

# chokka blog

thinking allowed: musings on business, the economy and scottish politics @kevverage

Monday, 28 January 2019

## Robert Burns: An Immortal Memory

It was my privilege to deliver the Immortal Memory at the Gifford Village Burns' supper on Saturday and some people enjoyed it enough (or were at least polite enough) to ask me to share a written version. So here goes.

The hugely talented Aileen Watson and her brother Neil provided musical contributions / interludes and - so as not to test the patience of the audience - I broke my contribution into three distinct sections with the aim of providing a narrative structure to the evening.

There is much fun that can be had with Burns' bawdier works - I chose not to given the rather genteel audience I was addressing.

A final note on delivery: personally I never read from a script - I prefer the natural and more engaging cadence that comes from speaking from the briefest of notes - so the prose that follows is a perhaps awkward hybrid of prose and script [complete with asides] and can only represent an approximation of what I might actually have said!

### Song: 'Rantin, Rovin Robin (There Was a Lad)'

*"He'll be a credit to us a'  
We'll a' be proud o Robin!"*

And proud of him we are!

My task tonight is to remind us why we're here to celebrate the life and works of this extraordinary man, why he was indeed a '*credit to us a'*'.

And to do that I think it's helpful to provide some context, to help understand why this meal itself is so significant and why the haggis we're about to welcome deserves such an impressive ceremony.

So I want you to come with me on a journey - come back 260 years [and one day] to the night of the 25th January 1759. We're by the banks of the river Doon in Alloway, and a wild storm is blowing. And there's a small, mud-walled, thatch-roofed cottage - an 'auld clay biggin' - inside which a child is being born. That child is, of course, our hero: Robert Burns.

Legend has it that the wind was so fierce that night that the gable-end wall of the cottage started to collapse, and the baby Burns had to be carried though the tempest to somewhere more secure<sup>1</sup>.

So he was born in a storm - and born into a world very different to that we know today: the world of the agricultural poor in 18th century Scotland.

What did that mean in practice?

## Price of Independence

March 14, 2016

The Price of Independence  
- An Objective Analysis -

Kevin Hague  
@kevverage / Chokkablog

## Featured post

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A summary of my recent analysis on the data around the SNP's performance on education appeared in today's Daily Record, along with...



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Well the home that Burns grew up in we today wouldn't consider to be fit for human habitation. That two room cottage would have had no proper flooring - certainly no floorboards or carpet - no running water, no sanitation, no bathroom – and the living area was probably shared with chickens.

When Burns studied at night - and he did study; encouraged by his father he studied English grammar, French, Latin and later mathematics and the classics - he would have been working by the dim flicker of tallow lamps.

Picture him: studying and later writing his poetry while his feet scuffed against an earthen floor, with hens maybe clucking around him, the light dim and the air thick with the smell of rendered animal fat burning in those lamps.

Not to put too fine a point on it: life for the agricultural poor back then was pretty miserable. Disease was rampant and infant mortality was shockingly high.

In fact, let me do a little test with you all here tonight *[get all to put their hands up, then lower them if older than 50, 40, 35 - at least for this supper all were over 35, most were over 50]*

OK - so the average life expectancy in Scotland when Burns was born was just 32 years<sup>2</sup>.

Now averages are funny things [infant mortality brings down the average a lot<sup>3</sup>] but still - 32 - it's a sobering thought, is it not?

Well if that's a sobering thought, maybe we should turn our attention to drink!

When Burns wrote of *'reaming swats, that drank divinely'*<sup>4</sup>, he was of course referring to the foaming, creamy ale that was drunk not just in taverns but with every meal - drunk because it was purer, safer than the water.

So if you choose to indulge in *'guid auld Scotch drink'*<sup>5</sup> tonight [or even New Zealand sauvignon blanc or Chilean cabernet sauvignon] you can take comfort from the fact that what you are doing is something that, in 18th century Scotland, would have been considered simply healthy best practice!

[so you can drink guilt free tonight]

But what about the meal, what food would Burns have been used to?

His diet would have consisted primarily of oatmeal-porridge, barley-broth, potatoes [introduced to Scotland just 20 years before his birth<sup>6</sup>] and milk - maybe some kale, peas or beans. But meat was just an occasional luxury ... and hunger, famine even, was a reality for many.

[We're not talking about Tesco's running out of avocados here]

Towards the end of his life, while staying in Dumfries, he wrote to one friend:

*"Here, we have actual famine, & that too in the midst of plenty – many days my family & hundreds of other families, are absolutely without one grain of meal; as money cannot purchase it"*  
- from letter to France Anna Dunlop, Jan 1796

Later that same year he wrote:

*"if I die not of disease, I must perish with Hunger"*  
– from letter to Alexander Cunningham, July 1796

So as we tuck into our haggis this evening, we should appreciate that for the man we're here to celebrate, this meal really would have been a special treat - particularly because haggis features that most precious commodity of the time: meat.

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Hopefully that has helped get us all into an 18th century frame of mind – and perhaps help us appreciate why he wrote the paean of praise to the humble haggis that we'll be hearing very soon.

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**['Address to the Haggis']**

**['Selkirk Grace']**

**Soup**

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So while we wait for our main-course to arrive, I want to talk very briefly about Burns the farmer. In later years he was also an exciseman (a tax collector for the British state no less!) but he was born a farmer's son and farmed nearly all of his adult life. In his own words:

*"I was bred to the plough, and am independent"*  
- from Address to the Caledonian Hunt, 1787<sup>28</sup>

[Independent of mind, of course - we'll come on to discuss that.]

Well bred to the plough he may have been, but in truth he was not a great farmer. How could he be when his mind was continually distracted by higher things?

As a 19th century biographer wrote<sup>7</sup>:

*"to him the stubble-field was musing-ground, and the walk behind the plough, a twilight saunter on Parnassus"*

[Parnassus of course being the home of the "muses" in Greek mythology]

So as he ploughed, he mused - and luckily for us, he let his mind wander and committed his thoughts to rhyme.

When his plough turned down a mountain daisy, he would grieve for it - and apologise to it:

*"Wee, modest, crimson-tippèd flow'r,  
Thou's met me in an evil hour;  
For I maun crush amang the stoure  
Thy slender stem:  
To spare thee now is past my pow'r,  
Thou bonie gem"  
- from 'To a Mountain Daisy'*

The words of a great poet - but surely not concerns a good farmer would find time for.

And perhaps most famously of all – when his ploughshare [the "coulter"] disturbed a field-mouse's nest, he took time to ponder the moral questions this raised. In the process he reflected not just on the similarities between him and his '*fellow mortal*', but also - towards the end of the poem - I'd suggest his real insight is to pin-point the fundamental *difference* between man and mouse.

[This is the only poem I'm going to recite in full this evening - it's not too long but it's worth highlighting a phrase which can trip some people up; '*A daimen-icker in a thrave*' refers to the occasional ear of corn (the daimen-icker) out of a bundle of 24 ears of corn (the thrave).]

**'To A Mouse (On Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough)'**

*Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie,  
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!*

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- [Petplanet.co.uk](#)

*Thou need na start awa sae hasty,  
Wi' bickering brattle!  
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,  
Wi' murdering pattle!*

*I'm truly sorry Man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion  
Which makes thee startle  
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion  
An' fellow-mortal!*

*I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;  
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!  
A daimen-icker in a thrave  
'S a sma' reque;,  
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,  
An' never miss't!*

*Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!  
Its silly wa's the win's are strewin!  
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,  
O' foggage green!  
An' bleak December's win's ensuing,  
Baith snell an' keen!*

*Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,  
An' weary Winter comin fast,  
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,  
Thou thought to dwell,  
Till crash! the cruel coulter past  
Out thro' thy cell.*

*That wee bit heap o' leaves and stibble,  
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!  
Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble,  
But house or hald,  
To thole the Winter's sleety dribble,  
An' cranreuch cauld!*

*But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best-laid schemes o' Mice an' Men  
Gang aft agley,  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,  
For promis'd joy!*

*Still thou are blest, compared wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee:  
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,  
On prospects drear!  
An' forward, tho' I cannot see,  
I guess an' fear!*

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## **Main course & pudding**

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### **Song: 'Ae Fond Kiss'**

*"Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;  
Ae fareweel, and then forever!"*

The pain of lost love - the agony of saying goodbye to a loved one, never to see them again. But I'd suggest the genius of Burns lies in recognising that the sadness of

separation is the ticket-price price you pay for the joy of love:

*"But to see her was to love her;  
Love but her, and love forever.  
Had we never lov'd sae kindly,  
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,  
Never met—or never parted—  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."*

The broken heart is the price you pay for the joy of the love that comes before.

The words of this song were written by Burns as a parting gift, sent in a letter to a woman with whom he had become infatuated – in his letters he referred to her as his "Clarinda", her real name was Nancy<sup>8</sup> - and that letter was his farewell to her as she sailed to Jamaica and he expected never to see her again.

We'll come back to Nancy – but first we have to tackle that most difficult of subjects: Burns and women.

It was a woman - a girl really - working beside him during the harvest who first inspired Burns, an infatuated 15 year-old boy to, in his own words, '*commit the sin of rhyme*'<sup>9</sup>.

And in that first poem, 'Handsome Nell', I think we can see the first flickers of the genius that was to come in these lines:

*"She dresses aye sae clean and neat,  
Baith decent and genteel,  
And then there's something in her gait  
Gars\* ony dress look weel"*

\* *makes, compels*

[15 years old: can you imagine any 15 year-old you've know expressing emotion like that?]

And so began a long history of loving women – and of being loved by them.

He grew to be a relatively tall, good-looking man with dark, bright eyes – and with women in particular he he was witty, eloquent ... and *persuasive*.

But his talents didn't end there. As one of his conquests said:

*"an hour with him in the dark was worth a lifetime of light with any  
other body"*<sup>10</sup>

[that's not a bad review, is it?]

And Nancy – the woman he wrote 'Ae Fond Kiss' for? They never did meet again, but she certainly never forgot him. Some 40 years later, an 86 year-old Nancy wrote in her journal, under the date 6th December 1831<sup>11</sup>:

*"This day I can never forget. Parted with Burns, in the year 1791, never  
more to meet in this world. Oh, may we meet in Heaven!"*

He certainly left his mark with mark with women - not least in that he got at least 6 different women pregnant and fathered 12 children that we're sure of [some say 14]<sup>12</sup>.

One of those women, by the way, was the maid of that same Nancy to whom he wrote 'Ae Fond Kiss'. She was their go between, she carried the letters between them<sup>13</sup> - and somehow in the process Burns got her pregnant!

He clearly had "issues".

But to characterise Burns as a lothario - a selfish womaniser - is, I'd suggest, to do him a disservice. If you read his letters it seems clear to me that he genuinely loved them all. In his own words:

*"my heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other"*

– from letter to Dr John Moore

He was a weak-hearted lover – [weak-hearted: plot point!] – and he couldn't help but fall in love. In fact heartbreak was the catalyst for his most creatively productive period.

His heart was broken when - in his mid-twenties - he met, wooed, got pregnant [of course he did] and decided to marry the woman who would eventually bear nine of his children: Jean Armour, his 'Bonnie Jean'.

But his reputation preceded him – he already had one illegitimate child by this time (who now was being raised by his mother<sup>14</sup>) and he didn't hide his disdain for religion – so Jean's father forbade the marriage and forced Jean to renounce him.

Burns was distraught - and this triggered a period of manic poetic productivity. It was said that:

*"He persevered in song & sought solace in verse, when all other solace was denied him"*<sup>15</sup>

Let's sample some of it:

*"Ye jovial boys who love the joys  
The blissful joys of lovers;  
Yet dare avow with dauntless brow,  
when th' bony lass discovers\*;  
I pray draw near and lend an ear,  
And welcome in a Frater  
For I've lately been on quarantine  
A proven fornicator"*  
- from 'The Fornicator'

*\*shows to be pregnant*

He showed nothing but scorn for the pious and holier-than-thou who presumed to judge him - particularly those who wore religion as a shield:

*"God knows, I'm no the thing I should be,  
Nor am I even the thing I could be,  
But twenty times I rather would be  
An atheist clean  
Than under gospel colors hid be  
just for a screen"*  
- from 'Epistle to the Rev John McMath'

Or perhaps even more scathingly:

*"O ye, wha are sae guid yoursel'  
Sae pious and sae holy  
Ye've nought to do but mark and tell  
Your neebours fauts and folly!"*  
- from 'Address to the Unco Guid'

So shunned by the pious and renounced by Jean, he 'went all but mad', he 'roamed, moody and idle about the land'<sup>16</sup> - fortunately for us, writing frenetically as he did.

He still found time to fall in love again [of course he did].

He became betrothed to Mary Campbell (his 'Highland Mary') and planned to sail with her to Jamaica to start a new life - but decided to publish his poems first to



help finance their new life.

Tragically, Mary died while waiting for him at the port [probably in premature child-birth].

His trunk was literally packed and on its way to the dock when his works were published to immediate and wide acclaim. So he changed his plans and headed to Edinburgh – there for his feet to touch carpet for the first time – and he enjoyed two years of being lauded and favoured by the great and the good.

And there he met Nancy – his “Clarinda”, to whom he would write ‘Ae Fond Kiss’ - and we have come full circle.

Shortly after Nancy sailed to Jamaica he finally married his Bonnie Jean;

*“On peace an rest my mind was bent,  
And, fool I was! I married”  
- from ‘O, Ay My Wife She Dang Me’*

A few years later, Jean was to take in Robert’s latest illegitimate child and bring her up as her own– you can just imagine the weary resignation with which she uttered those immortal words:

*“Our Robbie should have had twa wives”<sup>17</sup>*

### **So why do we celebrate this man?**

He had a reputation as drunkard, he was certainly a womaniser, unfaithful to his wife, a ‘proven fornicator’. We can I’m sure agree that he was no saint - but I hope we can also agree that he *was* a genius.

Walter Scott may have been responsible for the shortbread-tin view of Scotland so beloved of tourists - but Burns managed to capture the *true* essence of ‘Scottishness’ in a way that Scots today still relate to.

His first published works were titled: ‘Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect’ – and that dialect is critical, because he wrote using the language of the fireside, he captured the way that common people actually spoke.

It was said that *‘the auld doric to him was what an ancient harp might be to a minstrel’<sup>18</sup>*

[Scottish dialect was the instrument on which he played - and If you think of other famous 18th century poets - Blake, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Shelly, Wordsworth – beautiful writers all, but none of them wrote with the voice of the common man<sup>19</sup>]

And he described characters with such deft observational skill that they still live today – think of the drunken reveller Tam O’ Shanter or his shrew-like wife Kate, waiting at home *‘gathering her brows like gathering storm, nursing her wrath to keep it warm’<sup>20</sup>*.

[I see some flickers of recognition in the audience!]

But his canvas was so much broader than just Scotland and Scottishness.

He was capable of biting satire - fearless when denouncing the hypocritical and the entitled. But he also - with compassion, humour and wit – was understanding and forgiving of the moral frailty of the common man.

He observed the human condition and articulated fundamental truths about it and - above all - he championed the goodness that he believed exists in us all.

*“Then let us pray that come it may,*

*As come it will for a' that,  
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth  
Shall bear the gree an' a' that  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's comin yet for a' that,  
That Man to Man the warld o'er  
Shall brithers be for a' that."*

- from 'A Man's a Man For a' That'<sup>21</sup>

Or as in 'To A Louse'

*"O would some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us"*

[Somehow those words seem more appropriate now than ever - words witten 260 years ago that still resonate today]

In fact, whether you've noticed it or not, his words have echoed through the ages.

In the 19th century when a shipping magnate wanted to build the world's fastest Tea Clipper, he named her 'Cutty Sark' in direct reference to Burns' narrative masterpiece 'Tam O'Shanter'<sup>22</sup>.

In the 21st century when John Steinbeck wrote 'Of Mice and Men' he was, of course, quoting that line from 'To A Mouse': *'the best-laid schemes o' Mice an Men gang aft agley'*.

And when 20th century politicians say *'the rocks will melt wi' the sun'* before they'd change a policy<sup>23</sup>, we know they're stealing a line from 'My Luv is Like a Red Red Rose':

*"Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear  
and the rocks will melt wi' the sun!  
And I will Luv thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry"*

And of course, when at New Year - and on nights like tonight - we sing 'Auld Lang Syne' we are singing something that Burns was responsible for capturing and putting in print<sup>24</sup>.

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But to celebrate the great man's life, it is our duty to consider the circumstances of his death.

His love of drink – and the pressure put on him to drink - certainly didn't help

*"occasional hard drinking is the devil to me [...] it is the private parties  
in the family way, among the hard drinking gentlemen of this country  
that does me the mischief"*

- from letter to Frances Anna Dunlop, Dec 1792

[I know how he feels]

But it was that weak heart – that easily broken heart - that did for him. We think now that he suffered from chronic rheumatic heart disease and we know, from his own letters, that he suffered throughout his life. Just one example of many:

*"I have only known existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of  
sickness; and have counted time by the reprecussions of pain!  
Rheumatism, cold and fever have formed, to me, a terrible Trinity in  
Unity, which makes me close my eyes in misery, and open them  
without hope"*

- from letter to George Thomson, Apr 1796

[he certainly knew how to feel sorry for himself - but we now know he had just



cause]

And sadly, most of his last letters see him begging for money to settle debts, fearful that his wife and children would be left in penury. Burns was:

*"a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it"*<sup>25</sup>

But he never lost his wit – or indeed his love of women.

With a fitting symmetry - for than man first inspired to rhyme by a bonny lass – his last work was written for the nurse who tended his death bed;

*"Or were I in the wildest waste,  
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,  
The desert were a Paradise,  
If thou wert there, if thou wert there"*  
- from 'O, Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast' (deathbed poem to Jessie Lewars)<sup>26</sup>

He passed away on 21st July 1796, at just 37 years of age<sup>27</sup>.

His funeral was attended by **10,000 mourners** - and on the day of his funeral his wife Jean gave birth to the last of his children.

Now, before I propose the toast, I'd like to take advantage of the poignancy of this moment to ask Aileen to perform one of Burns' most touching works (and something Aileen sings beautifully): 'Ay Waukin O'.

[The song of a woman who lies awake, unable to sleep for thinking of her lover]

### **Song: 'Ay Waukin O'**

So now, ladies and gentlemen, it just remains for me to ask you to raise your glasses and join me in a toast: to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns

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### **Sources**

Robert Burns. The Complete Poetical Works, edited by James A Mackay [Alloway Publishing]

Life of Robert Burns by Allan Cunningham [published in 1842 - available online [here](#)]

The Complete Letters of Robert Burns, edited by James A Mackay [Alloway Publishing]

The Robert Burns Story, John Cairney [via iTunes]

Robert Burns: man o' independent mind, Professor Chris Whatley [[These Islands](#)]

[Burness Genealogy and Family History: Descendants of Robert Burns](#)

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### **Timeline (cobbed together from the above)**

1. 05/1785 to Elizabeth Paton (servant girl): Elizabeth "Bessy" – lived to 32 yrs
2. 09/1786 to Jean Armour: Robert – lived to 71 yrs
3. 09/1786 to Jean Armour: Jean – **died an infant [13 mths]**  
10/1786 to Margaret (Mary) Campbell – possibly died in premature labour  
05/1787 to May Cameron - became pregnant, outcome unknown

4. 05/1788 to Jean Armour: twin – **died unnamed**
5. 05/1788 to Jean Armour: twin – **died unnamed**  
[08/1788 marriage to Jean Armour recognised]
6. 11/1788 to Janet (Jenny) Clow (maid): Robert - unknown
7. 05/1789 to Jean Armour: Frances Wallace – **died aged 13 yrs**
8. 04/1791 to Jean Armour: William Nicol – lived to 80 yrs
9. 03/1791 To Anna Park (barmaid): Elizabeth "Betty" – lived to 82 yrs
10. 11/1792 to Jean Armour: Elizabeth R – **died an infant [2 yrs]**
11. 08/1794 to Jean Armour: James G – lived to 72 yrs
12. 07/1796 to Jean Armour: Maxwell – **died an infant [2 yrs]**

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## Footnotes

1. A little bit of poetic license is being used here - although that *legend exists*, in truth this incident appears to have **occurred some days after his birth**
2. **Mortality in Early Modern Scotland**
3. An interesting illustration of this point can be gleaned from the timeline above. Of the 11 of Burns children for whom we know the outcome their *average* age was c. 32 - bang on the average for the time. Dig a little deeper and you'll see that 5 died as infants and one other failed to reach adult-hood - but of those that did reach adulthood, 4 of them lived to be over 70 (2 of them to over 80). The point being, *if* you survived to adulthood you could reasonably expect to live beyond your 50s (which is why Burns can still be considered to have "died young" at 37, despite that being greater than the *average* life expectancy at the time)
4. from Tam O'Shanter:  
*But to our tale:-- Ae market-night, Tam had got planted unco right; Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely, Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely*
5. from Scotch Drink  
*O thou, my muse! guid auld Scotch drink! Whether thro' wimplin worms thou jink, Or, richly brown, ream owre the brink, In glorious faem, Inspire me, till I lisp an' wink, To sing thy name!*
6. "The introduction of **the potato to Scotland in 1739** greatly improved the diet of the peasantry"
7. from Life of Robert Burns by Allan Cunningham [published in 1842]
8. **Agnes "Nancy" Maclehose**
9. In a letter for Dr John Moore, August 1787:  
*"... brought to me my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme - [...] she altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated in me a certain delicious passion, which in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence and bookworm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below!"*
10. from Life of Robert Burns by Allan Cunningham [published in 1842]
11. attributed to **multiple sources**
12. See timeline above
13. She was **certainly Nancy's maid** and appears to have met Burns delivering one of her letters
14. See timeline above
15. from Life of Robert Burns by Allan Cunningham [published in 1842]
16. from Life of Robert Burns by Allan Cunningham [published in 1842]
17. **"Our Robbie should have had twa wives"**
18. Attributed to Reverend Paterson by Major J. Fraser Morgan in The William Will Memorial Lecture to the Vernacular Circle of the Burns Club of London: 11th January 1982 [via the **Burns Chronicle**]
19. OK, full disclosure: I googled a list of 18th century poets and I think my assertion is fair, but I stand ready to be corrected!

20. Tam O'Shanter, obviously
21. The following verse is perhaps better known  
*For a' that, an' a' that,  
Our toils obscure an' a' that,  
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The Man's the gowd\* for a' that.*  
\*gold
22. Shipping magnate **John Willis in 1869** - the figurehead famously features the witch Nanny Dee with the tail of Tam's grey mare Meg clasped in her hand
23. **Alex Salmon, about tuition fees.** For obvious reasons I decided to not use the following example, but I include it here for completeness:

In the fevered world of Scottish politics, you'll regularly hear supporters of independence quoting Burns' line from **a poem written in 1791**:

*"We're bought and sold for English gold  
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!"*

But others might point out that - as the aftermath of the French Revolution became clearer - **in 1795 he wrote**:

*"Be Britain still to Britain true,  
Amang ourselves united;"*

I guess you pay's your money and you takes your choice!

24. I choose my words carefully here, because the extent to which Burns reworked a traditional ballad is a subject of some debate - the tune of 'Auld Lang Syne' itself is known to have been in print since 1700 [per "Poetical Works of Robert Burns" edited by James A Mackay]
25. A line attributed to Robert Cox in **various sources**
26. In one of those remarkable co-incidences that makes life so interesting, one of the audience members approached me after this speech to introduce themselves as a direct descendent of Jesse Lewars, whose portrait hangs in their house
27. There is a rather fantastical version of Burns' final moments offered by Allan Cunningham  
*"He had laid his head quietly on the pillow awaiting dissolution, when his attendant reminded him of his medicine of his medicine and held a cup to his lips. He started up suddenly, drained the cup at a gulp, threw his hands before him like a man about to swim and sprung from head to foot of the bed – fell with his face down and expired with a groan"*  
but I tend to share the view that this **a rather over-embellished anecdote**
28. OK, so this note is out of sync: but I think it's worth putting the extract in context:  
*"Though much indebted to your goodness, I do not approach you, my Lords and Gentlemen, in the usual stile of dedication, to thank you for past favours; that path is so hackneyed by prostituted Learning , that honest Rusticity is ashamed of it. Nor do I present this "Address" with the venal soul of a servile Author, looking for a continuation of those favors. I was bred to the Plough and am independent."*

Posted by **Kevin Hague** at 05:00 

Labels: **Burns Children, Burns Life, Burns Women, Immortal Memory, Robert Burns**

### 3 comments:

**Alastair McIntyre** said...

Enjoyed your Immortal Memory Kevin. I host the series, Robert Burns Lives! which you might like to read at:

<https://electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns.htm>

This was created by Frank Shaw from Atlanta, GA in the USA. He's up to 264 chapters now.

28 January 2019 at 07:02

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**Alastair McIntyre said...**

In my last comment to you I gave ypu the url for Robert Burns Lives! but thought I should be more specific in providing the review of his column for the 250th chapter at [https://electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns\\_lives250.htm](https://electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives250.htm) as this will give you a flavour of his work which was written by four Burns Editors.

28 January 2019 at 07:25

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**CanadaGirl2k said...**



This was lovely. Much appreciated, Kevin.

1 February 2019 at 16:23

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