

# The Historical and Literary Associations of the vicinity of the New Site of The High School of Stirling

IF the School is no longer 'The School on the Rock', it now stands on a surprisingly dominant situation on the little 'tor' or eminence in the centre of the ancient lands of Torbrex. These are defined in an ancient charter confirmed by James V in 1533 as 'the lands of Torbrekkis and lake and bog of the same, lying between the lands of Cambusbarron, the New Park, Loveylands, the Kirklands and Southfield'. For centuries, therefore, this little estate has formed a peaceful little island around whose shores the tide of Scottish history has ebbed and flowed; and now that new houses seem to be storming the very walls of the School, those who have loved a quiet stroll by the old right-of-way from Springwood, past the 'Blue Farm' to Torbrex, will be glad to think that the green heart of this Arcadia will be preserved in the school playing-fields and, we hope, in the cricket ground at Williamfield.

The following pages are offered as a tentative and by no means definitive survey of the historical and literary riches to be found in the neighbourhood, in the hope that others may develop these in such a way that our boys and girls will feel that their new school, so well equipped for

preparing them for the future, is deeply rooted in the past.

It must have been a stirring time for Stirling boys when this region formed the rear of the position that Bruce was preparing for the two most memorable days in the story of Scotland: the twenty-third and twenty-fourth of June 1314. The Rev. Thomas Miller, in a paper to the Stirling Archaeological Society, states that a lease of Torbrex, sealed at Stirling in April 1311, proves that the land was under cultivation at the time of the battle and here was the natural grazing ground, with water from the Kirk burn or Pelstream (which still flows alongside the Williamfield road) for Keith's 500 horses which Bruce was to use so effectively to end the 'hideous shower' of English arrows which were thinning the ranks of his spearsmen.

For over thirty years Williamfield and Torbrex have seen many a stirring encounter between the School Houses of Randolph and Douglas, but not all the players taking part have known the inspiring story which these names recall. Young Randolph, the King's nephew, who had earlier distinguished himself by seizing Edinburgh Castle by climbing the rock with thirty followers, was given the task, as the English army approached on the 23rd of June, of seeing that no body of English outflanked the Scottish left:

Beside the kirk till keep the way.

For some reason, a formidable body of cavalry under Robert de Clifford passed unchallenged by Randolph's post, drawing from Bruce the famous reproach:

That ane rose of his chaplet  
was fallen.

'Annoyit in his hert and wae', Randolph with the men from the Moray Firth and the far North hastened to intercept Clifford's force. A long-established tradition, which should not be lightly discarded, makes Randolphfield the site of this stern encounter. Clifford attacked immediately, but the Scots, well-trained, quickly formed a 'hedgehog' with bristling spears and met resolutely the fearful onset of the English squadron. In vain did the English knights circle round, hurling their maces and battle-axes into the schiltrons in order to force an opening. Nevertheless, the Scots were hard pressed and Douglas, 'doughty of heart', became alarmed for his friends' safety. Receiving Bruce's unwilling assent to go to the rescue, Douglas approached the fight, but, finding that Randolph's men were achieving the impossible – they were attacking cavalry! – halted his men. It would have been a sin, said Douglas, to lessen Randolph's glory:

And it were sin to less his pryss  
That of sa soverane bounté is.

The first English knight to be unhorsed was Sir Thomas Gray, whose son later wrote an account of the fight which proves that this gallant and inspiring episode is no mere legend. The English army unharnessed for the night, wrote Gray, 'having sadly lost confidence, and being too much disaffected by the events of the day'. The encounter of Randolph and Clifford clearly played its part in the overwhelming Scottish victory on the following day.

In recalling these events, we may remember with justifiable pride the words of the Arbroath Declaration: 'We

fight not for glory nor for wealth nor honour; but only and alone we fight for FREEDOM, which no good man surrenders but with his life.' But we should also, at this time of day, follow the example of the first chronicler, Barbour, in saluting the heroism of the English knights, especially of Sir Giles of Argenté:

Of his deid was richt greit pitie;  
He was the thrid best knicht, per fay,  
That men wist livand in his day.

And of the magnanimous Walter Scott, who reminds us that the English dead were buried in St Ninians:

'And, O farewell!' the victor cried,  
'Of chivalry the flower and pride,  
The arm in battle bold,  
The courteous mien, the noble race,  
The stainless faith, the manly face.  
Bid Ninian's convent light their Shrine,  
For late-wake of De Argentine.'

The second great event with which Torbrex has the closest associations was the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. On the 13th of September, the Jacobite army, in order to avoid Stirling, crossed the Forth at the fords of Frew about eight miles west of the town and encamped at Touch House. Seton of Touch belonged to a family who were the hereditary armour bearers of the Kings of Scotland, and students of *Macbeth* will recall that Macbeth, besieged in Dunsinane, loudly calls for Seytoun to give him his armour. King James would note Shakespeare's accuracy on this point. The little Highland army was in fine fettle, with the young Prince, superbly fit, the first

to plunge into the Forth, marching at the head of his men. The determination of the chiefs to maintain discipline is revealed in the story of how Cameron of Lochiel shot one of his own men who, impatient of the delay in the distribution of rations, had helped himself to a sheep belonging to one of the tenants of Touch. Next day, the army marched by Cambusbarron, where the Prince was entertained to cake and wine by John Wordie of Cambusbarron and Torbrex. John Wordie belonged to a very ancient family with a long and very honourable association with Torbrex and Stirling, severed by the recent death of Sir James Mann Wordie, master of St John's College, Cambridge, who has been called 'exploration's eldest statesman'. After being chief scientific officer in Shackleton's heroic 1914 expedition, he devoted himself to the cause of exploration and his name has been given to geographical features in both the Arctic and the Antarctic. After being President of the Royal Geographical Society, he became Chairman of the British National Committee for the International Geophysical Year, 1954-8. An eloquent tribute was paid to this great man by Mr Harold Whitbread, F.R.G.S., in the *Stirling Observer* of 6th February 1962. Among the most delightful of the prize-giving addresses to the School, recorded in *Old Boys and their Stories of the High School of Stirling*, is that given by Sir James Wordie's father, John Wordie, then head of a transport firm known throughout Scotland, when he told the pupils of his own boyhood: of outings with a 'piece' and a candle in his pocket to explore the Polmaise lime mines, and of fights in the Back Walk, but he ended by appealing to the boys always to be big-minded and

chivalrous. This seemed to be a traditional attribute of his own family, as it is evident in every reference I can find. In the *Statistical Account* of 1842 we find that about fifty years earlier a William Wordie had left a sum of money, the interest of which was to be distributed among the deserving poor of St Ninians. The home of the Wordies was for long, Williamfield House, built about 1682.

The most picturesque description of the Jacobite army as it passed beyond the protection of the Kings Park is to be found in the narrative of the gay Chevalier O'Sullivan,\* quarter-master general of the army, whose spelling is as original as that of Bonnie Prince Charlie who addressed his father as 'Geems'.

Sept. 13. The next morning H.R.Hs decamped and passed in sight and even within Cannon Shot of the Castle of Sterling, in very good order, Collors flying, pipes playing and makeing the best appearance he cou'd with his little Army. The Castle fired several Cannon Shots at him as he past, and tho' the bals came very near, and even one or two past over their heads, not one man stured out of his rank, but answered by several Howsa's. H.R.Hs halted at Banacburn, dined at Sir Hugh Paterson's, and sent to the Town of Sterling ordering them to send so many barrels of Bear, bread, Chees etca, to refraish his men, wch they did.

Some of the cannon balls referred to are said to have fallen in the Torbrex lands, probably close to the King's Park.

The Prince's sole cannon was in the charge of McLaren

\* 1745 and After by A. and H. Tayler (Nelson).

of Invermenty who ventured near enough to fire two shots at the castle. McLaren figures in *Redgauntlet* as Pate-in-Peril, and a descendant of this family, the Rev. John Watson ('Ian McLaren'), an 'old boy' of the school and of Perth Academy gave its name to the 'Kail Yard' school of Scottish writers by his book *Beside The Bonnie Brier Bush*, once intensely admired, and containing something of value in its picture of a bygone age, but now of interest mainly to those who care to muse over the vicissitudes of literary taste.

January 1746 brought a tragic contrast. The Prince returned to Bannockburn House, but he no longer marched blithely at the head of his men but rode sullenly in the rear. Victory at Falkirk showed that his men were still formidable, but the siege of Stirling Castle was an ignominious failure and the blowing up of St Ninians Church is evidence of confused commands and deteriorating discipline. In O'Sullivan's narrative we find the following rather irresponsible entry:

Jan. 31. Before the Prince parted, an accident happn'd at St Rigens or Ninians. The powder and other ammunition was depos'd in the chirch. As our men were going of, they would not go empty handed as all soldiers are, I dont know how, but the powder took fire and the Chirch was blown up. Yt made such a terrible noise that our men thought that all the artillery of Sterling was at their heels, I believe yt helped to hasten 'em away.

No wonder Lord George Murray was furious. The church was blown up, but the tower remains to this day,

a lonely witness to bad leadership and a milestone on the road to Culloden Moor.

In March, Hessian troopers of Cumberland's army were quartered at Torbrex, coal and candle (paid for by Stirling Town Council) being furnished by James Watson, St Ninians, and James Wands, Torbrex.

Ancient tradition has long associated the love story of Prince Charlie and Clementina Walkinshaw with the old house of Torbrex near the Wellpark end of the lane. An older generation used to enjoy going to Mr Gordon's nursery for gooseberries – 'Twopence a pound if you pick them yourself' – but it is in a rather sad state at the moment. It is to be hoped that this fine old house will be preserved for its own sake and for its associations. The tablet, still to be seen on the wall is dated 1721 and bears the initials of John or Thomas Buchanan and his wife, Elizabeth Campbell, and also the letters M.W., which may be of Murray, the superior and Wordie, the feuar. The centre of the tablet has a lion rampant, the arms of Buchanan. When built, it probably stood alone in the middle of several acres of ground with a courtyard and stanchioned windows. Here for many years after 1745 lived Clementina Walkinshaw's mother and it is more than probable that the Prince would have visited a house with such strongly Jacobite associations.

In September, the Prince had won all female hearts with his good looks and grave courtesy, but in January it wasn't to the pert Robina Edmonstone who had invited the 'canty callant' to 'pree her moo' that the Prince turned when ill and unhappy, but to Clementina Walkinshaw who nursed him at Bannockburn House. Clementina,



aged twenty, and five years younger than the Prince, was the daughter of Katherine Paterson of Bannockburn and John Walkinshaw of Barrowfield in Lanarkshire who was taken prisoner at Sheriffmuir and confined in Stirling Castle. Jacobite wives seemed to make a practice of helping their husbands to break out of prison and the high-spirited Katherine was no exception, for she successfully effected her husband's escape and joined him at the Jacobite court abroad, where they were honoured by having as godmother for their baby girl, Prince Charlie's youthful, Polish mother, Marie Clementina Sobieski, and so she was baptised Clementine-Marie-Sophie Walkinshaw.

About sixty years after the '15, Mrs Walkinshaw at the age of ninety-seven, her brother, Sir Hugh Seton, at the age of ninety-four and their younger sister, aged ninety-two, danced a reel together to an old Jacobite tune in the drawing-room of Touch House 'with wonderful spirit and agility'.

Whether Clementina had her mother's high spirits we do not know, but it is said that while they were at Bannockburn House, the Prince obtained a promise from her 'to follow him wherever Providence might lead, if he failed in the attempt'. Certain it is that she joined him abroad about five years later, but their story is not a happy one. The extraordinary fact that Clementina's eldest sister was housekeeper to the mother of George III made her suspect among the Jacobite coterie, a fact that Scott makes use of in *Redgauntlet*; perhaps the deterioration in the Prince's character had most to do with it, but Clementina it was who broke off the association taking with her their

little daughter to a convent. The Prince never forgave Clementina, but years later, in July 1784, the aging Chevalier sent for their daughter Charlotte, his *chère fille*, to come to him at Florence, and made her Duchess of Albany. After they moved to Rome 'she soothed his last years by her aimiable and sensible disposition'.\*

After Burns's death there were found, in his *Common-place Book*, lines written on this occasion which reveal the same intense dislike of the Hanoverian dynasty which he expressed so rashly on a Stirling window.

My heart is wae, and unco wae,  
To think upon the raging sea,  
That roars between her gardens green  
An' the bonie Lass of Albany. .

This lovely maid's of royal blood  
That rulèd Albion's kingdoms three,  
But oh, alas! for her bonie face,  
They've wranged the lass of Albany.

He continues by saying she ought to be Duchess of Rothesay (and therefore heir to the throne) but that a 'witless youth' fills her place. This was the Prince of Wales, later George IV. The poem ends:

We'll daily pray, we'll nightly pray,  
On bended knees most fervently  
The time may come, with pipe an' drum  
We'll welcome hame fair Albany.

But it was not to be. 'Our ain sweet Albany' died after a fall from a horse some twenty months after the death of

\* *Dictionary of National Biography.*

her father. This was the tragic end of the romance that sentiment has so long associated with the little mansion house at the end of Torbrex Lane.\*

. . . .

Who killed Campbell of Glenure? Who shot the Red Fox? From 1752 until the present day the mystery of the Appin murder has fascinated all those interested in the history of the Highlands. It will be remembered that James Stewart, half-brother of the exiled Charles Stewart of Ardshiel whose lands had been forfeited, was brought to trial at Inveraray, before a court presided over by the Duke of Argyll with a jury of Campbells. He was condemned and hanged in chains at Lettermore, near Ballachulish, the scene of the crime. The latest historical research† fully vindicates the long-held view that James Stewart was innocent and died as a victim of political expediency. A few weeks before the murder, James Stewart was twice in earnest consultation with John Wordie at Williamfield House, in the course of a momentous journey in which he called at many Jacobite houses in the neighbourhood including Touch and Murrayshall. Nearly all of these families were related to the wife of Stewart of Ardshiel who belonged to the notable Perthshire family of the Haldanes. How this came about and

\* According to Henrietta Tayler in *Prince Charlie's Daughter*, Charlotte of Albany died of cancer. Her son, Charles Edward Stuart, Count Roehenstart, died after a stage-coach accident near Stirling in 1854 and is buried in Dunkeld Cathedral. Clementina Walkinshaw died in Switzerland in 1802, aged eighty-two or eighty-three.

† *The Appin Murder and the Trial of James Stewart* by Lt. General Sir William McArthur.

how Robert Louis Stevenson, residing at Bridge of Allan, came to be interested in the story that was to be the theme of *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* is told in one of the most fascinating books ever to be written about Stirling: *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Scottish Highlanders*, by David Buchan Morris, former Town Clerk. All those who care for local history will find something of interest in every paragraph and, after reading it, one can turn to *Catriona* with renewed interest and appreciation. A few years before he died, Mr Morris, a venerable figure, scholarly, dignified, but infinitely gentle and courteous, held the Debating Society enthralled with his stories of the past. My debt to his book will be apparent to all who know it.

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A third house now enters our story: the old farm house of Torbrex. The outhouses may still be seen just beyond the boundary fence, but the old house which was just within the school precincts and close to the new tennis courts has been rased and the foundations neatly covered with turf. Let us hope that the spirit of the traditional ghost has been laid! This old house had happy associations with the School. My account is based on *The Story of Murrayshall*, 1925, by the late J. W. Campbell, agent of the Bank of Scotland, perhaps the most delightful of the papers read to the Stirling Archaeological Society. According to Mr Campbell, the house was advertised in the *Stirling Journal* about 1825 as 'a desirable country residence of a genteel family'. To this pleasant home there came in 1771, Lieutenant Alex Murray of the 22nd Regiment, the grandson

of John Murray, 14th laird of Polmaise and Touchadam, and his bride, Isobel Wordie, daughter of John Wordie, and here were born three children. The story of two of them reads like something from an old-fashioned historical novel. William obtained a cadetship in the Honourable East India Company, while Christian married an officer, Hugh McKenzie, and accompanied him throughout Wellington's Peninsular Campaign in which he fought in every battle. The second son, John Murray, became a lawyer and proprietor of Wester Livilands, now known as Westerlands. The old house of Wester Livilands or Loveylands (the Tennis Club may prefer the old name!) had considerable interest before it was completely reconstructed. Here, according to Drysdale's *Auld Biggins*, resided in August 1651, General Monk during the siege of Stirling Castle to whom the 'balyeis' sent 'two quarts wyne, ane dossone pyps and a pund of tobacco and two glasses'. John Murray of Livilands became a prominent citizen and he it was who, in May 1841, as the oldest scholar present, presided over a distinguished company of over a hundred former pupils, at the dinner given in honour of Mr Peter MacDougal on his completing fifty years of teaching in the Writing and Mathematical School,

Peter MacDougal continued teaching until the age of eighty-five and died in his ninety-first year. He was succeeded by his nephew Duncan who continued as headmaster of the Mathematical School in the new High School and after sixty-one years of continuous service as a teacher retired in 1882. His uncle and he together had served the Mathematical School of Stirling for almost a century and it is pleasant to record this somewhat tenuous

link between such famous teachers and the site of the new school.

The most exciting literary association of the old Torbrex farm house is with Walter Scott as a boy. Some years after 1777 the tenant of the property was Patrick Spark, an Edinburgh lawyer and a friend of Scott's father. After an illness young Walter was brought by his mother to Torbrex for the good of his health. 'From Torbrex, in what was then known as the one-horse shay, or drosky, of his host, the future author of "The Lady of the Lake" made his first acquaintance with the Trossachs, afterwards to be immortalised by him.' I think we may accept the reliability of this story. Mr John Campbell's family had a long association with Stirling: his great-grandfather, the Rev. Robert Campbell, succeeded Ebenezer Erskine, his grandfather was a lawyer and agent of the Tory party, while his father was procurator-fiscal. It is almost certain that in the small Stirling community of the past, a family of such distinction in law would know very well a member of the legal fraternity residing at Torbrex. I wonder if some young poet of the future, reading in our splendid new library will be inspired by Mr Campbell's final picture: 'While at Torbrex a thunderstorm took place, and it is related that Walter was found reclining on the hearth-rug in the parlour, on account of his lameness, writing in verse a description of the storm'.

As many pupils will pass a notice indicating Murrays-hall Quarries, I should like to mention in passing the famous and redoubtable Jacobite ladies of Murrayshall, whose ancestor came over with Anne of Denmark, queen of James VI. When prayers were said in church for the

Hanoverian Royal Family, they shut their books with a slam, rose from their knees and yawned audibly. The last of them lived from being a girl at the time of the '45 to within a decade of the Victorian age. Their pastor was Bishop Gleig, one of the first editors of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, to the third edition of which his friend, the erudite Rector Doig of the Grammar School with whom Burns once spent an evening, contributed three articles. Bishop Gleig's son, a pupil of the Grammar School, became Chaplain-General of the Forces and was in his youth a friend of Keats. An interesting light is shed on the intense idealism of the young Keats by his being surprised and shocked when his loftily ethical friend, the Reverend Benjamin Bailey, after losing his heart, apparently completely, to two young ladies in rapid succession, went up to Stirling where his susceptible heart was conquered by Miss Gleig, daughter of the Bishop.

Surely there is endless fascination in a district where a road sign to lorry drivers can lead to a 'peak in Darien'!

The picture I should like to leave, however, is essentially simple and indeed austere. It is of quiet fields with three or four modest mansion houses, of little cottages with weavers at their looms and nail-makers at their anvils. At a time when so many of our boys will be preparing to enter the world of modern technology, I should like to mention one nail-maker in particular. He was specially skilled in making nails for horse-shoes, and so deft was he in giving these nails the precise curvature to hold the shoe without penetrating beyond the hoof that they were sent for from far and near. His pride was not in producing more nails than others but in the fact that



the best craftsmen insisted on using *his* nails. These people were often very poor and there was, it must be confessed, a good deal of squalor in old Scotland as Elizabeth Hamilton, a pupil of the eighteenth-century English School, who played at Williamfield as a child, showed in the character of Mrs McClarty ('who couldna' be fash'd') in her book *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, still available in the Stirling Public Library, thanks I imagine to Mr John M. Amess, and to our very helpful Library staff. But a community such as St Ninians could give birth to a great artist like Sir George Harvey, and in an age when there is ample evidence of 'Luxury's contagion, weak and vile,' we should recall the moral and technical integrity of the craftsmen of long ago.

Burns's Jacobitism was not so much a political aspiration as the expression of a sense of loss which has haunted Scotland since 1707 – a feeling that the ancient glory of Scotland had faded. Scott is, I think, a wiser guide.\* In his greatest novels, he involves a cultured, sensitive and fair-minded young man in some crisis of Scottish history, reveals to him the essential complexity of life: heroism and ruthlessness, idealism and fanaticism, high tragedy and the humours of ordinary life, then leaves him at the end of the story, matured and strengthened, to face the future. This has a relevance to our school at the present time. Each school has its own 'subconscious', influencing in subtle ways the attitude of the pupil to the school. From 1856 onwards, there has been in the background of every High School pupil's consciousness a sense of 'belonging' – of being a member of a community of scholars and

\* See *Literary Essays*, by David Daiches.



teachers stretching far back into a remote and somewhat awe-inspiring past. The architecture of the school encouraged this with its 'studious cloisters' and massive towers. In the preceding pages I have tried to show that this feeling need not be destroyed, that, indeed, it may be strengthened, but our pupils need also to be imbued with a desire to create the future and not merely to accept passively from the past. Perhaps the most significant feature of the new site is that the 'knowe' on which the school is built has no history – as far as I know – except that of Mother Earth! Here, our pupils should feel, a fresh start may be made. To a new generation the new building will have its own individual charm, and it should widen our horizons, physical, intellectual and spiritual. If we lift up our eyes, we may look towards the Gillies' Hill and the field of Bannockburn, to Dumyat and Ben Cleuch and the bridges spanning the Forth, to Stuc-a-Chroin and Ben Vorlich, to Ben Ledi and Ben Venue and the distant peak of Ben Lomond; above all to 'Fair Snawdoun with thy towris hie': to the Castle where 'Stuarts once in glory reigned'; to the church of the Holy Rude, its very name enshrining for centuries the memory of a bitter Cross on a green hill far away; and to the Observatory Tower of the old school – a memory and an inspiration.

C. S.