to Belfast and lodged with the Presbyterian McCracken family. He introduced the organ to many of Belfast's most prestigious Presbyterian congregations, before returning to the Church of Ireland when he became organist of St George's Church in Belfast in 1817.



POEMS,

CHIEFLY IN THE

SCOTTISH DIALECT.

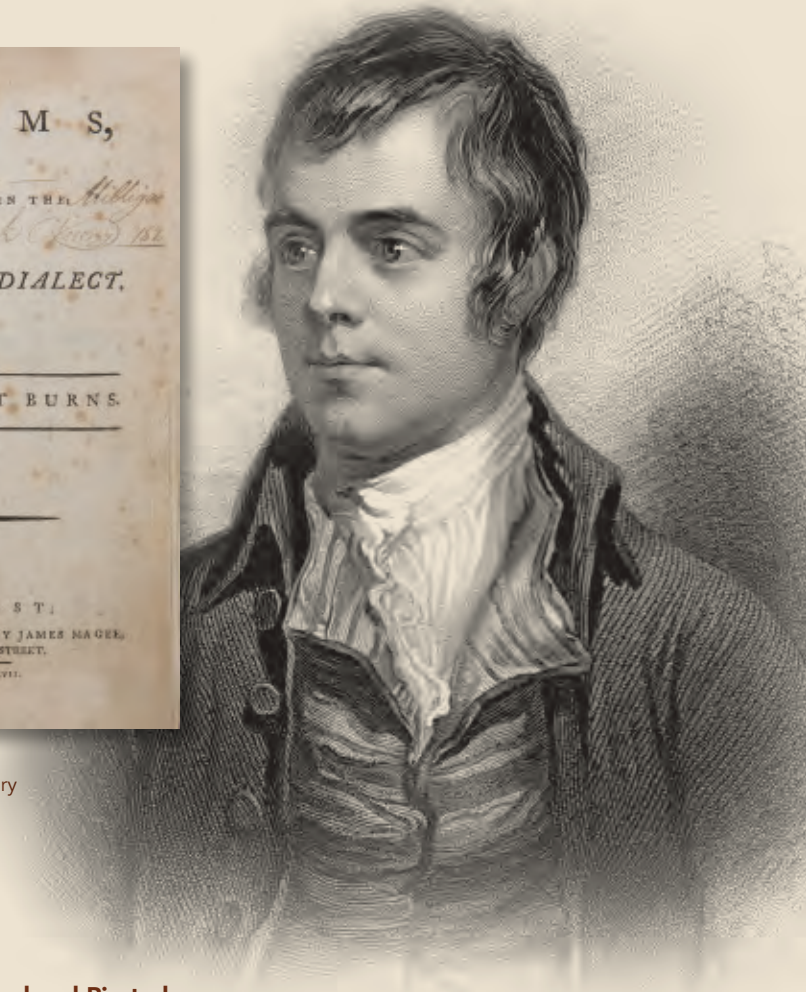
BY ROBERT BURNS.

BELFAST:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY JAMES MAGEE,

No. 3 BRIDGE-STREET.

The 1787 Belfast edition
Courtesy Linen Hall Library



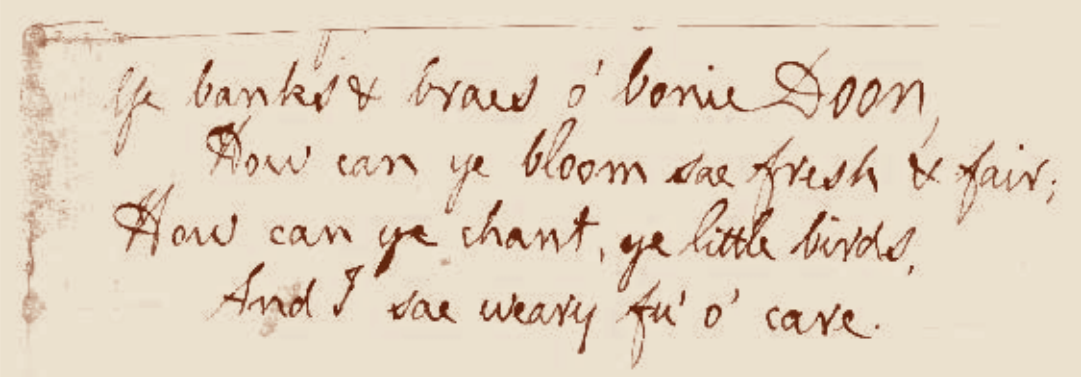
1786–1787: Published and Pirated

Individual poems by Burns were printed in Belfast newspapers in 1786 and his first book was published in rural Kilmarnock in July of that year. It sold like wildfire – and sophisticated Edinburgh produced an enlarged edition in 1787. The demand in Ulster inspired the entrepreneurial Belfast printer James Magee of Bridge Street to produce a cheaper pirate edition, which was announced in the *Belfast News Letter* on 24 September 1787.

Rumoured sightings

Like any celebrity, there were traditions of sightings of Burns. Almost a century later, in 1894 the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* published a series of letters asking readers if they knew anything of Burns' reputed visits to north east Antrim. There is also a County Down legend of Burns visiting Donaghadee on a day trip to see a fellow poet who had invited him to "visit to a part of Ulster where there were very many of Scotch descent, his warm admirers."

Robert Burns' manuscript for 'Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonie Doon'


Ye banks & braes o' bonie Doon,
How can ye bloom sae fresh & fair;
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae weary fu' o' care.

Songs and Melodies

Burns' work collecting traditional songs also had an Ulster dimension, and he wrote of the common musical culture and community on both sides of the water – "the wandering minstrels, harpers and pipers, used to go frequently errant through the wilds both of Scotland and Ireland and so some favourite airs might be common to both."

Of the tune 'Jockie's Gray Breeks' he wrote that "though this has certainly every evidence of being a Scottish air, yet there is a well known tune and song in the north of Ireland called 'The Weaver and His Shuttle O' which though sung much quicker is, every note, the very tune." He wrote that the melody for 'Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon' was more than likely from Ireland, asking a correspondent "What would you think of Scots words to some beautiful Irish airs?"

1794: Ulster visitors

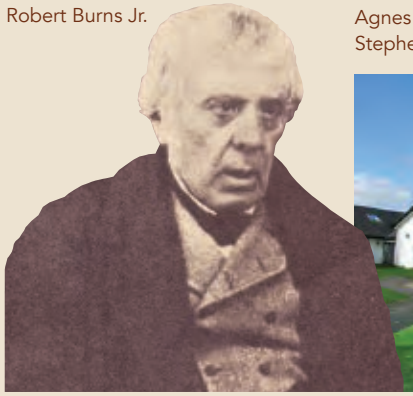
By 1794 Burns was living in a fine red sandstone house in Dumfries, and was visited there by a series of Ulster travellers. The poet Samuel Thomson visited in February, and gave Burns a gift of Dublin snuff. In July of that year, Henry Joy, the owner of the *Belfast News Letter*, and Rev. William Bruce, the Presbyterian principal of Belfast Academy, visited him in Dumfries. Another Ulsterman, Luke Mullan, visited Burns in Edinburgh in 1796, just weeks before the bard died on 21 July.

1796: Ulster Memorials

The *Belfast News Letter* and *Northern Star* printed obituaries to Burns, an account of his funeral procession in Dumfries, and in the weeks that followed printed more of his poems. The Ballycarry poet James Orr composed a memorial poem entitled 'Elegy on the Death of Mr Robert Burns' –

Sad news! He's gane, wha baith amus'd
The man o' taste, an' taught the rude
Whase warks hae been mair read an' roos'd
Than onie, save the word o' Gude

Robert Burns Jr.



Agnes Burns Cottage & Visitor Centre
Stephenstown Pond, Dundalk

1800s: The Burns family in Belfast, Dublin and Dundalk

Robert Burns Jr. visited Belfast a number of times in the 1840s; his daughter Eliza, and her daughter Martha, lived in Belfast for almost 25 years – firstly just off York Street and later on the Lisburn Road.

Burns' nephew, Gilbert Burns, moved to Dublin in the 1840s and lived at Castleknock where he died in 1881. Burns' sister Agnes moved to Dundalk with her husband William Galt in 1817. Their cottage is still there today, as are their graves, and also an obelisk to Burns' memory which was built in 1859.

Robert Burns' great granddaughter Martha, who lived in Belfast for almost 25 years, including for a time at Wilmont Terrace on the Lisburn Road

Belfast Corn Exchange hosted a Burns centenary event in 1859. Today it is the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre.

1859 & 1896 Centenary Celebrations

Robert Burns' life and work has been part of cultural life in Ulster ever since his early poems. There were centenary events in Belfast, of his birth in 1859, and of his death in 1896. Martha and Eliza took part in these events.

1900s: A Continuing Tradition

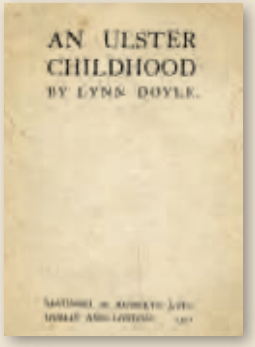
Burns suppers settled in as part of our annual cultural calendar. A generation later, in his 1921 autobiography *An Ulster Childhood*, County Down author Lynn C. Doyle (Leslie Montgomery) included a chapter about the cross-community appeal of Burns. Also in 1921, Harland & Wolff paid for a monument to Burns in Failford, Ayrshire. A new Belfast Burns Association was founded in 1931, and paid for the restoration of the Dundalk obelisk in 1935.

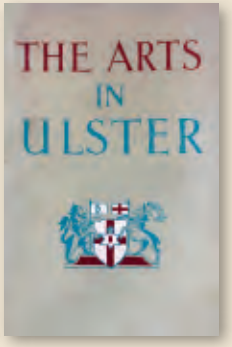
1950s: The new Ulster arts scene

In the 1950s, a new generation of prominent people in the Ulster arts scene, such as Sam Henry, Nesca Robb and Sam Hanna Bell all referenced Robert Burns, and used Ulster-Scots naturally within their own writings. Their friend John Hewitt recalled that "Once upon a time there was a copy of *Burns Poems* in every cottage from Comber to Ballymoney, many of them especially printed in Belfast for the local market" (*Belfast Telegraph*, 10 March 1955). The *Irish News* published a poem in 1952 which said:

> *"Nights with Burns are all the fashion"*
> *Said the host, "our Province o'er*
> *Bonnie Scotland is our passion*
> *Ulster Scots we, to the core"*

It was reprinted in *Lays of An Ulster Paradise* in 1960.





Doyle (1921) and Bell, Robb and Hewitt (1951)

1959 Centenary Celebrations

Belfast marked Burns' bicentenary by inviting Scottish rugby legend John Bannerman to the city, an exhibition at Linen Hall Library, film screenings and tv broadcasts.

1960s, 70s and 80s

Burns suppers continued to fill hotels and keep pipers busy. Queen's University ran a special Burns workshop day, and Ulsterbus offered three day trips to Burns Country for £12. One Belfast butcher sold 3800lbs of haggis in the run up to Burns Night in 1978!

Seamus Heaney's Understanding and Appreciation

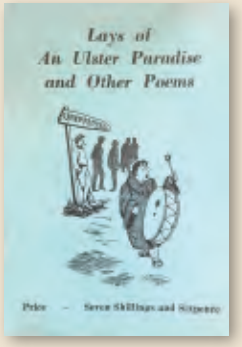
Seamus Heaney recognised the value of Ulster-Scots and of the writings of Robert Burns. Having been raised in rural Ulster, and having won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995, his 1996 *Burns Art Speech* and his 2009 poem *A Birl for Burns* are outstanding examples of cultural understanding and expression.

A Continuing Tradition

Burns' versatility is part of his wide appeal. You may be a purist devotee of Burns' language and writings, or perhaps you stumble through *Auld Lang Syne* on New Year's Eve. Whether you enjoy the formal ceremony of a traditional Burns Supper, or prefer a battered haggis supper with chips, Robert Burns continues to attract new audiences and new generations - back in Scotland, here in Ulster and around the world.

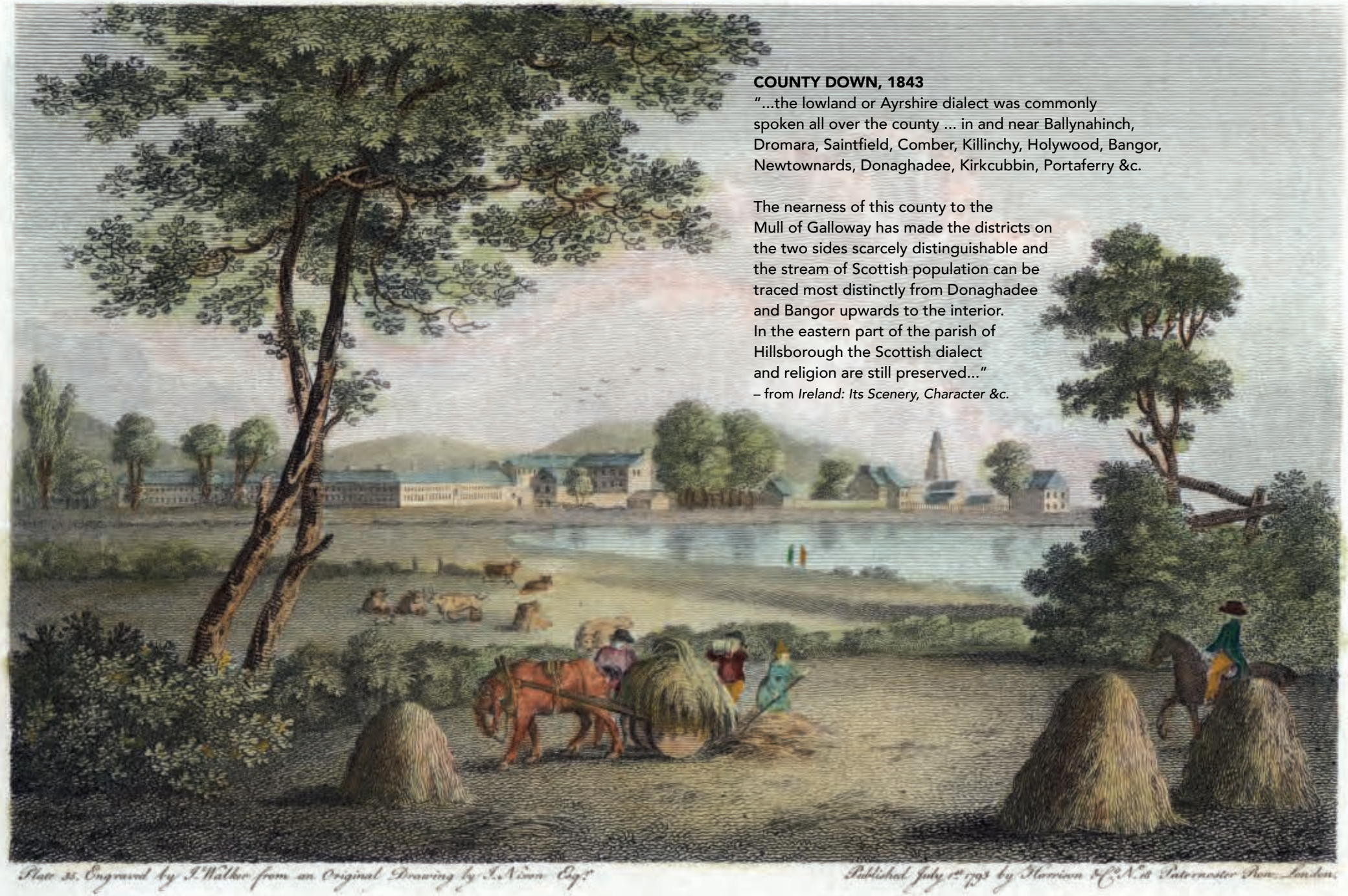
"Burns speaks to a part of me that would prefer to crack rather than lecture... that older rhyme world which was still vestigially present when I was growing up in rural Ulster"

Seamus Heaney, Burns Art Speech, 1996



Lays of an Ulster Paradise
Irish News, (1960)

A Robert Burns commemorative street banner in Belfast city centre outside the former Scottish Provident Building beside City Hall



COUNTY DOWN, 1843

"...the lowland or Ayrshire dialect was commonly spoken all over the county ... in and near Ballynahinch, Dromara, Saintfield, Comber, Killinchy, Holywood, Bangor, Newtownards, Donaghadee, Kirkcubbin, Portaferry &c.

The nearness of this county to the Mull of Galloway has made the districts on the two sides scarcely distinguishable and the stream of Scottish population can be traced most distinctly from Donaghadee and Bangor upwards to the interior. In the eastern part of the parish of Hillsborough the Scottish dialect and religion are still preserved..."
– from *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character &c.*

Belfast circa 1793

1 Ayrshire & Ulster – and Burns' Early Success

Ayrshire is on the west coast of Scotland, with County Antrim just a short boat journey away. The close proximity of the two coastlines, with the sea as the highway between, has meant there have been centuries of easy movement across the water.

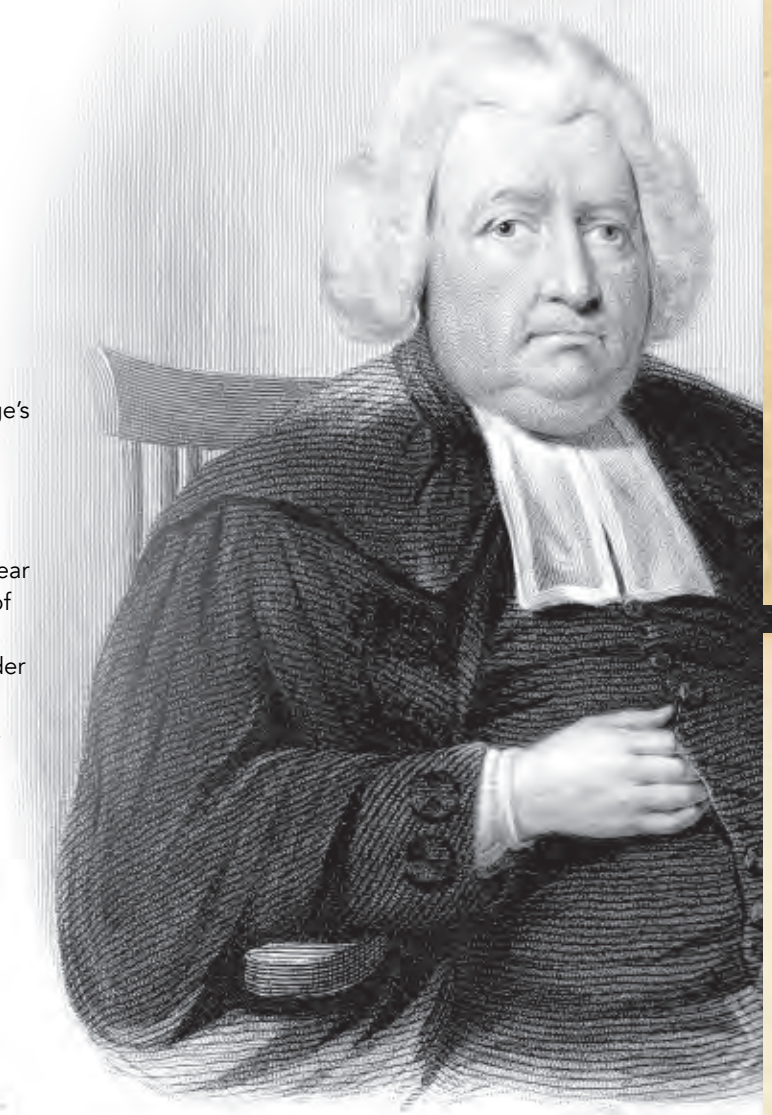
1315 – The Bruce Brothers
In 1315, Edward Bruce, the brother of King Robert the Bruce of Scotland, sailed from Ayr with 6,000 men in 300 boats, in an alliance with the Ulster O'Neills to oust the Anglo-Normans from Ireland. Their campaign is described in one of the Scots language's earliest and most important works – *The Brus* by John Barbour, written c. 1380.

1606 – Hamilton and Montgomery
The Bruces' plan failed, but almost 300 years later in 1606 it was another two Ayrshire men – James Hamilton from Dunlop and Hugh Montgomery from Braidstane Castle near Beith – who struck a deal with the Clandeboye O'Neills and began a huge migration of thousands of Lowland Scottish families into County Down, after which more followed into County Antrim and across the rest of Ulster. Hugh Montgomery's relative, Alexander Montgomerie, was one of the most renowned Scots language poets of the time. The Scots language, Presbyterian faith, and many other cultural traditions came with them.

1786: The Kilmarnock edition and George Lawrie's Ulster Covenanter ancestry
Robert Burns was born at Alloway near Ayr on 25 January 1759. Shortly after his first edition was printed by John Wilson at Kilmarnock in 1786, the 27-year-old Burns was encouraged in his poetry by the Rev. George Lawrie of Newmilns in Ayrshire.

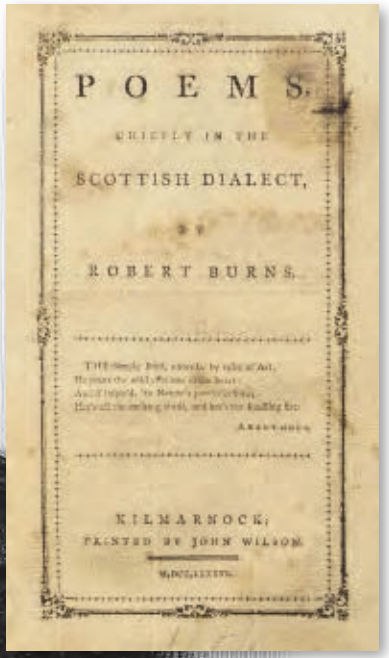
Lawrie's grandfather, John Lawrie, had been the Presbyterian Covenanter minister of Auchinleck in Ayrshire, but like so many of that time he sought refuge in Ulster in the 1670s during Scotland's 'Killing Times' of persecution, and became minister of Macosquin near Coleraine. Other Lawries are also said to have come to Ulster.

From Kilmarnock to Edinburgh
Burns had decided to emigrate to Jamaica, and while travelling to the docks at Greenock he called at Lawrie's manse, where he enjoyed an evening of music, song, dancing and poetry with the family. A letter arrived for Lawrie, from a Dr Blacklock, requesting Burns to come to Edinburgh – Burns later wrote that this "overthrew all my schemes" of emigration. He stayed in Scotland, and soon a new edition was printed in Edinburgh. Burns, the 'Ayrshire Ploughman', had gone national.



Rev. George Lawrie of Newmilns. His daughter Christina played a type of piano called a spinet. Burns spent time with the family and while staying overnight he composed a prayer poem, entitled 'Lying at a Reverend Friend's House One Night'.

The 1786 Kilmarnock edition


POEMS,
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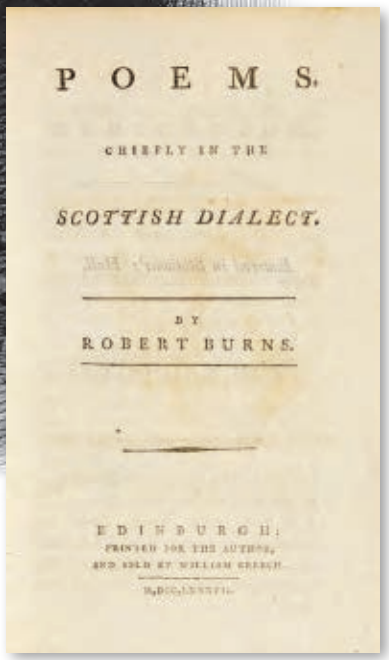
KILMARNOCK:
PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON.


POEMS,
CHIEFLY IN THE
SCOTTISH DIALECT.
BY
ROBERT BURNS.
EDINBURGH:

The 1787 Edinburgh edition

2 1787: Burns' Poems Pirated and Printed in Belfast

Printing had come to Ulster from Scotland in 1695. Literature in the Scots language had been popular in the city for decades – works by Scottish poets such as Sir David Lindsay, Alexander Montgomerie and Allan Ramsay had been printed in Belfast as well as in Scotland.

Ulster-Scots poetry by William Starrat of Strabane was printed in Edinburgh in the 1720s in one of Allan Ramsay's collections. More of Starrat's *Scotch Poems* were printed Belfast in 1753, before Burns was even born.

"Broad Scotch"
When Amyas Griffith from Tipperary came to Belfast in 1780 as Surveyor of Excise he noted that "the common people speak broad Scotch, and the better sort differ vastly from us, both in accent and language."

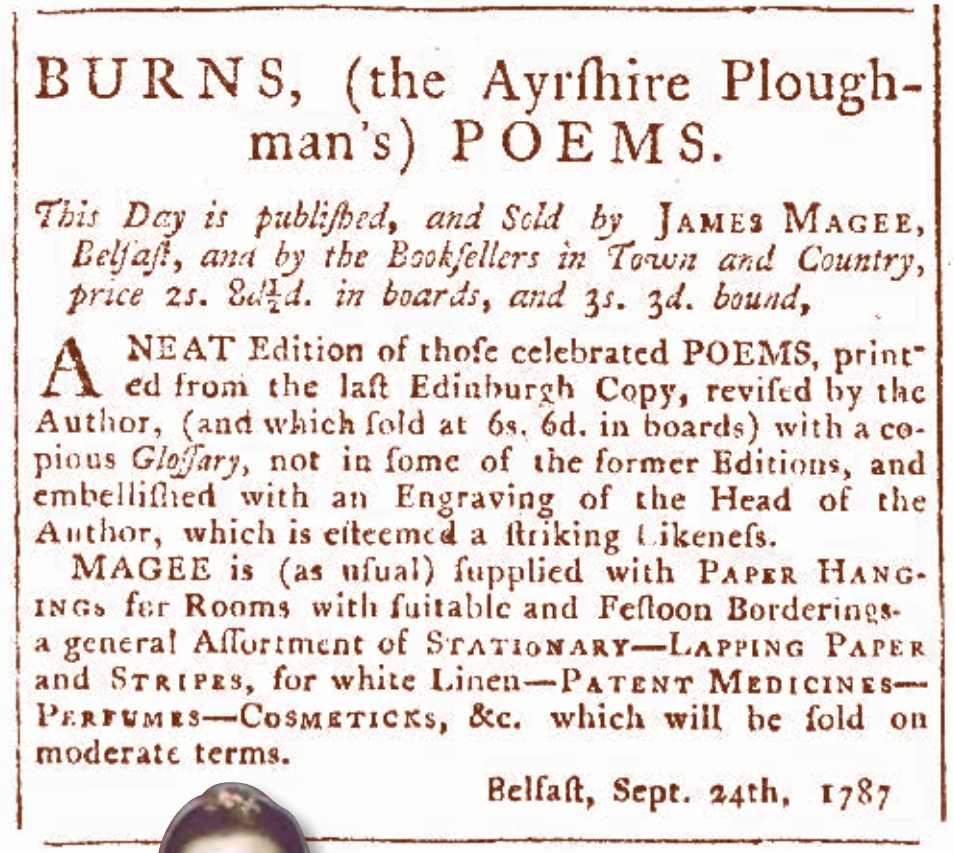
"Scotch Town"
French aristocrat Le Chevalier de la Tochnaye, when visiting the city in 1797, wrote that "Belfast has almost entirely the look of a Scotch town and the character of the inhabitants has considerable resemblance to that of the people of Glasgow. The way of speaking is much more Scotch than Irish."

1787: The Belfast unauthorised edition
Burns' Edinburgh edition was published in April 1787. Back in Belfast, the city where 'Clabber Loning', 'Point Loning' and famously 'The Pass Loning' (from the Scots word 'loanen' which means 'lane') would all be marked on James Williamson's 1791 map, demand for Burns' poems was increasing.

The popularity caught the attention of Belfast printer James Magee, who placed an advert in the *Belfast News Letter* on 24 September 1787, announcing that he had printed his own (unauthorised) edition. A copy of this edition is in the Gibson Collection in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast. Many other editions would be printed in Belfast and Ulster towns in the centuries that followed.

In the following 40 years, an estimated 30 editions of Burns' poems were printed in Belfast

The 'Stinking Editions'
The Belfast reprint copied a spelling error from the first Edinburgh edition. In the famous poem *Address to a Haggis* the Scots word 'skinking' (meaning watery) was mis-spelled as 'stinking'. These were nicknamed 'The Stinking Editions'.


BURNS, (the Ayrſhire Plough-man's) POEMS.

This Day is publiſhed, and Sold by JAMES MAGEE, *Belfaſt, and by the Bookſellers in Town and Country, price 2s. 8d½d. in boards, and 3s. 3d. bound,*

A NEAT Edition of thoſe celebrated POEMS, printed from the laſt Edinburgh Copy, reviſed by the Author, (and which ſold at 6s. 6d. in boards) with a copious *Gloſſary*, not in ſome of the former Editions, and embelliſhed with an Engraving of the Head of the Author, which is eſteemed a ſtriking Likeneſs.

MAGEE is (as uſual) ſupplied with PAPER HANGINGS for Rooms with ſuitable and Feſtoon Borderings- a general Aſſortment of STATIONARY—LAPPING PAPER and STRIPES, for white Linen—PATENT MEDICINES—PERFUMES—COSMETICKS, &c. which will be ſold on moderate terms.

Belfaſt, Sept. 24th, 1787

The *Belfast News Letter* advert, 24 September 1787

Elizabeth Rawdon, the Countess of Moira (1731–1808) was perhaps Ireland's first patron of Robert Burns. She lived at Montalto House, Ballynahinch. She pre-ordered six copies of the April 1787 Edinburgh edition and is named in the subscribers list.

The 1787 Belfast edition. Courtesy Linen Hall Library

ROBERT BURNS.

POEMS,

CHIEFLY IN THE

SCOTTISH DIALECT.

BY ROBERT BURNS.

BELFAST:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY JAMES MAGEE,
No. 9 BRIDGE-STREET.

M,DCC,LXXXVII.

3 1790s: Ulster-Scots Poets and Burns

Ayrshire, Burns' home county, is visible from Ulster. Naturally, there were several influential Ulster-Scots poets who saw Burns – his rural roots, his language and his aspirations – as being almost identical to their own, all part of a common cultural community that spanned the North Channel.

Samuel Thomson of Carngranny, The 'Father of Ulster-Scots Poetry'
In particular, Samuel Thomson of Carngranny (near Roughfort, between Mallusk and Templepatrick) was regarded as the 'Father of Ulster-Scots poetry'. He was a schoolteacher and inspired a group of younger men in the locality to write in their own tongue. In 1793, aged just 27, Thomson published his own collection of poems – *Poems on Different Subjects, Partly in the Scottish Dialect* – and dedicated it to "Mr Robert Burns, the Ayrshire Poet". It included a poem entitled 'Epistle to Mr Robert Burns':

I've aften read their pages a'
An' monie mair o' deep ingine
But frae a' the verses e'er I saw
Your Cotter fairly taks the shine

County Down poet Francis Boyle (1730–1815) of Gilnahirk and Gransha near Comber also wrote an 'Address to Robert Burns', but it wasn't published until 1811.

O! wad ye tak' a thought, an men',
An' use the usefu', virtuous men, -
Higher your fame than eagle's ken,
Wad, glorious, fly,
And I wad help to gar it sten'
Aboon the sky.

Over the centuries that followed, Robert Burns would be referenced and revered by many Ulster writers.

Samuel Thomson's home 'Crambo Cave'

James Orr monument, Ballycarry

Samuel Thomson Visits Burns
In early 1794 Thomson and his friend John Williamson travelled to Dumfries to meet Burns – Thomson and Burns sent each other letters, books and even snuff. In July of the same year Henry Joy, the publisher of the *Belfast News Letter*, and William Bruce also visited Burns. Thomson's friend Luke Mullan visited Burns in Edinburgh in 1796.

James Orr, Ulster's Burns
Burns died on 21 July 1796 at his home in Dumfries and was greatly mourned in Scotland and Ulster. James Orr of Ballycarry, a young protégé of Thomson's, published his own *Poems on Various Subjects* in 1804, which included an 'Elegy on the Death of Robert Burns'.

Dumfries might weel steek ev'ry shap,
An' sen' her tribes to bury Burns
Oh Burns! oh Burns! the wale o' swains
Wi' thee the Scottish music fell

In later years, James Orr would be described as 'Ulster's Robert Burns'. Some scholars have suggested that some of Orr's writings were better than those of Burns.

Legends of Robert Burns in Ulster
There were rumours and legends from County Antrim and County Down of Burns visiting Ulster – Elvis-like sightings and stories, but all unproven. However, this folklore shows that people here wanted to believe that he might have come across the water. Some of Robert Burns' friends and family certainly did come to Belfast.

4 James Gray of Dumfries & Belfast

Robert Burns moved to Dumfries in 1791. His children attended the grammar school in Dumfries where the Rector was Presbyterian minister Rev. James Gray. Gray was the son of a shoemaker, but even as a child he showed a love of literature. He and Burns struck up a close friendship – Gray described Burns as "a kind and attentive father".

Gray and Burns

Gray wrote that Burns "took great delight in spending his evenings in the cultivation of the minds of his children. Their education was the grand object of his life... he bestowed great pains in training their minds, habits of thought and reflection, and in keeping them pure from every form of vice." Robert Burns Jr, aged only nine, was capable of Latin translation thanks to his father's tuition. Gray visited Burns just days before he died – "though the hand of death was upon him, he repeated to me a little poem he had composed the day before, full of energy and tenderness".

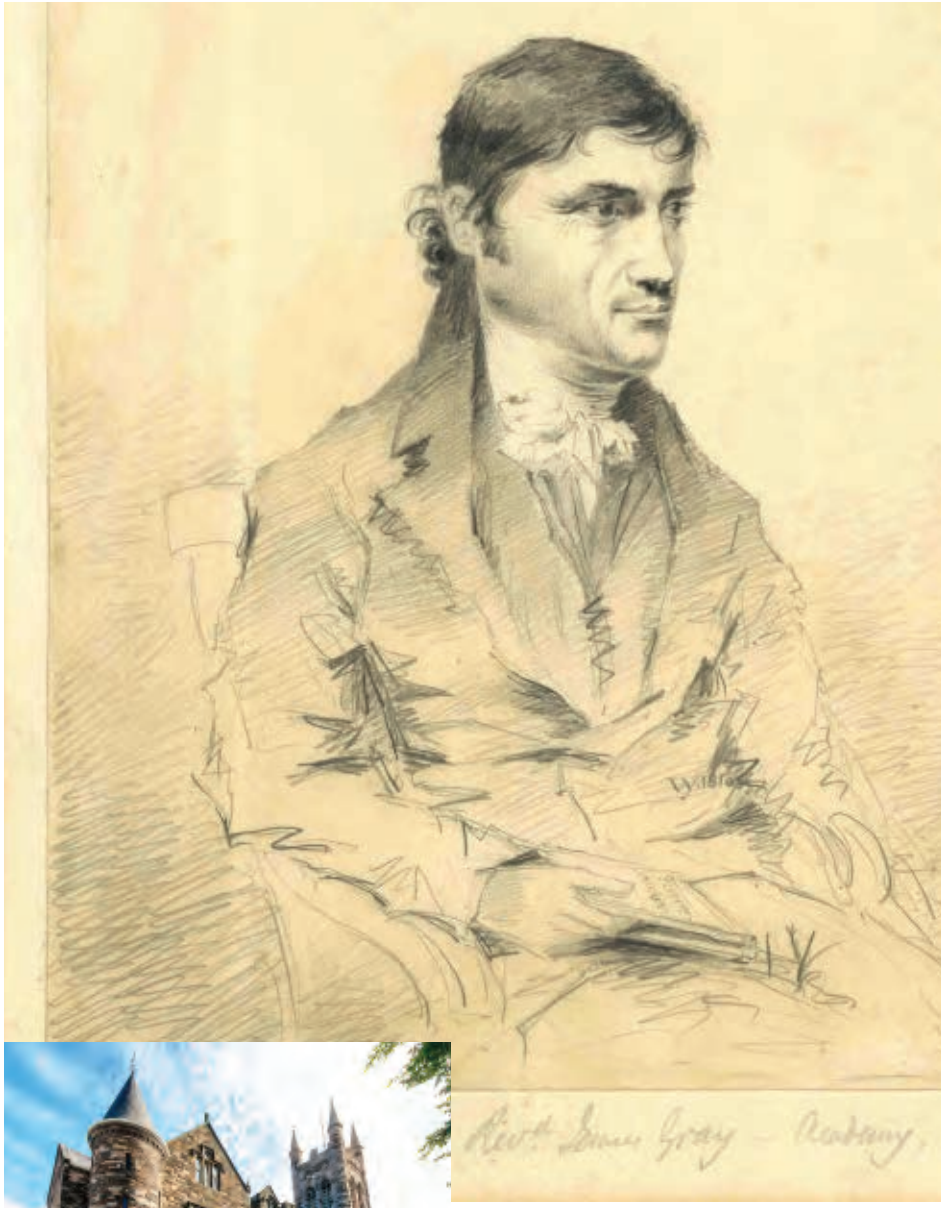
James Gray relocated to Edinburgh in 1801; he married the sister of Scottish poet James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, and he featured in Hogg's poem 'Queen's Wake'.

Gray Comes to Belfast

After 21 years in Edinburgh, James Gray came to Belfast to become Principal of Belfast Academy in November 1822, succeeding William Bruce (who had himself visited Burns in Dumfries). However, Gray's earlier calling to church life drew him to become a deacon of the Church of Ireland. In 1826 he left Belfast Academy to become a chaplain in India. He was personal tutor to a young Indian king and translated the four Gospels into the local language. Gray died in India in 1830.

1796 Burns' death and funeral

Burns had been ill since the winter of 1795. He died in Dumfries on 21 July 1796. The *Belfast News Letter* and *Northern Star* printed obituaries. As a former member of the Dumfries Volunteers he was buried with full military honours in a corner of St Michael's kirkyard, but with just one family member, his brother Gilbert, present.



Rev James Gray portrait, courtesy of Belfast Royal Academy. The school was originally situated in Academy Street in the city centre. It relocated to a purpose-built Scottish baronial building on the Cliftonville Road in 1880.

5 1844: The Burns Family in Belfast

Burns' sister Agnes moved to Dundalk with her husband William Galt in 1817. Their cottage is still there today at Stephenstown Pond, as are their graves, and also an obelisk to Burns' memory which was built in 1859.

Around 1844 Robert Burns' granddaughter Eliza settled in Belfast. Eliza Burns met and married Bartholomew J. Everitt (originally from County Wexford) when she had been in India. Tragically on their return voyage to Britain their infant son Robert Burns Everitt died at sea.

Eliza and Martha come to Belfast

The couple settled in London where a daughter, Martha Burns Everitt, was born in October 1839. Tragedy struck the family again when Bartholomew died in April 1840. Eliza and their baby daughter Martha then moved to Belfast, to Brougham Street off York Street.

Robert Burns Jr comes to Belfast

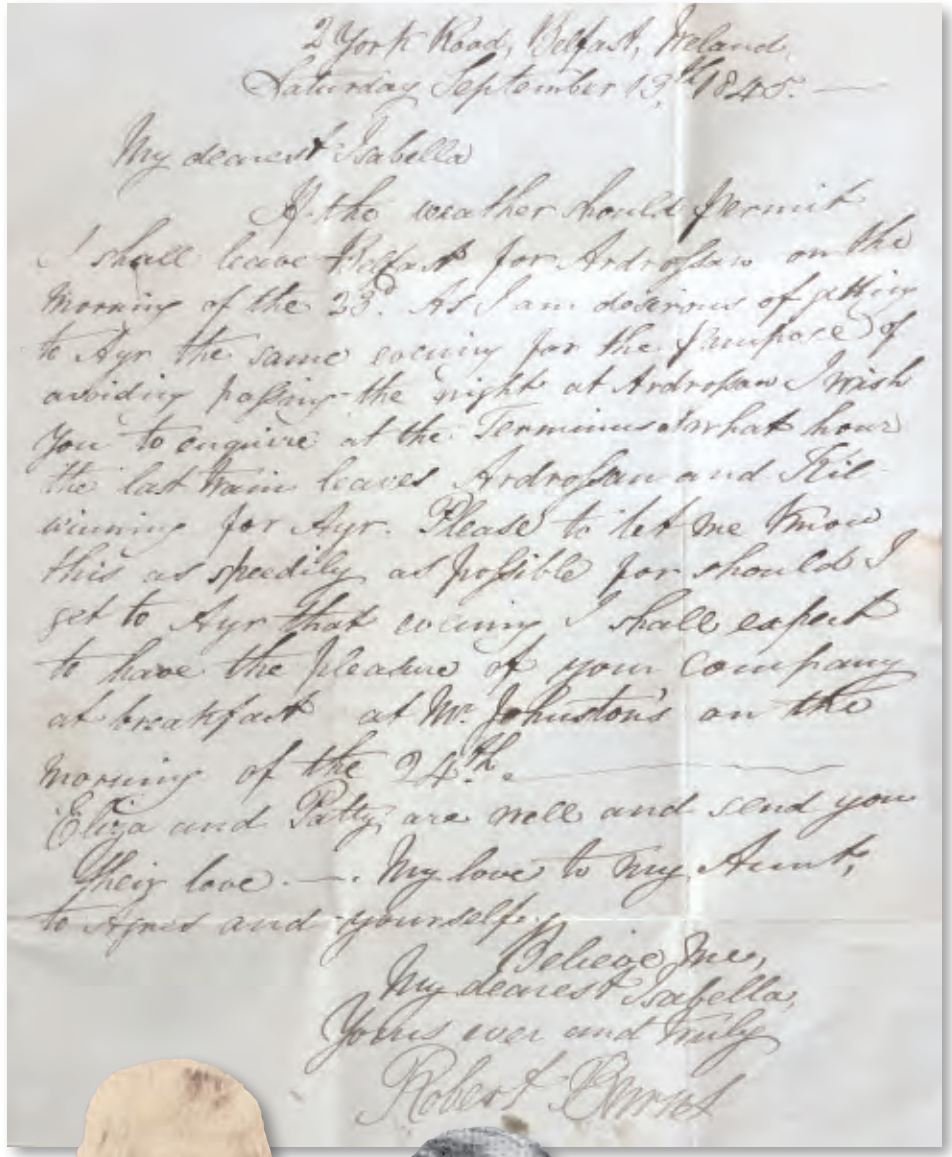
In 1844, Eliza's father, Robert Burns Jr, came to see them in Belfast. There had been a major Burns commemoration in Ayr on 6 August, and the people of Belfast took the opportunity to hold their own celebration later that month. At Burns Tavern in Long Lane, and also at the Belfast Music Hall, events were held under the auspices of 'Belfast Burns Club'. A public breakfast event was held on 4 September at the Donegall Arms Hotel.

Burns' personal seal in Belfast

Robert Burns Jr died on 14 May 1857, and in his will he left Eliza his father's personal wax seal. It is therefore likely that the seal was in Belfast for some years.

Martha Burns Everitt - Raised In Belfast

Eliza and Martha moved to Wilmont Terrace on the Lisburn Road around 1858, where they remained until around 1865. Martha, aged 26, had effectively spent all of her life in Belfast. They moved to Scotland and settled at Barns Terrace in Ayr. In later years, Rev. Thomas Hamilton, Principal of Queen's College Belfast, said that Martha had been "an early and much valued friend of my own". The Everitts had attended York Street Presbyterian Church where Hamilton's father had been minister – the two families had often shared Christmas dinner together.



2 York Road, Belfast, Ireland.
Saturday September 13th 1845.

My dearest Isabella

If the weather should permit I shall leave Belfast for Ardrossan on the morning of the 23d. As I am desirous of getting to Ayr the same evening for the purpose of avoiding passing the night at Ardrossan I wish you to enquire at the Terminus for what hour the last train leaves Ardrossan and still winning for Ayr. Please to let me know this as speedily as possible for should I get to Ayr that evening I shall expect to have the pleasure of your company at breakfast at Mr. Johnston's on the morning of the 24th.

Eliza and Patty are well and send you their love. — My love to my Aunt, to Agnes and yourself.

Believe me,
My dearest Isabella,
Yours ever and truly
Robert Burns

Robert Burns Jr was a frequent visitor to Belfast. Shown above is a letter he wrote in 1845 from 2 York Road in Belfast, to his cousin Isabella in Ayr.

His granddaughter, Martha Burns Everitt, who grew up in Belfast.

6 1859: Belfast Burns Centenary

1859 was the centenary of the birth of Robert Burns, and commemorative events were held all over the world. The *Northern Whig* newspaper ran a competition for poems to celebrate the centenary and two major events were held, at Belfast Music Hall and the Corn Exchange.

Belfast Music Hall was designed by Thomas Jackson. Music Hall Lane marks where it once stood.

Belfast Music Hall Grand Banquet

With guests of honour Eliza Everitt and Martha Burns Everitt, 250 gentlemen and 80 ladies packed the Music Hall (it stood on the corner of May Street and Upper Arthur Street) to commemorate Burns in style and grandeur. From 6pm until well after midnight, dignitaries, clergymen, politicians and civic leaders gathered to toast and pay homage to the Bard. A portrait of Burns painted by William Dobie was unveiled during the evening. Dobie had trained at the Royal Scottish Academy but was then living in Belfast. The previous year he had completed a painting for Holywood Presbyterian Church of their minister Rev. Henry Henderson, who wrote a newspaper column under the pseudonym 'Ulster Scot'.

During his speech at the Music Hall, Professor Craik of Queen's College, Belfast, said "... it might also be a matter of question whether this Ulster of ours be not really more a part of Scotland than a part of Ireland... we have come over and set up another Scotland here – an Irish or Little Scotland it may be called. We have made this Province of Ulster – this Black North – half Scotch, or more than half Scotch, in almost everything, in blood, in language... ".

The portrait was later given to Eliza Everitt; around 1901 her daughter Martha donated it to Queen's College.

Corn Exchange 'Working Classes' event

A different style of event was held at the Corn Exchange where 400 people "from the working classes" attended a soirée which was felt by some at the time to be more in keeping with Burns' own ethos. Ayrshire-born Dr James McCosh of Queen's College (who later became President of Princeton) was the key speaker. He made references to the Covenanters and said that, although he had been invited to the Music Hall event, he preferred "mingling with the common people". Oldpark Band played a selection of Burns' airs, and Burns songs were performed by a variety of solo singers.

Belfast Corn Exchange was also designed by Thomas Jackson. Original interior.

Other Events in Ulster & Ireland

Commemorations were also held in Newry and Armagh, and also in Dublin, Dundalk, Gort, Limerick and Tralee. The Dublin events were organised by Belfast-born historian and writer Sir Samuel Ferguson, and Sir William Wilde, the father of Oscar. Burns' nephew Gilbert had recently moved to Dublin and was a member of their committee.

Sir Samuel Ferguson

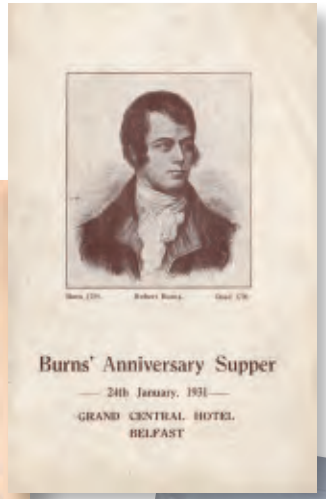
"Tremendous houses, curious people. They seem all Scotch"

Charles Dickens on his visit to Belfast, 1858.

7 1872: Belfast Burns Club Founded

When he was in Belfast in 1844, Robert Burns Jr asked to be made an Honorary Member of Belfast Burns Club. In 1872 a Burns Club was formally instituted in the city and in 1886 was accepted into membership of the newly established Burns World Federation, becoming Burns Club No 15 in the world. Today there are over 250 member clubs worldwide.

Belfast Burns Association artefacts



8 1893: Belfast's Burns Statue unveiled

On 19 September 1893, a statue of Robert Burns by renowned Scottish sculptor George Anderson Lawson was presented to Belfast Central Library. A special commemorative booklet entitled *A Tribute to the Memory of Burns* was printed.

The statue was organised by James Dewar, the secretary of the Belfast Benevolent Society of St Andrew and Vice-President of the Belfast Scottish Association. It bore the inscription:

Robert Burns 1759–1796
Presented by his countrymen and admirers in Belfast

It was a replica of the statue which had been installed in Ayr in 1891, and which can still be seen there. The Belfast statue is now on display in Linen Hall Library.

The Lawson statue is currently displayed in the Linen Hall Library, on loan from National Museums Northern Ireland.

9 1896: Centenary Events and Andrew Gibson

21 July 1896 was the centenary of Burns' death and an international outpouring of events, publications, medals, monuments and commemorations took place in Scotland, under the patronage of Queen Victoria, with the Earl of Rosebery as honorary president. People from all over the Scottish diaspora visited and participated. Glasgow and Dumfries were the focal points.

Ayrshire-born Belfast businessman and philanthropist Andrew Gibson was the only person from outwith Scotland to be appointed to the Executive Committee for the proposed Burns Centenary Exhibition in Glasgow. He loaned hundreds of items from his own vast Burnsiana collection. Among the many sponsors of the Annual Burns Chronicle for 1896 was Henry Thomson & Co. Whisky of Newry.

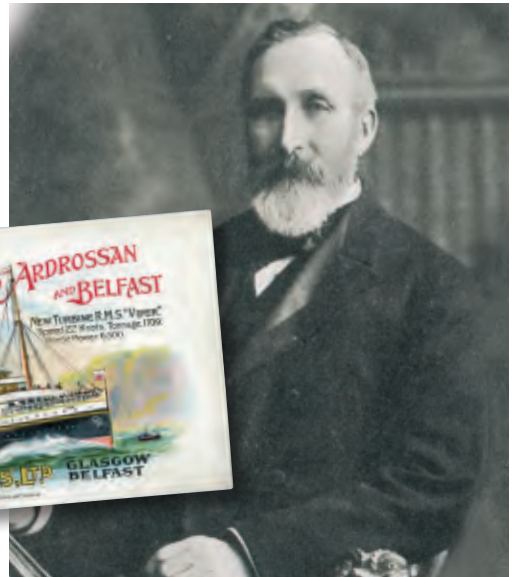
Andrew Gibson of Ayrshire and Belfast

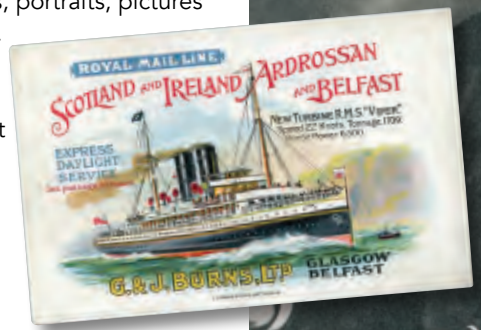
Gibson (1841-1931) was born in New Cumnock in Ayrshire and came to Belfast with his family in the 1880s. He lived on Cliftonville Avenue and was an agent for the G & J Burns and Cunard steamship lines. He was a man of wide interests – he was a Governor of the Linen Hall Library, became President of Cliftonville Football Club and his son played international football for Ireland. Gibson is also regarded as the father of bowls in Ireland.

Ulster public invited

A special effort was made to source further items from Ulster. In May 1896 Gibson was tasked with leading a committee in Belfast. Adverts were placed in the local newspapers inviting members of the public to bring forward Burns related items, portraits, pictures and personal relics. Other members of the committee included prominent Belfast business people, historians and academics.

Andrew Gibson, Belfast agent for G&J Burns Ltd





Robert Burns' personal seal, in a shamrock decorated box
Courtesy Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Ayr

1896 Centenary seal card

Ian MacLaren visits Belfast

The famous 'kailyard' author Ian MacLaren (aka Rev. Dr John Watson) spoke at a major event at Belfast's Grosvenor Hall. His stories of Scottish rural life were hugely popular in the late 1800s – his novel *Beside The Bonnie Brier Bush* sold over 700,000 copies. The Belfast press reported on the events being held in Glasgow and Dumfries. At the annual dinner of the Belfast Benevolent Society of St Andrew, this poem was quoted –

The land we left – aye to us dear
We've sung it lood an lang;
But hae we nae a country here
As worthy o' a sang?

Belfast participation at the Dumfries events

In Dumfries, the Robert Burns mausoleum in St Michael's kirkyard was bedecked in floral garlands. A huge procession and demonstration took place in the town which was attended by thousands of people. Andrew W. Stewart of the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, who was President of the Belfast Burns Club, gave a short address. He was accompanied at the Dumfries events by the Club secretary, Peter Galloway, and William Henry Anderson. Stewart also commented that "the Belfast exhibits formed no inconsiderable attraction at the Glasgow exhibition".

The 1896 Robert Burns Seal Centenary Cards

Gibson was one of the recipients of a centenary card from Burns' great-granddaughter Martha Burns Thomas, featuring Robert Burns' wax seal. Martha was by then living in County Wexford and she issued these to close family and friends. Gibson's personal card – signed "Andrew Gibson Esqre. With Mrs Burns Thomas' compliments, 11th Sept. 1896" – is thought to be with other Gibson items which are now held in the Manuscripts, Archives & Rare Book Library of Emory University, Georgia, USA.

10 20th century and the 1959 bicentenary in Belfast

In 1901 the Gibson collection was acquired by Linen Hall Library, and Martha Burns Thomas donated some items from her family collection to the library. She also donated the life-size three quarter length oil painting portrait of Burns, which had been given to her during the Belfast event at the Corn Exchange in 1859, to Thomas Hamilton of Queen's College Belfast to be hung in the Great Hall.

In his 1921 autobiography *An Ulster Childhood*, County Down author Lynn C. Doyle (Leslie Montgomery, from Downpatrick) included a famous chapter entitled 'Burns In Ulster' about the cross-community appeal of Burns' work.

Monuments in Ayrshire and Dundalk

Also in 1921, the Belfast and Greenock shipbuilders Harland & Wolff funded a new red sandstone pillar monument in Failford in Ayrshire to commemorate the spot where Burns met 'Highland' Mary Campbell in 1786. A new Belfast Burns Association was founded in 1931, which paid for the restoration of the Dundalk Burns obelisk in 1935.

1950s A Continuing Tradition

In the 1950s, prominent people in the Ulster arts scene, such as Sam Henry, Nesca Robb and Sam Hanna Bell all referenced Robert Burns. Their friend John Hewitt recalled that "Once upon a time there was a copy of *Burns Poems* in every cottage from Comber to Ballymoney, many of them especially printed in Belfast for the local market" (*Belfast Telegraph*, 10 March 1955). The *Irish News* published a poem in 1952 which said:

> *"Nights with Burns are all the fashion"*
> *Said the host, "our Province o'er*
> *Bonnie Scotland is our passion*
> *Ulster Scots we, to the core"*

The Burns monument in Failford, Ayrshire, paid for by Harland & Wolff

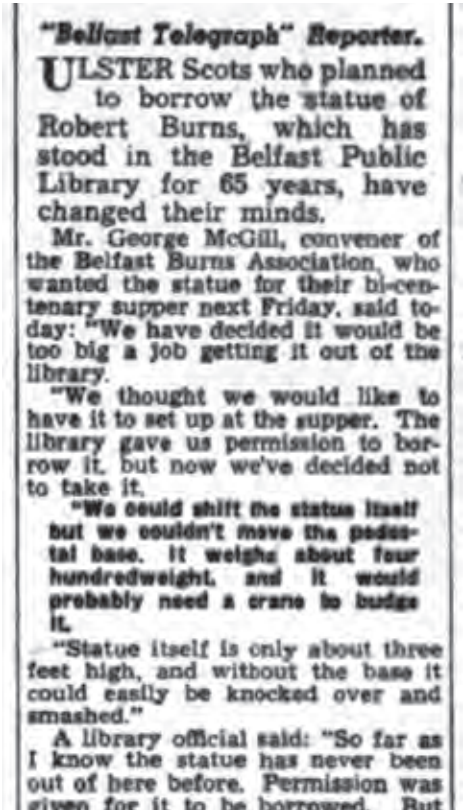
1959 Bicentenary events in Belfast

The 1959 bicentenary was another huge occasion in Scotland. Belfast's events included yet another exhibition at Linen Hall Library. The Belfast Burns Association showed a film called *The Land of Burns* which had been made by British Transport Films. They had considered borrowing the bronze Burns statue from Belfast Public Library, but found it to be too heavy to easily move.

Former Scottish rugby star John MacDonald Bannerman was guest of honour at the Belfast celebrations, during which he protested that the UK government had not issued a postage stamp to commemorate Burns' bicentenary. However, the USSR government did so instead. Special television broadcasts included a depiction of Burns' life entitled *The Other Dear Charmer*.

Scottish rugby star John Bannerman was guest of honour at the 1959 Belfast bicentenary events

Belfast Telegraph article, 17 January 1959



"Belfast Telegraph" Reporter.

ULSTER Scots who planned to borrow the statue of Robert Burns, which has stood in the Belfast Public Library for 65 years, have changed their minds.

Mr. George McGill, convener of the Belfast Burns Association, who wanted the statue for their bi-centenary supper next Friday, said today: "We have decided it would be too big a job getting it out of the library.

"We thought we would like to have it to set up at the supper. The library gave us permission to borrow it, but now we've decided not to take it.

"We could shift the statue itself but we couldn't move the pedestal base. It weighs about four hundredweight, and it would probably need a crane to budge it.

"Statue itself is only about three feet high, and without the base it could easily be knocked over and smashed."

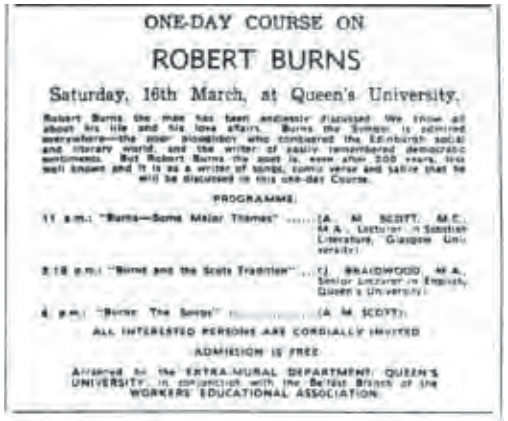
A library official said: "So far as I know the statue has never been out of here before. Permission was given for it to be borrowed. But

1960s Suppers, Courses and Lectures

During the 1960s, Belfast's most prestigious venues such as the Grand Central Hotel hosted Burns suppers, at which pipers like William Maxwell of Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band provided the accompaniment. Our newspapers printed special columns for each Burns night. In 1963 Queen's University ran a special one-day course on Burns, delivered by Prof. John Braidwood and AM Scott from Glasgow University.

Presbyterian ministers were frequent participants in Burns suppers. In July 1968, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church Synod brought Rev. James L Dow from Scotland to deliver a lecture on Robert Burns at Rosemary Street church. Dow was a recognised Burns expert. He had translated Bible passages into the Scots language which were broadcast by the BBC and released as an LP.

Rev John L Dow LP of *The Bible In Scots* (1963)



ONE-DAY COURSE ON

ROBERT BURNS

Saturday, 16th March, at Queen's University.

Robert Burns, the man has been endlessly discussed. We know all about his life and his love affairs. Burns the Scotsman is admired everywhere—the poor peasant who conquered the Edinburgh social and literary world, and the writer of easily remembered democratic sentiments. But Robert Burns, the poet is, even after 200 years, too well known and it is as a writer of songs, comic verse and satire that he will be discussed in this one-day Course.

PROGRAMME

11 a.m.: "Burns—Some Major Themes" ..... (A. M. SCOTT, M.C., M.A., Lecturer in Scottish Literature, Glasgow University)

2.15 p.m.: "Burns and the Scots Tradition" ... (J. BRAIDWOOD, M.A., Senior Lecturer in English, Queen's University)

4 p.m.: "Burns: The Songs" ..... (A. M. SCOTT)

ALL INTERESTED PERSONS ARE CORDIALLY INVITED

ADMISSION IS FREE

Arranged by the EXTRA-MURAL DEPARTMENT, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, in conjunction with the Belfast Branch of the WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION.

Queen's University advert (1963)

200 attend Burns dinner

THE 206th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet, was celebrated by more than 200 Ulster Scots in Belfast last night.

The traditional haggis was sampled at the Burns supper in the Grand Central Hotel. Mr. David McWatters, the Burns Association official piper, preceded the haggis to the top table.

Eighty-five-year-old Mr. Tom Forbes—who came to Belfast in 1903—paid tribute to the haggis with Burns's poem, "Address to the Haggis".

Guests included the Lord Mayor, Councillor William Jenkins, and the Lady Mayoress; Mr. Cuthbert Douse, an authority on Burns, and Mrs. Douse.

A book commemorating the bi-centenary of Burns's death was presented to the librarian of the Linenhall Library by the president of the Association, Mr. J. Grant Cobb.

Belfast Telegraph article, 23 January 1965

1970s

Even in the early years of the Troubles, in 1971 Ulsterbus were running three day breaks to Ayrshire including visits to the Robert Burns cottage at Alloway, for only £12.

In 1978, the *Belfast Telegraph* printed Larne man John Clifford's Ulster-Scots poem *An Ulsterman's Address to a Mouse* – an homage to Burns' world famous original. That same year a Belfast butcher sold an astonishing 3,800lbs of haggis in the run up to Burns night, and was featured on the BBC Northern Ireland evening news.

In 1979, the Belfast Music Festival included a Robert Burns Salver prize for Scottish song.

"country people in Ulster passed many a night reading Burns aloud or singing the old songs"
Belfast Telegraph 20 May 1972

Belfast Telegraph article, 21 January 1978

An Ulsterman's address to a mouse

Ach poor wee frichted nervous moose,
I've torn tae threds your nice wee hoose.
I'm sure 'twas higg-ed strong an' doose
Weel doon beneath the stibble.
But how was I tae know 'twas there
Until my plough's coul' cruel share
Destroyed what you had fashioned there
Wi' mony's a toilsome nibble.

I watched you scurryin' doon the sheugh
Your path was clammy, coul' an' rugh.
The wintry win wi' cruel sugh
Showed neither shame nor pity.
As I surveyed this wofu' scene,
I thocht how snug you micht ha'e been
Sae happy, warm, and safe and clean
In some big toon or city.

It's there I'm tell't the folk are gran',
Ha'e neither ploughs or beasts or lan'.
Wi' modern gadgets ave at han'
Tae meet their very need.
While you and me maun face the blasts
As lang as wicked wunter lasts
Scorned, unrewarded — poor outcasts
Forgotten, yince we're deead.

I've wondered oft' tae what degree,
The Fates would strive tae succour me,
If I were forced tae rise and flee
Frae my wee thack-ed hoose.
Nae ploughman wi' a wife an' weans
Could big a hoose wi' moss an' stanes
In fields or hedges, sheughs or lanes
As freely as a moose.

My Maister has me "cottage tied",
An' there my wife an' weans must bide
Tae thole his taunts — suppress oor pride,
Pay honour tae his name.
We leeve in hourly dread an' fear that maybe at
the next half year
He'll lond us out wi' a' oor gear,
Bereft o' hoose an' hame.

Nae doon we'll big anither hame.
Beneath the heel o' some big stane,
Choose some weel sheltered peaceful lane
Weel lined wi' moss an' ferns,
An' there contented safe an' blessed
Ye'll big anither cosy nest,
Whaur nae intruders can molest
Your brood o' helpless bairns.

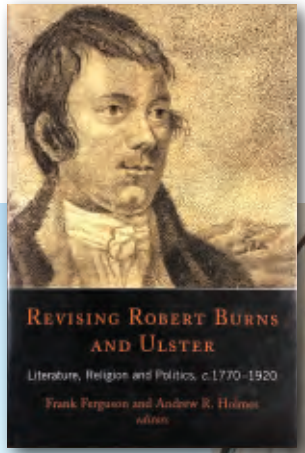
When my oul' limbs grow stiff wi' pains,
Through years o' scoorin' sheughs an' drains,
An' biggin dykes wi' heavy stanes,
Then what becomes o' me —?
I'll wander roon in sheer despair,
A wee bite here — a wee bite there,
At last I meet death's chilly stare
In the Poorhouse — there tae dee.

11 21st century: Rediscovery and Revival

Ulster-Scots was recognised as a vital part of our shared cultural wealth in the Belfast Agreement of 1998 and the subsequent establishment of the Ulster-Scots Agency has been the catalyst for a renewed interest in the connection of Burns to Ulster.

Support for academic research has led to the publication of seminal works, most notably by Dr Frank Ferguson of Ulster University, exploring the legacy of Burns within a wider Ulster-Scots literary context.

Investment in the Linen Hall Library has supported the extensive restoration and conservation of the Gibson Collection, with the result that a collection that was once at risk of being broken up and was only saved due to a backlash from the Ulster-Scots community, is now the foundation of the Library's museum status.



Revising Robert Burns and Ulster, Four Courts Press, 2009

Ulster Orchestra and Eddi Reader concert, Belfast Waterfront Hall, 2014

Titanic Belfast was the venue for 'Burns By The Lagan' in 2019, hosted by Phil Cunningham and broadcast by BBC Northern Ireland and BBC Scotland

High profile Burns Concerts organised by the Ulster-Scots Agency have seen some of Scotland's foremost entertainers, including Eddi Reader, Phil Cunningham and Aly Bain performing in Belfast and sparking cultural collaborations on both sides of the water.

Television programmes supported by the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund, initially based around the Burns Concerts, have explored Ulster's passion for Burns and brought it to new audiences in both Ulster and Scotland.

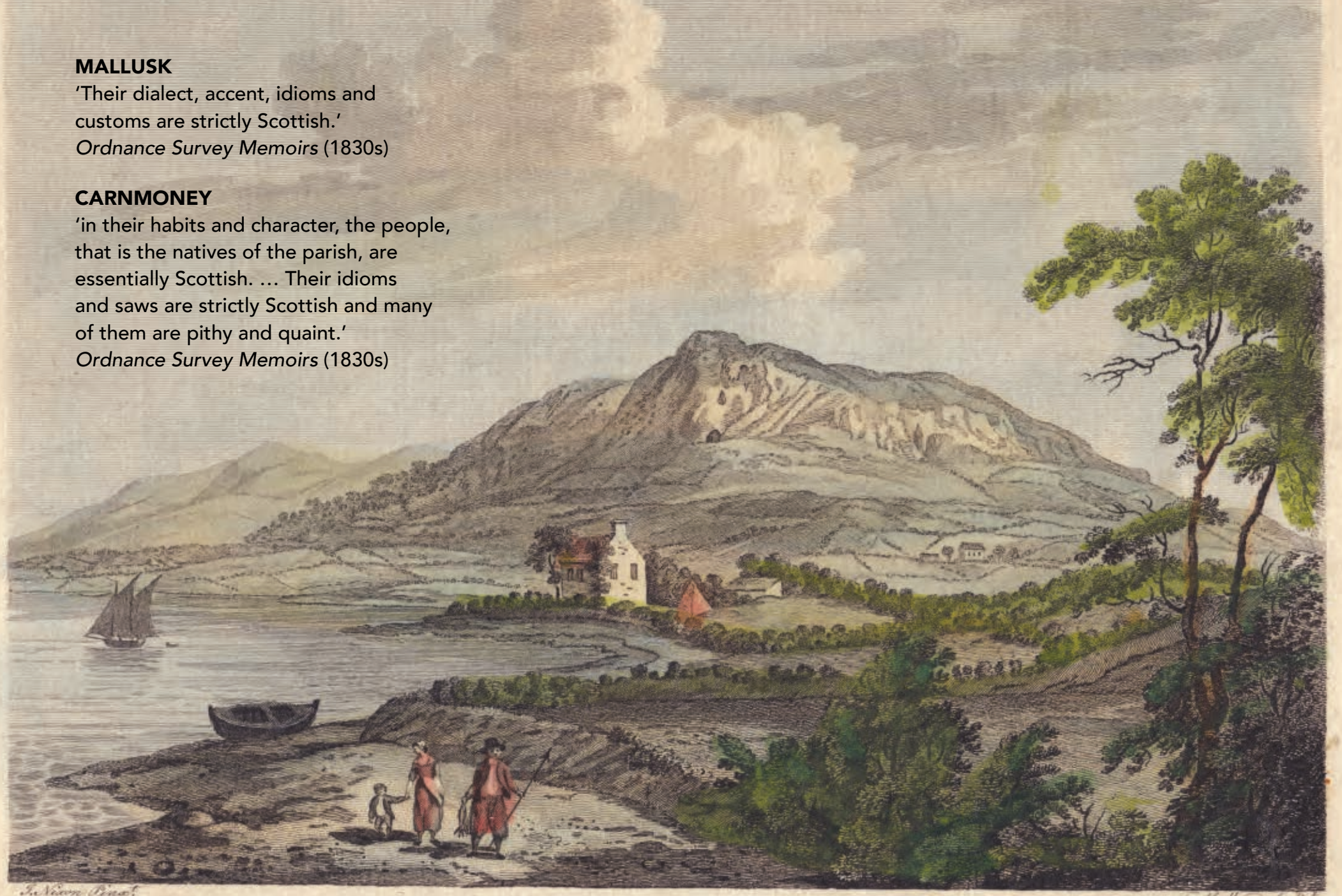
Popular publications and touring exhibitions have been created to raise awareness of the Ulster dimension to the story of Burns, which have been welcomed by local communities in Belfast and beyond, as well as being displayed in Scotland.

In the run up to Burns Night, the lamp posts of Belfast's principal thoroughfares are adorned with banners proclaiming the city's connections to Scotland's national bard.

City centre banners marking four key dates in Belfast's connections with the Bard

MALLUSK
'Their dialect, accent, idioms and customs are strictly Scottish.'
Ordnance Survey Memoirs (1830s)

CARNMONEY
'in their habits and character, the people, that is the natives of the parish, are essentially Scottish. … Their idioms and saws are strictly Scottish and many of them are pithy and quaint.'
Ordnance Survey Memoirs (1830s)



Belfast circa 1780

Visit Belfast
Discover Ulster-Scots Centre

Situated in Belfast's vibrant Cathedral Quarter, the Corn Exchange was once one of the city's leading commercial buildings.
In 1859, it was the venue for one of two major events which took place to mark the Burns Centenary. Today, it is home to the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre, which introduces visitors to the vibrant cultural identity of the Ulster-Scots people, Lowland Scots who have shaped this part of the world for over 400 years.

Exhibition galleries explore the early historic links between Ulster and Scotland; as well as the key events since the arrival of the Ulster-Scots, including the coming of Presbyterianism to Ulster, the Williamite Wars and the 1798 Rebellion. There are also a range of displays on the language and culture that Ulster-Scots share with their kin in Scotland; as well as a dedicated gallery telling the story of the Scotch-Irish, Ulster-Scots who travelled to the USA.

Visitors can enjoy a cup of coffee, browse the gift shop or undertake their own web-based research with the help of expert staff who are on hand to assist.

You can even try our new VR experience which features Robert Burns!

VISITOR EXHIBITION • GIFT SHOP • LITERATURE

■ Discover Ulster-Scots Centre
1–9 Victoria Street, Cathedral Quarter, Belfast BT1 3GA
T: 028 9043 6710
www.discoverulsterscots.com

Visit Belfast
Linen Hall Library

The Linen Hall Library is located just a stone's throw from Belfast City Hall. Situated right in the heart of the city, it has also been at the heart of cultural life in Ulster since it was established in 1788. The Linen Hall is home to the Gibson Collection, the largest Burns collection in the world outside Scotland, amassed by Ayrshire-born Belfast businessman Andrew Gibson, who was also a Governor of the Library.

It also holds a fabulous collection of artefacts donated by Martha Burns Thomas, the poet's great-granddaughter, who grew up in Belfast, which includes volumes from Burns' own library. Since 2016, the Linen Hall has enjoyed museum status due to its Burns collection and its unique collection of early Belfast printed books, which date back to the arrival of printing from Scotland in 1696.

As well as exploring the library's historic collections, visitors can see Belfast's very own Burns statue, which was originally presented by the Poet's Belfast admirers in 1893. You can also enjoy a snack in the atmospheric café overlooking City Hall or pick up a momento of your visit in the gift shop.

VISITOR EXHIBITION • COFFEE SHOP • BURNS STATUE

■ Linen Hall Library
17 Donegall Square North, Belfast, BT1 5GB
T: 028 9032 1707
www.linenhall.com

Visit Ayr
Robert Burns Birthplace Museum

Robert Burns Birthplace Museum offers a truly unique encounter with Scotland's favourite son. Set among 10 acres of the poet's cherished Alloway countryside, the museum comprises the famous Burns Cottage where the poet was born, historic landmarks, the elegant monument and gardens created in his honour and a modern museum housing the world's most important Burns collection.

With fantastic interpretation and adventures to suit all the family, the museum offers a magical opportunity to see where Burns began – and to understand why his amazing legacy has touched the hearts of people throughout the world. Open seven days a week, year-round and supported by a busy programme of events, Burns' birthplace is truly a place of inspiration for everyone.

A 'Must-See' destination For Centuries

Over the centuries many Ulster travellers have chosen Alloway as a 'must-see' destination. In 1813 Robert Magill of Broughshane near Ballymena, who was a student at Glasgow University, walked from Portpatrick to Glasgow. He had learned many of Burns' poems as a child – 'I called to see his portrait and to drink his memory – the landlady pointed out the place where his father slept and told me several particulars relative to his life'.

■ There are many other Burns connections in Alloway and Ayr, including Alloway Auld Kirk and G.A. Lawson's bronze statue at Burns Square, a replica of which is in Belfast.

■ **See www.burnsmuseum.org.uk for more details.**

Visit Dumfries
Robert Burns House and Centre

The next time you're in south-west Scotland, perhaps driving towards the Scottish Borders or the north of England, why not stop for a break at Dumfries and visit these two excellent Robert Burns visitor attractions? Samuel Thomson, the Ulster-Scots poet from Carngranny near Templepatrick, visited Burns at his house in Dumfries in 1794. You can visit the same building today.

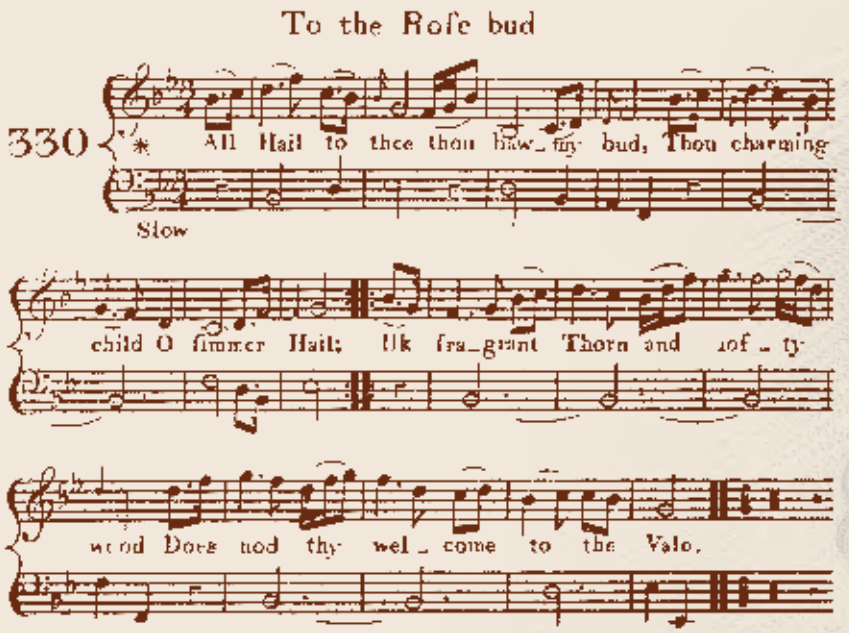
Robert Burns House
Burns Street,Dumfries DG1 2PS
It was in this simple sandstone house in a quiet Dumfries street that Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet, spent the last years of his brilliant life.

Robert Burns Centre
Mill Road,Dumfries DG2 7BE
Located in the town's eighteenth century watermill on the west bank of the River Nith, the Robert Burns Centre tells the story of Robert Burns' last years spent in the bustling streets and lively atmosphere of Dumfries in the late eighteenth-century.

■ **For more information about Robert Burns House and Robert Burns Centre visit www.dgculture.co.uk**

■ There are many other Burns connections in and around Dumfries, including his mausoleum at St Michael's Church, a white marble statue near Greyfriars Church, Ellisland Farm near Auldgirth and the Brow Well on the B725 near Ruthwell.

■ **To find out more about the collection of manuscripts, books, relics, art and memorabilia that illuminates Scotland's national bard visit www.burnsscotland.com**



THIS song is the composition of a Johnson, a joiner in the neighbourhood of Belfast. The tune is by Oswald, altered, evidently, from "Jockie's Gray Breeks."

"All hail to thee, thou bawmy bud,
Thou charming child o' simmer, hail!
Ilk fragrant thorn and lofty wood
Does nod thy welcome to the vale.

See, on thy lovely faulded form
Glad Phœbus smiles wi' chearing eye,
While on thy head the dewy morn
Has shed the tears o' silent joy.

The tuneful tribes frae yonder bower
Wi' sangs of joy thy presence hail;
Then haste, thou bawmy fragrant flower,
And gie thy bosom to the gale!

A Belfast song collected by Burns and published in *The Scots Musical Museum*, Vol IV (1792)

"Jockie's Gray Breeks – though this has certainly every evidence of being a Scottish air, yet there is a well known tune and song in the north of Ireland called 'The Weaver and His Shuttle O' which though sung much quicker is, every note, the very tune"
ROBERT BURNS

"There is an air ... to which I wrote a song 'Ye banks and braes o bonnie Doon'... Now, to show you how difficult it is to trace the origin of our airs, I have heard it repeatedly asserted that this was an Irish air; nay, I met with an Irish gentleman who affirmed he had heard it in Ireland among the old women"
ROBERT BURNS

1755 Kennedy Map
© PRONI

Robert Burns

When Robert Burns arrived on the Scottish literary scene in Ayrshire in 1786, he became part of a common ancestral, cultural and language community that connects both sides of the North Channel – the 'auld acquaintance' of Scotland and Ulster.

His writing spoke to Ulster people, not just because of his humble origins and his radical worldview, but because he spoke to them in their own voice, the Ulster-Scots which is well known to us all. His writings, songs, life and legend spoke to generations of Ulster writers from the Weaver Poets to Seamus Heaney. They still speak to us today, and can help us to access a tradition of Scots and Ulster-Scots that is often underappreciated.

Burns has a unique relationship with Belfast, the Ulster-Scots speaking town that was the first place outside Scotland to publish his work. His friends and family made their homes here and over 200 years later, his life and legacy continues to be celebrated for auld lang syne.

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