



# The Tattler

Summer 2014 Edition

## Words from the President

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The Robert Burns Association of North America

Affiliated with the Robert Burns World Federation Ltd  
Kilmarnock, Scotland  
Club #1024

Greetings to all members of RBANA. I'm very honoured to have been elected as your President at the recent highly successful Conference and AGM held at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. The meeting made me feel highly optimistic about the future of RBANA and of



Burns in North America. I was most impressed by the work being done at USC, and of course their offer to archive our materials going forward was a huge bonus, relieving us of a major headache and expense. Thanks to Elizabeth Sudduth and her enthusiastic team for their support. It was good to see new blood coming into my Executive, on both sides of the border. Tony Grace from Calgary, Ken Montgomery from Medicine Hat and George McClellan from Atlanta are all great additions to the team. Also significant is the enthusiasm evident in the Calgary Club in hosting the 2015 Conference, with Medicine Hat also showing interest for future years.

Since Columbia, Secretary Ron Ballantyne has been working diligently with me to complete the transfer of RBANA materials to the Special Collections Library at USC and to establish a system for regular additions to the archive in the future. Ron is now completing his unexpectedly-extended tenure as Secretary/Treasurer and on behalf of all of us I'd like to thank him for his sterling efforts. He will be continuing as Webmaster for a little while, but has indicated he'd like to bow out of that within the next year or so. One of my priorities is therefore to find the right person within RBANA to take over as Webmaster and I'd be delighted to hear from anyone who is interested or knows someone who might be.

I've been motivated by the success in archiving RBANA's materials to seek something similar for the Heather & Thistle Society of Houston's records for the last sixty years. It now looks likely that the newly created Texas Room of the Houston Metropolitan Research center will be pleased to help us. Thanks to RBANA for putting me on the right track!

I've just made my reservations to attend the World Federation Conference in Irvine in September. It is great for me that this meeting will be held only about ten miles from where I was born and brought up. So as well as meeting old and new friends at the Burns Conference I'll get the chance to catch up with family and old friends.

I'm excited about my upcoming two years as your President and will do my best to continue the good work of my predecessors, especially Tony Grogan who has been most supportive.

I'd like to wish you and yours a good summer. Keep promoting Burns!

Yours Aye

Robert Boyd

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## Columbia Gives RBANA Warm Welcome

The annual RBANA conference was held in ideal weather in Columbia, South Carolina the last weekend in April..

The genesis of the conference arose from the suggestion, at the Williamsburg conference, by former RBANA President Mac Irvin that it might be a good idea to run the 2014 conference in association with the University of South Carolina. The Library there has the largest collection of literature about Burns and Burns' artifacts outside of Scotland, all thanks to the personal efforts and scholarship of Professor G. Ross Roy.

The Library people were enthusiastic about hosting the conference with us and the result

ner was Bill Molloy. This year we had several guests from Scotland including Jane Brown President of the Robert Burns World Federation and Alison Tait the CEO of the Federation. We also had Bill Dawson, Editor of the Burns Chronicle, Professor Gerry Carruthers, and Willy Gibson from Grangemouth.

Most of the delegates took the opportunity to visit the Burns collection at the Hollings Library.

Prior to the conference the executive had been discussing what action should be taken to deal with the accumulating paraphernalia belonging to RBANA. The bulk of possessions made transport difficult, forwarding by courier was costly and resulted in damage to



Mac Irvin welcomes delegates to Columbia



Part of the Burns Collection on display for visitors



this year was a remarkable and most exciting weekend organized by Mac Irvin and Elizabeth Sudduth of the Ernest F. Hollings Library.

Delegates were registered in the Courtyard by Marriott, which is located adjacent to the University campus and close to the University Library.

Most of the 50+ delegates arrived on Thursday afternoon and the proceedings kicked-off with the Friday morning golf tournament in idyllic weather and this time around the win-

the containers. While visiting the Library the subject came up and Elizabeth Sudduth the Library director offered the services of the Library to archive the RBANA records. This generous offer was accepted willingly at the Directors meeting in the afternoon and recommended to the AGM on Saturday. In the early Friday evening the Hollings Library hosted a special display of Burns' artifacts and hosted a heavy hors 'd oeuvres and wine reception. On display was the latest Library acquisition, a version of Burns 'Flow

## RBANA In Columbia (cont'd)

Gently Sweet Afton' in Burns' own handwriting. Music during the reception was provided by one of our members, Debra Brewin-Wilson, on a Clàrsach (Scottish harp).



controlled vaults which held much more of the rare books collections, and more, including a cast model of Robert Burns' skull.

Following Lunch the Jim Connor Memorial Quiz was held in the Hollings Library conference room. Jim Cunningham had again set a challenging set of questions and the result depended on a tie-breaker competition between Les Strachan & David Murray, which eventually was won again by David.

Following greetings from Elizabeth Sudduth and Jane Brown the attendees were warmly welcomed by Thomas McNally, the Dean of the University of South Carolina Libraries.

The company then returned to the Courtyard Hotel where later in the evening we enjoyed a

talk by Professor Gerry Carruthers, of Glas-



Jane, Allison and others look at the artifacts in the vault



A cast of Burns skull in the library vaults



President Jean gets up close with Burns' skull

great ceilidh hosted by Ronnie O'Byrne and we again enjoyed the musical talent of Nils Brown.

The AGM on Saturday morning was held in the conference room of the Hollings Library and the new executive for 2014/2016 was installed.

The President of the Calgary Burns Club, Ian Denness, announced that the 2015 Conference would be held in Calgary on the 29th to 31st May.

Many of the delegates then took the opportunity to revisit the displays in the library; a few had the opportunity to visit the climate

gow University, on the changing perceptions of Burns over the 20th century.

That was followed by a presentation by Elizabeth Sudduth and her Post Grad students on the type of research being pursued at the Hollings Library.



## RBANA In Columbia (cont'd)

We then returned to the Courtyard Hotel for the formal reception and dinner . The speeches and greetings saw the handover of the Presidency to Robert Boyd of the Heather & Thistle club from Houston Texas.

President Robert then presented the trophies for the Golf and the Quiz competitions to the winners Bill Molloy & David Murray respectively.

The entertainment after dinner was highlighted with a delightful vignette by RBWF President



Jane Brown, in period dress, enacting a monologue in the character of Jean Armour, relating her life with Robert Burns.



Some of the company enjoyed a round of the Gay Gordons ceilidh dance. Again this year Ronnie O'Byrne performed his special rousing rendition of "Scots Wha Hae" and during the singing all the men in the room again joined Jim Cunningham with the bodhrán and paraded around the floor.

The evening finished up with all the company circling the hall and singing Auld Lang Syne first with Nils Brown singing it to the original tune then we all joined in with the one we are all familiar with.

On Sunday Morning we attended a short ecumenical service led by individual RBANA member Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson, who also led the singing of the hymns, set to familiar Burns' tunes, with her Clàrsach.

We then took our leave, looking forward to the next conference in Calgary on May 29th to 30th 2015.

Credit and thanks are due for the organization and efforts by Mac Irvin and Elizabeth Sudduth the Director of the Hollings Library.

Those clubs represented this year were:-.

The Halton Peel Burns Club,

The Robert Burns Society of Kilmarnock Ontario

The Heather & Thistle Society of Houston

The Robert Burns Society of Annapolis

Calgary Burns Club

The Burns Club of Atlanta

Five Independent members,

plus the 5 visitors from the UK.

The Robert Burns Society of Doon,

The Winnipeg Robert Burns Club

The Niagara Falls Burns Club

Scheihallion Scottish Heritage Society

The Medicine Hat Burns Club

The St Andrews Society of Williamsburg

## Mystery Editor Helped Burns Prepare Kilmarnock Edition (?)

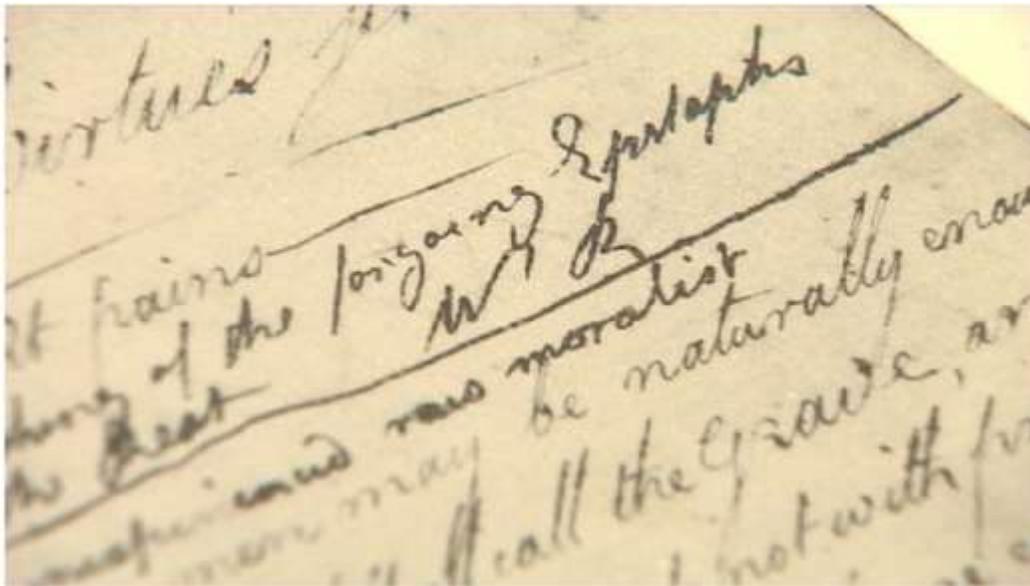
A new study by Prof Nigel Leask (right) of the University of Glasgow has claimed that Robert Burns might have used someone with the initials 'WR' to edit all his early work.



into print.

Scotland's national bard also worked with the "figure in the margins" to help him achieve public recognition.

His findings were discussed at the inaugural World Congress of Scottish Literatures (WCSL) organised by the Glasgow university



in early July.

Prof Leask discovered notes in Burns' first commonplace book from 1783 - before he was ever published - signed by someone with the initials WR.

He said: "WR was given the task by Burns to read through his commonplace book and choose which works were good enough to go

"He was a kind of consultant and this work resulted in the publication of the Kilmarnock Volume of Poems in 1786.

"Suddenly Burns was launched from obscurity as a tenant farmer in Ayrshire to the most famous poet in Scotland - and the rest is history."

Several theories about the possible identity of WR have been put forward but so far none has been confirmed.

The initials WR can be seen next to notes written by Burns' mystery colleague (below)

Prof Leask said: "We don't know who WR was - probably a man but it could have been a woman.

"We are very keen to find out. So if anyone knows of someone with those initials who was living in the vicinity of Burns' farms in Ayrshire in the mid-1780s, please get in touch."

The WCSL brought together academics and experts from as far afield as Australia, Canada, China and the United States.

In total there were more than 200 speakers at the event, discussing their research into Scottish texts and authors.

It also saw the launch of the International Association for the Study of Scottish Literatures (IASSL), formed to raise the status of Scottish literature around the world and promote Scottish authors internationally.

## Was Burns Bipolar?

**R**obert Burns, wrote of his mood swings and melancholia as “blue devilism”. Today, experts suggest it might be diagnosed as bipolar disorder.

University of Glasgow organised a symposium for medical experts and Burns specialists to scrutinise the mental and physical health of Scotland’s bard, whose work includes "Auld Lang Syne" and "Tam o’ Shanter".

It is the first time that medical and literary academics have met to address the question over whether Burns suffered from bipolar disorder. The organisers hope it will lead to a research project into the issue.

Daniel Smith, reader in psychiatry at the University of Glasgow, said: “Burns had a complicated and some might say tempestuous personal history, with bouts of melancholic depression.”

He continued: “It is possible that his life history and his prodigious literary outputs may have been influenced by a recurrent disorder of mood, such as bipolar disorder.”

Burns died in 1796 at the age of 37 and, Dr. Smith said, “was known to have serious de-

pression”. In 2009, an analyst suggested the poet was the victim of manic depression after scrutinising his letters and writing.

The expert Joan Charles said a manuscript for "A Winter Night" revealed him to be in a “deep, dark place”. Robert Crawford, the poet’s biographer, also suggested he may have suffered from serious mental illness.

Dr. Smith, a medical adviser to Bipolar Scotland has worked with Gerry Carruthers, (left) co-director of the centre for Robert Burns Studies at the university for a year on the topic.

Professor Carruthers said: “Today is a starting point. What we may do is chart his creative output against some of his own testimony about his moods. No one has ever done that.”

He also suggested it could be the topic of a PhD. “Burns is a very positive role model in some ways, he has an almost manic story of creativity. Maybe this is a good time to remove the stigma of bipolar.”

"Maybe we will see Burns as a different force of nature – a force of a disordered or not entirely normal brain. "But if you begin to speculate that the national bard might have been depressive, it could also increase acceptance of mental health issues."



Think Burns

## Calgary club adds addition to Bruce Monument.

On the afternoon of Sunday, 29 June 2014, members of the Calgary Burns Club and the public gathered at the base of the Robert the Bruce statue, situated on a hill overlooking 14 St. N.W. in Calgary, Alberta, for the unveiling of the addition to the effigy.

“The Battle of Bannockburn was one of the final installments of Scotland’s trying to get independence over England,” explained Ian Denness, President of the Calgary Burns Club. “(Robert the Bruce) was severely outnumbered, by three to one, by Edward the Second’s army but was able, through use of some very clever tactics, to defeat the English.

It was Calgary’s Eric L. Harvie, a lawyer, philanthropist and the founder of the world famous Glenbow



Museum in that city, who was instrumental in the funding of the Robert the Bruce statue located at the site of the Battle of Bannockburn near Stirling, Scotland, and that it was also at Harvie’s insistence that an identical statue was erected in Calgary.

“We have this unique linkage between Calgary and Scotland,” “The name Calgary is derived from a wee town on the Isle of Mull and obviously Eric Harvie thought it was appropriate to provide that linkage in, I was going to say in a cast iron way, but the statue is actually made of bronze, so in a bronze way.”

Our thanks to Canadian Director Ken Montgomery for this report.



## Burns Choral Settings Now Online

A new online resource has been launched to make choral versions of Robert Burns work available to the public for the first time.

The Robert Burns Choral Settings website is the result of a year-long collaborative project between the Centre for Robert Burns Studies and the Chapel Choir at the University of Glasgow to record and compile choral versions of 20 of Burns’ most famous works.

218 years after his death, academics and performers have included works such as ‘Ae Fond Kiss’, ‘Ye Banks and Braes’ and ‘A Man’s A Man’ from a range of composers from across Europe, including Ralph Vaughan Williams and Robert Schumann.

Burns’ work was the inspiration for many composers across Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries; the online resource brings together the most notable of these people for the first time, along with information

about each work and its composer.

The selection includes two world premiere performances of pieces music created by renowned Scottish composer Francis George Scott.

Dr. Kirsteen McCue, co-director of the Centre for Robert Burns Studies at the University of Glasgow, said: “Because Burns is so central for us we think we know everything about him, but we don’t. Composers and musicians worldwide have found inspiration in Burns’ work and this project presents new information about how influential his song lyrics have been and continue to be.

“Each musical creation has taken the Bard’s work to different places entirely: linguistically, musically, and culturally, and together they reveal the universality of Burns’ poetic and musical voice.”

Nick Wade, communications officer at the university, said: “It took a while to get everything together, a lot of the help came from volunteers from the university choir. There will be performances coming up over the next year hopefully, but nothing is scheduled just yet.”

The Centre for Robert Burns Studies was established in July 2007 at the University of Glasgow.