



The Tattler

Spring 2015 Edition

Words from the President

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The Robert Burns Association of North America

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Kilmarnock, Scotland
Club #1024

All the very best to you and yours for 2015. I hope you all had a successful Burns Season, and look forward to seeing your Club Supper reports on the new RBANA Website soon! Here in Houston we had a special event the day after our supper to rededicate our



Burns Bust, which was relocated to the new Avenue of Heroes in Hermann Park which has been completely remodeled to mark its centennial. Jack Hume is delighted with the new setting for the Bard! Before Christmas we sent out the Conference Registration Package for Calgary in May 2015 to Club Secretaries, Individual Members and potential UK attendees. Thanks to Tony Grace, Ian Denness and their team for putting an impressive event together. Let's all try to pass this information on to as many people as possible to ensure a well-deserved success. We already have four registrants from the UK which bodes well. I encourage everyone to register as soon as possible. This promises to be a good year for RBANA. One positive development is our new website, which I hope you all enjoy and will use actively. Your feedback is always welcome. Late last year we had a crisis concerning the website when Ian Smith sent word from Australia that he wished to resign as website manager effective end-2014. We engaged Pixelwerx, a South Texas firm to manage and host the site, and Ron Ballantyne has worked with them to rebuild the site. One of the key enhancements is that Ron can now directly add new material as it is available, so the site will be considerably fresher. This change was made possible by a donation to RBANA from the surplus generated at the South Carolina Conference. Donations were also made to the Atlanta Club to assist with mandatory improvements required at their Burns Cottage replica; to the World Federation; and to the Special Collections Library at USC, our gracious hosts and now custodians of the RBANA archive. Many thanks to Mac Irvin for this sterling effort! I recently read the Burns Chronicle 2015 and received as a Christmas gift the newly-revised Burns Encyclopedia. I was delighted to see in the Chronicle Ronnie O'Byrne's poem I Don't Like Poetry which he premiered at RBANA. It is an extremely clever piece, very well done, as well as being right on the mark for many of us who reconnected with Burns later in life. It is also however a reminder of how the Burns movement has failed to hold the attention of school children even when targeted by

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Words from the President

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the Schools Competition and other efforts both in the UK and elsewhere. This was the key theme at the RBWF Conference in Irvine. Then when I skimmed through the encyclopedia I was struck by how many new angles on Burns it opened up to me right away. So my thought for the Calgary meeting and beyond is that although it is easy to repeat the same old pattern, especially as it is such hard work to put on a successful event, we should try where possible to take a fresh look at our programming to include different items especially those that would appeal to a wider group. See you in Calgary

Yours Aye

Robert Boyd

Calgary Ready To Welcome RBANA

RBANA members return to Calgary at the end of May for the 35th Annual Meeting and Conference. The conference hotel is, as it was in 2002, the Carriage House Inn, a full service hotel on MacLeod Trail SE, on the major road south out of downtown. There is easy access to all parts of the city by C-Train, public bus service or by car. Further to the north on MacLeod Trail, is the largest shopping centre in Calgary – The Chinook Centre, with over 250 stores including several major outlets such as Nordstroms, Williams-Sonoma, Lammles Western Wear and The Bay. To the south on Macleod Trail is the South Centre Mall. Local sites within the city that are worth considering for those spending extra time are the Zoo, the Glenbow Museum and Archives, Heritage Park, Calgary Tower, Telus Spark, Calgary Olympic Park and many others.

The conference program begins on Friday morning, May 29th, 2015 with the opportunity to compete for the RBANA Trophy on the links.

Registration is on during the afternoon with a reception for all registrants hosted by The Calgary Burns Club.

In the evening there will be a dinner followed by entertainment.

Saturday starts with the RBANA AGM, and then after lunch the annual Jim Conner Memorial Quiz will be fol-

lowed by a seminar with presentations by well known Burnsians.

Following a reception in the evening, all guests will sit down to a Burns Supper complete with entertainment.

Sunday will see the close of the conference with a short ecumenical service conducted by RBANA individual member the Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson, who will accompany the hymn singing on her Clarsach. Those who attended Debra's service last year will confirm that it is a lovely way to end our "Gaitherin".

Registration for the conference is \$195.00 (Canadian) and must be completed by April 20. Hotel rooms are available from \$145.00 per night.



RBANA Website Redesigned

As Robert Boyd indicated in his President's Message, RBANA is making changes to our very successful website.

Since its inception, under the leadership of the late Jock Smith, the technical management has been handled by a web designer in Australia, Ian Smith. Ian had done this on a volunteer basis from the start, but in the latter years was invoicing us for his services. Due to pressures of work and family it often took longer than was satisfactory for website updates. These pressures finally forced Ian to resign as manager.



Through Robert Boyd's efforts, and with the concurrence of Webmaster Ron Ballantyne and the Board, Pixelwerx, a South Texas company Robert is familiar with have been contracted to redesign and rebuild the website, take over management from Ian Smith, and hosting from our current hosts, provide the board with comprehensive usage statistics, and train one or more RBANA members to directly input material onto the site. This will allow direct control of updates, which we have not had in the past. Ron Ballantyne will remain as our Webmaster, and be solely in charge of updates, but it is hoped that one or more members will be trained as a backup if necessary.

Len Murray Visits Winnipeg

On a cool November afternoon, the Winnipeg Robert Burns Club welcomed nearly twice its normal attendance for a regular monthly luncheon meeting. The reason, the well publicized visit by the Dean of the Robert Burns Guild of Speakers, Len Murray. The club executive had rescheduled the meeting by two weeks to accommodate, and were pleased by the unexpected turnout, which pushed the capacity of the room.

The club does not, as a rule, bring in such high profile guests, but took advantage of Len's availability and presence in the city, as a guest of the St Andrew's Society of Winnipeg. Having spoken the evening before at the Society's annual St Andrew's Day Dinner, before Manitoba's Lieutenant Governor, other dignitaries, members and guests, Len enjoyed the informal atmosphere of the Burns Club's monthly meeting, the highlight, for

him, of his whirlwind visit, and spoke to the club members and guests on his favorite topic – the life of the Immortal Bard.

Following Len's brief address, Club President Don Rennicks conferred upon Len an Honorary Membership in the club.



L to R Club President Don Rennicks, Len Murray, Club Secretary, Honorary Member and RBANA Vice President Colin Harris, Honorary Member and RBANA Past President Tony Grogan

Robert Burns - The Musical premieres in Aberdeen

A musical, with an "undiscovered Scottish cast" premiered at the Tivoli Theatre in Aberdeen on Burns Night.

Written by and starring Inverurie-born Tish Tindall, the musical had its origins in 1996 with David Gest, former husband of Liza Minnelli, and Michael Jackson.

A VIP reception was held at the Thistle Caledonian Hotel, prior to the world premiere performance.

Guests of Honour at the reception were Scottish Government Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop MSP, Lord Provost of Aberdeen George Adam, and Alison Tait, Chief Executive of the Burns Federation.

Tindall, the owner of Rock Academy Performing Arts, hopes her production Robert Burns The Musical will bring his messages right up to date.

She is still reeling after being approached by Los Angeles producer Gest about writing a show based on Burns – with music by Jackson.

“For a wee lassie from Inverurie to be involved in taking forward something which started off as their idea is just unimaginable.

The fact that Psycho star Anthony Perkins and Singing in the Rain’s Gene Kelly were meant to originally produce and direct just added to the sense of surrealism about it all.

Tindall, 45, said: “You couldn’t make it up. My manager Richard Smith is also David Gest’s manager and told me David was thinking about reviving it.

“He and Michael Jackson were passionate about Burns and produced music about him together.

“Their initial musical, then called Red Red Rose, was performed in 1996 with John Barrowman and came fourth as new international musical of the year in the Netherlands. Then nothing happened.”

The deaths of Perkins and Kelly put the project on ice – until Tindall became involved.

She said: “When Richard told me the story, I flip-pantly said to him, ‘If you



need some Scottish writers, some real writers, then let me know.’

A couple of calls later she was meeting with Gest.

“As we went over songs I thought, ‘This is mental. Here am I, a

lassie from Inverurie, thinking what the hell?’” Gest said he was keen for the show to be rewritten. Tindall said: “It belonged in the 90s – very Brigadoon. It was well-written but it didn’t really work for me.

“I didn’t think Scotland, at this time, would buy it. So I decided to write it from scratch.

“I wanted something not elitist, something to speak to the nation.

“For me, Burns was a simple guy and his genius was as interesting as his weakness. His passions and distractions make the man.”

Tindall made reference to Jackson in her rewrite. She said: “We first meet our Burns in 1995 and take the action up to 2015, so one of young Burns’ influences is Michael Jackson.

“David Gest was going to play a cameo in our story of Tam o’ Shanter as part of a reality TV performance. But a TV commitment stopped that.”

Tindall said it was a tall order trying to do justice to

Burns, indicating people were going to either love it or hate it.

“Robert Burns wasn’t a drunk. He was only 37 when he died and wrote so much so he couldn’t have been that [drunk] all the time.

“You never hear that about Shakespeare, who is revered in school. We want to take this into schools and have made everything easy to understand.

Tish narrates the show, which has an undiscovered cast. She said: “It depicts

"Robert Burns is alive and well and living in the modern world! A genius with weakness. A womaniser? Yes, but a cheat? No. For all his talents and all his faults, the man's a man - a real hot blooded man searching for comfort, searching for love and striving for success. Too much is never enough when you are searching for a pride of worth but our 21st century boy loses his way when fame brings Robert Burns a celebrity status. Every day trials ('bush tucker' included) and tribulations leave Robert constantly in the spotlight and constantly judged (especially by 'Simone Powell'...come on you can work it out!) Weathered by the crippling elements of social media exposure, the People's Poet is left with no choice. He has to look to his past to see the way forward. A Prince can make a belted Knight but an honest man - well he can make a difference. Robert Burns The Musical is hilarious, harrowing and heart warming. It speaks to you - it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, you will finally understand the man you raise a glass to, for auld lang syne."

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Robert Burns - The Musical (continued)

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what happens when people become famous nowa-days.

The musical includes Twitter hashtags and looks at sex

Tindall, who secured Lady Gaga's production man Richard Smith for the production, added: "I'm glad we are premiering it in Aberdeen and not in the central belt or London, because this will travel. "The cast are so hungry – we have an ensemble of 33.

To Mary in Heaven

Thou ling'ring star, with lessening ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usher'st in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

That sacred hour can I forget,
Can I forget the hallow'd grove,
Where, by the winding Ayr, we met,
To live one day of parting love!
Eternity will not efface
Those records dear of transports past,
Thy image at our last embrace,
Ah! little thought we 'twas our last!

Ayr, gurgling, kiss'd his pebbled shore,
O'erhung with wild-woods, thickening green;
The fragrant birch and hawthorn hoar,
'Twin'd amorous round the raptur'd scene:
The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,
The birds sang love on every spray;
Till too, too soon, the glowing west,
Proclaim'd the speed of winged day.

Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,
And fondly broods with miser-care;
Time but th' impression stronger makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear,
My Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy blissful place of rest?
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Highland Mary Monument Refurbished

The burial place of 'Highland Mary' Campbell - one of the great loves of Robert Burns - has been refurbished. Mary, from Campbelltown, died aged 23, at Greenock in October 1786 from a bout of typhoid fever, then plaguing the town.

Mary was originally buried in the Old West Kirkyard, in a plot belonging to her Greenock relatives.

However, in 1920 the shipyard adjacent to the kirkyard was granted the right to expand and all the remains of those in the graves were reinterred in the main South Street cemetery. At that time an infant's coffin board was found close to her grave. Gossipers soon spread it around that she had died in childbirth, however there is no proof that Mary Campbell was pregnant when she died.

Burns dedicated three poems to Mary, whom he had met after she went to Ayrshire to work.

One poem, To Mary in Heaven, was written on the third anniversary of her death - emphasising the impact their brief love affair had on Burns.

Recently a gold and pearl locket holding hair belonging to Mary was sold at auction in Edinburgh, along with a letter from 1895 authenticating the hair, to an anonymous bidder for £1,895.



Highland Mary Monument
before restoration

**Think
Burns**

Kirsteen McCue Makes History at the Bachelor's Club

Dr. Kirsteen McCue from Glasgow University has made history as the first female to address the Bachelors Club in Tarbolton, Ayrshire. It might seem strange that a bachelors' club would not welcome ladies with open arms, but since their first Burns Supper in 1970 the club has been men-only. Indeed, even in the 21st century there are many Burns' Suppers that are still men only. The club itself has a history going back 1780 and the Bard went there to learn Scottish country dancing when he was a lad. Dr. McCue, a Senior Lecturer in Scottish Literature is Co-director, with Gerard Carruthers, of the university's Centre for Robert Burns Studies. She is the



daughter of the renowned Scottish singer Bill McCue, a bass who combined performing popular Scottish songs with a career in Scottish Opera. Bill McCue's deep rich tones were heard around the world.

His work included opera, cabaret, television and radio work. He also starred in a theatre production of 'Fiddler on the Roof'.

But he was best known perhaps for his performance of the songs of Robert Burns and other traditional Scottish airs. He died in 1999 at the age of 65.

History of the Bachelor's Club

On 11 November 1780, The Bachelors' Club, a debating club was founded by young men from Tarbolton parish, namely: Robert Burns, his brother Gilbert, Hugh Reid, Alexander Brown, Thomas Wright, William M'Gavin and Walter Mitchell, inspired by one that was established in Ayr. Robert Burns was unanimously elected president for the first meeting, which was held in the upstairs room of John Richard's ale-house, the largest in Tarbolton. David Sillar, who lived nearby, was added to the list of founders in May 1781, followed by Matthew Paterson, James Paterson, and John Orr in 1782.

The Bachelors' Club was probably the first rural debating society in Scotland and the prototype for many Burns Clubs the world over. The subjects for debate included: "Whether do we derive more happiness from Love or Friendship?";

Every man proper for a member of this Society, must have a frank, honest, open heart; above anything dirty or mean; and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the club, and especially no mean spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money shall upon any pretence whatever be admitted.

Bachelor's Club Rule Number 10

"Whether is the savage man or the peasant of a civilised country in the most happy situation?"; "Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any future, had it in his power to marry either of two women, the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person or agreeable in conversation but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough; the other of them a girl every way agreeable in person, conversation and behaviour, but without any

fortune, which of them shall he choose?". Robert Burns debated on behalf the lass without the fortune. A toast to the mistresses of the club was the final act of each meeting. These mistresses were the mothers of each household. The house was occupied by a number of families until 1928, it then lay empty and in 1937 faced demolition by Ayr County Council, however the Burns Federation and the National Trust managed

to delay this precipitous act, WWII followed and in 1951 the property was acquired for the nation. It was renovated and re-thatched in 1971 by the National Trust for Scotland, and is a must see for any visitor to Tarbolton.

Hamilton Cairn Refurbished

News has reached us that Burns Cairn in Gage Park, Hamilton, Ontario has finally been restored. The Cairn was built back in the 1980s by the now defunct Bonny Doon Burns Club of Hamilton. The club folded by the early 1990s and the original motivator for the building of the cairn moved back to the UK. The Cairn had deteriorated over the years and many of the facing stones were



crumbling or falling off.

Former MP Duncan Beattie and other citizens from the City of Hamilton were asked to bring the situation to the attention of the City. But nothing seemed to be happening.

Now we can rejoice the work has been accomplished.



Robert Burns Travels Detailed

Newly published research from the Centre for Robert Burns Studies at the University of Glasgow and National Library of Scotland give details of Robert Burns' travels around Scotland, including the routes he took, the places he stayed, and the people he met.

Together with his reflections on Scottish society and culture, they reveal that, at the age of 28, Burns was engaged with the leading political issues of the day and was feted by some of the most powerful and wealthy people in Scotland.

"The tour journals are fascinating because they offer us an insight into the life of a poet who was operating at the peak of his powers and reaping the benefits of his new-found fame," said Professor Nigel Leask, regius chair of English language and literature at the University of Glasgow.

After touring both sides of the border with England, Burns travelled the Highlands and stayed with the Duke and Duchess of Atholl at Blair Castle. He also dined with the Duke and Duchess of Gordon at Castle Gordon and visited the Culloden battlefield and Cawdor Castle, which features in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Leask now believes that the poet had letters of introduction from Edinburgh patrons that smoothed his path into the upper echelons of nobility. The journals, accompanied by the most complete maps of his routes yet compiled, are included in a new Oxford edition of the *Works of Robert Burns: Commonplace*

Books, Tour Journals and Miscellaneous Prose, edited by Leask and published as part of a major new, fully annotated edition of the writer's prose.

"I hope this research will inspire people to engage with the work of Burns and consider him as a man who reacted to his surroundings, not only spaces that he passed through, but the social, political and physical environments that he found himself in."

Working from the handwritten journal and letters that Burns wrote while journeying around Scotland and the north of England in 1787, academics from the Centre for Robert Burns Studies at the University of Glasgow and National Library of Scotland have retraced the routes which became hugely influential to his work. By comparing his itinerary with early 19th-century road maps of Scotland and northern England, they have developed the first clear picture of his movements. The maps, which are available online, will allow enthusiasts to follow Burns closely through the places and landscapes that inspired him.

