

Robert Burns

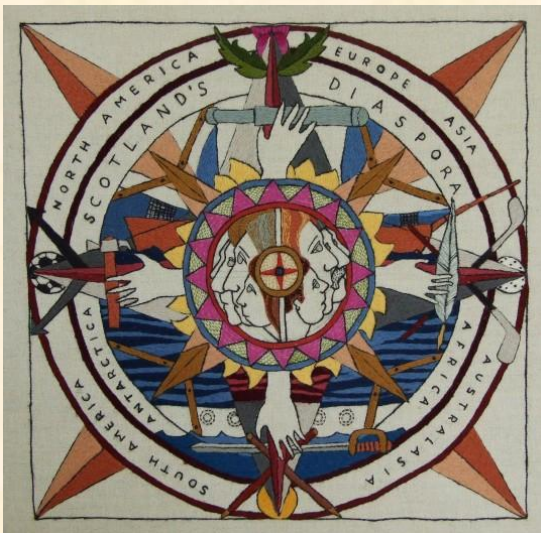
25 January 1759 – 21 July 1796



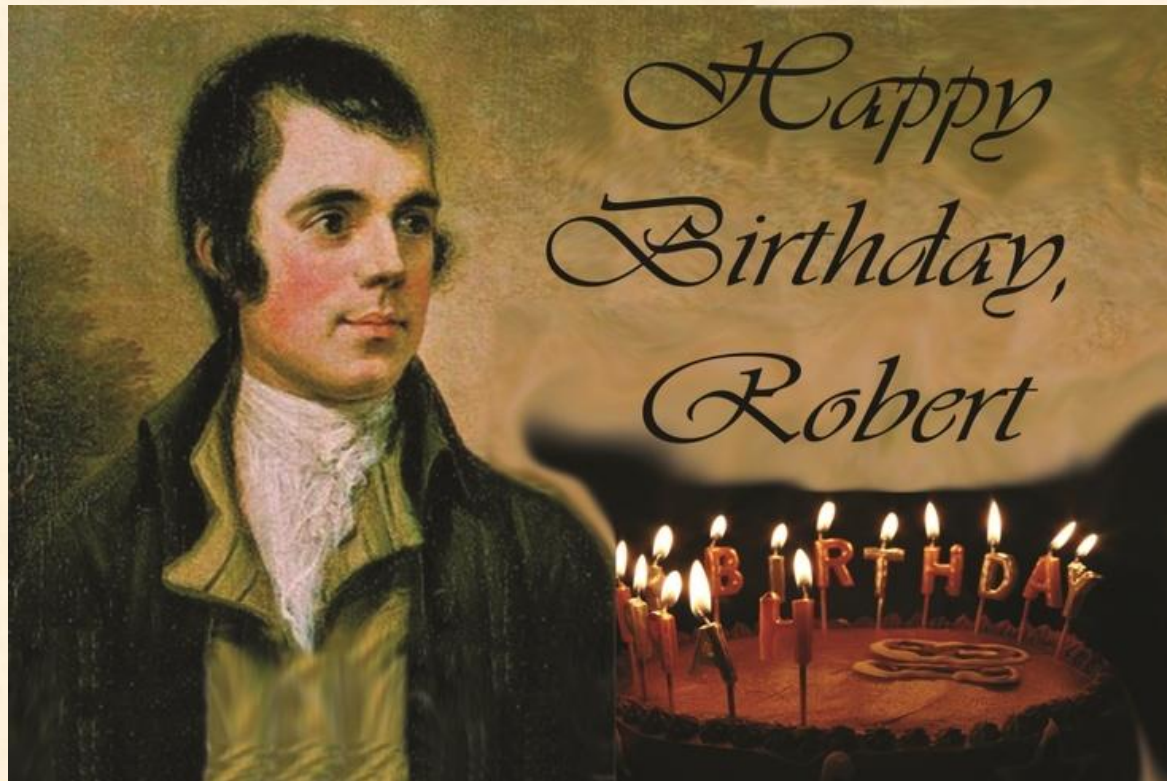
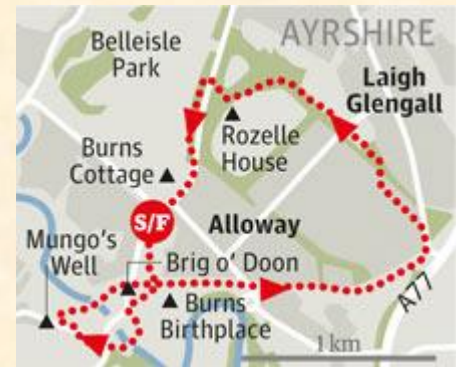
Robert Burns was a Scottish poet and lyricist. He is widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland and is celebrated worldwide. He is the best known of the poets who have written in the Scots language, although much of his writing is also in English and a light Scots dialect, accessible to an audience beyond Scotland. He also wrote in standard English, and in these writings his political or civil commentary is often at its bluntest.



He is regarded as a pioneer of the Romantic movement, and after his death he became a great source of inspiration to the founders of both liberalism and socialism, and a cultural icon in Scotland and among the Scottish Diaspora around the world. Celebration of his life and work became almost a national charismatic cult during the 19th and 20th centuries, and his influence has long been strong on Scottish literature. In 2009 he was chosen as the greatest Scot by the Scottish public in a vote run by Scottish television channel STV.



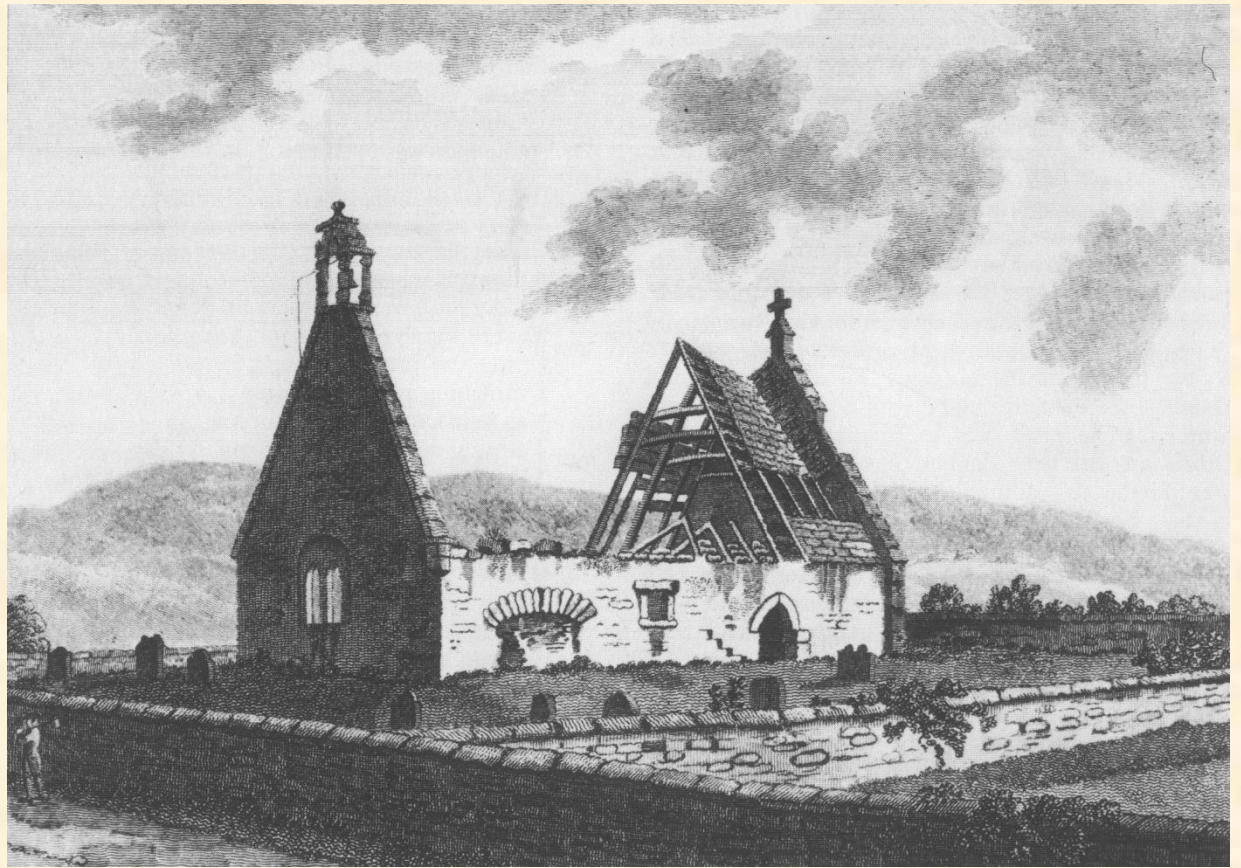
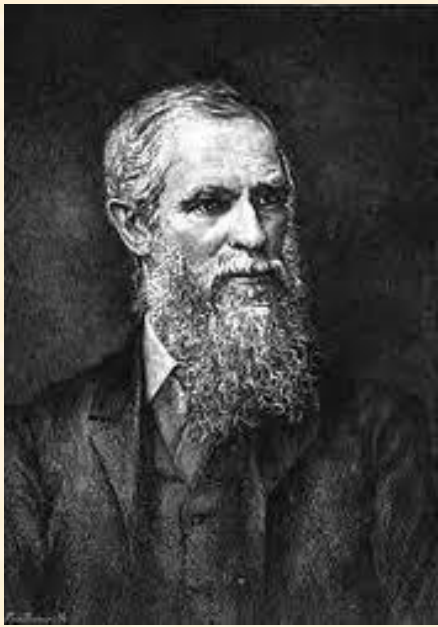
Burns was born two miles (3 km) south of . Ayr, in Alloway, Ayrshire, Scotland, the eldest of the seven children of William Burnes (1721–1784) (Robert Burns spelled his surname Burnes until 1786), a self-educated tenant farmer from Dunnottar, The Mearns, and Agnes Brown (1732–1820), the daughter of a tenant farmer from Kirkoswald, Ayrshire





He was born in a house built by his father (now the Burns Cottage Museum), where he lived until Easter 1766, when he was seven years old. William Burnes sold the house and took the tenancy of the 70-acre (280,000 m²) Mount Oliphant farm, southeast of Alloway. Here Burns grew up in poverty and hardship, and the severe manual labour of the farm left its traces in a premature stoop and a weakened constitution.





He had little regular schooling and got much of his education from his father, who taught his children reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history and also wrote for them *A Manual Of Christian Belief*. He was also taught by John Murdoch (1747–1824), who opened an "adventure school" in Alloway in 1763 and taught Latin, French, and mathematics to both Robert and his brother Gilbert (1760–1827) from 1765 to 1768 until Murdoch left the parish.

After a few years of home education, Burns was sent to Dalrymple Parish School during the summer of 1772 before returning at harvest time to full-time farm labouring until 1773, when he was sent to lodge with Murdoch for three weeks to study grammar, French, and Latin.



By the age of 15, Burns was the principal labourer at Mount Oliphant. During the harvest of 1774, he was assisted by Nelly Kilpatrick (1759–1820), who inspired his first attempt at poetry, "O, Once I Lov'd A Bonnie Lass". In the summer of 1775, he was sent to finish his education with a tutor at Kirkoswald, where he met Peggy Thompson (b.1762), to whom he wrote two songs, "Now Westlin' Winds" and "I Dream'd I Lay".

Now Westlin Winds



www.abcnotation.com/tunes

153 I dream'd I lay, &c.

146 I dream'd I lay where flowers were spring-ing,
Very Slow

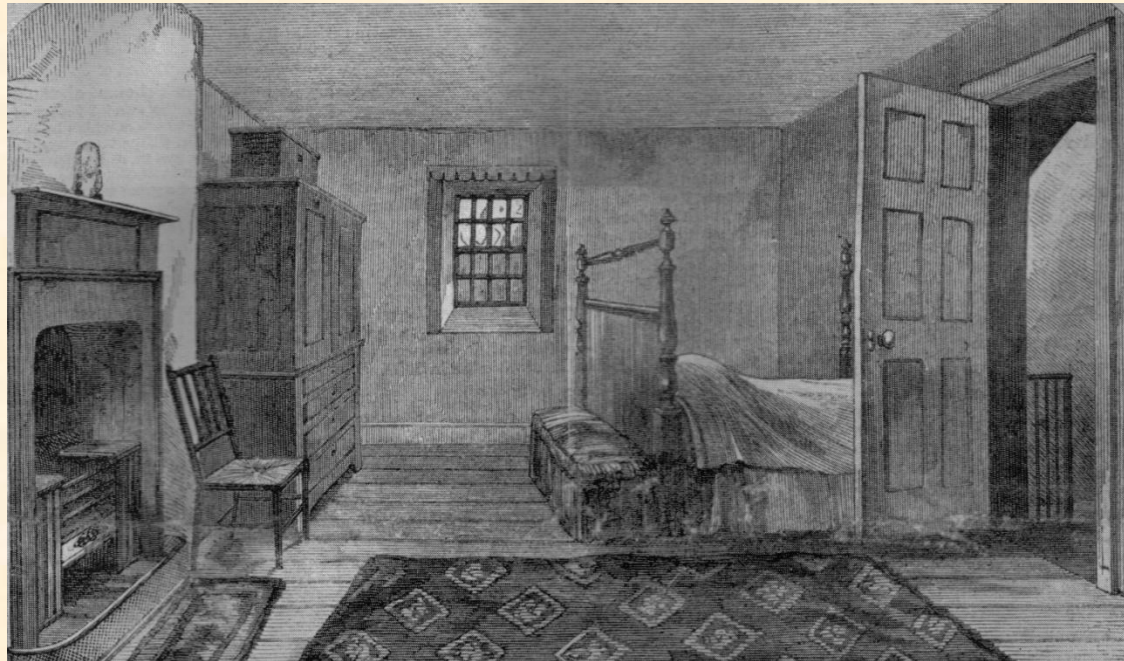
Gaily in the sunny beam; Lift'ning to the wild birds fing'ing,
By a fal-ling, chryf-tal stream: Straight the fky grew
black and daring; Thro' the woods the whirlwinds rave; Trees with aged
arms were war-ring, O'er the swelling, drumlie wave,

Such was my life's deceitful morning,
Such the pleasures I enjoy'd;
But lang or noon, loud tempests storming
A' my flowery blifs destroy'd.
Tho' fickle Fortune has deceiv'd me,
She promis'd fair, and perform'd but ill;
Of mony a joy and hope bereav'd me,
I bear a heart shall support me still.

X

Despite his ability and character, William Burnes was consistently unfortunate, and migrated with his large family from farm to farm without ever being able to improve his circumstances. At Whitsun, 1777, he removed his large family from the unfavourable conditions of Mount Oliphant to the 130-acre (0.53 km²) farm at Lochlea, near Tarbolton, where they stayed until William Burnes' death in 1784. Subsequently, the family became integrated into the community of Tarbolton. To his father's disapproval, Robert joined a country dancing school in 1779 and, with Gilbert, formed the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club the following year. His earliest existing letters date from this time, when he began making romantic overtures to Alison Begbie (b. 1762). In spite of four songs written for her and a suggestion that he was willing to marry her, she rejected him.

Robert Burns was initiated into masonic Lodge St David, Tarbolton, on 4 July 1781, when he was 22.



In December 1781, Burns moved temporarily to Irvine, Ayrshire, to learn to become a flax-dresser, but during the workers' celebrations for New Year 1781/1782 (which included Burns as a participant) the flax shop caught fire and was burnt to the ground. This venture accordingly came to an end, and Burns went home to Lochlea farm. During this time he met and befriended Captain Richard Brown who encouraged him to become a poet. He continued to write poems and songs and began a commonplace book in 1783, while his father fought a legal dispute with his landlord. The case went to the Court of Session, and Burnes was upheld in January 1784, a fortnight before he died.





Robert's first child, Elizabeth Paton Burns (1785–1817), was born to his mother's servant, Elizabeth Paton (1760–circa 1799), while he was embarking on a relationship with Jean Armour, who became pregnant with twins in March 1786. Burns signed a paper attesting his marriage to Jean, but her father "was in the greatest distress, and fainted away". To avoid disgrace, her parents sent her to live with her uncle in Paisley. Although Armour's father initially forbade it, they were eventually married in 1788. Armour bore him nine children, only three of whom survived infancy.

Burns was in financial difficulties due to his want of success in farming, and to make enough money to support a family he took up a friend's offer of work in Jamaica, at a salary of £30 per annum. The position that Burns accepted was as a bookkeeper on a slave plantation. Burns's egalitarian views were typified by "The Slave's Lament" six years later, but in 1786 there was little public awareness of the abolitionist movement that began about that time.

The Slave's Lament

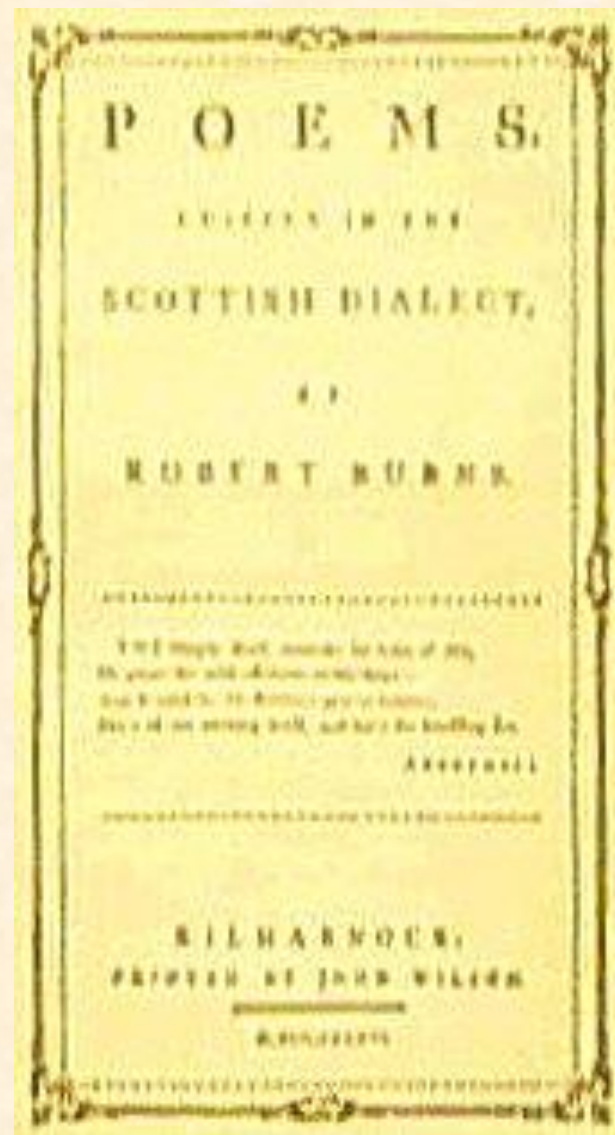
www.traditionalmusic.co.uk

The image displays a musical score for the piece "The Slave's Lament". It is written in 4/4 time and features a melody on a treble clef staff and a guitar accompaniment on a six-line staff. The melody is composed of eighth and quarter notes, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The guitar accompaniment is written in a style that combines standard notation with numerical tablature. The first system of the guitar part includes a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The second system of the guitar part continues the accompaniment. The score is presented in a clear, legible format, suitable for musicians to play.

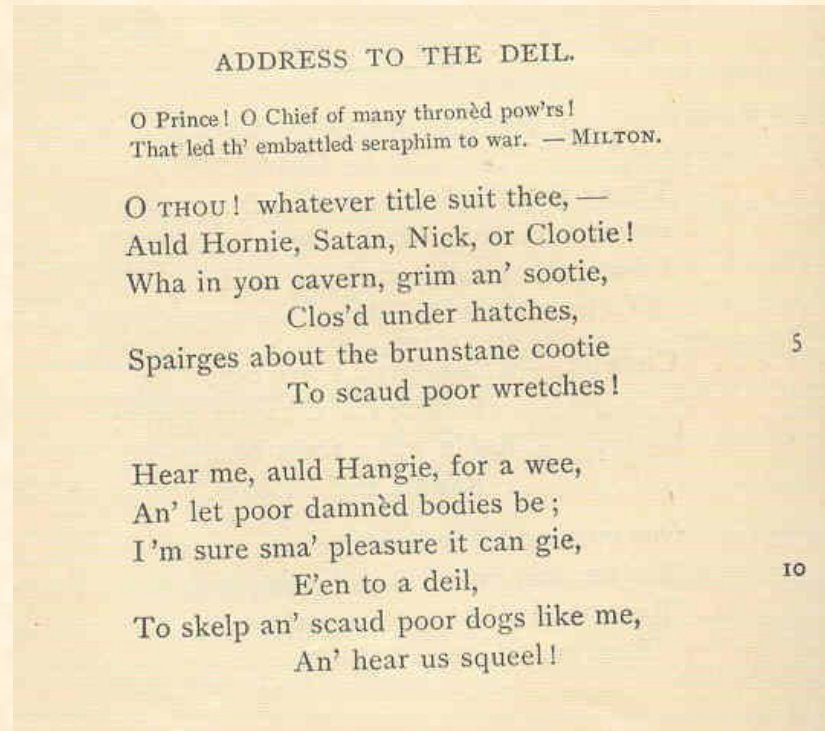
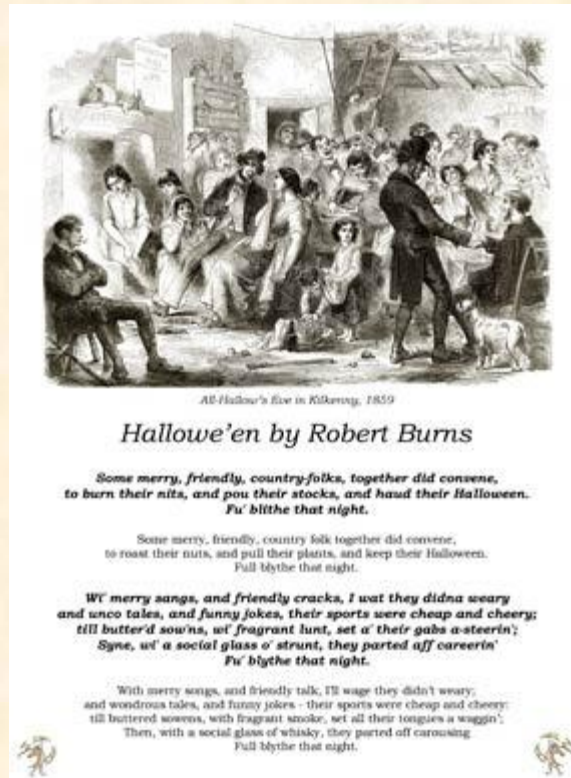
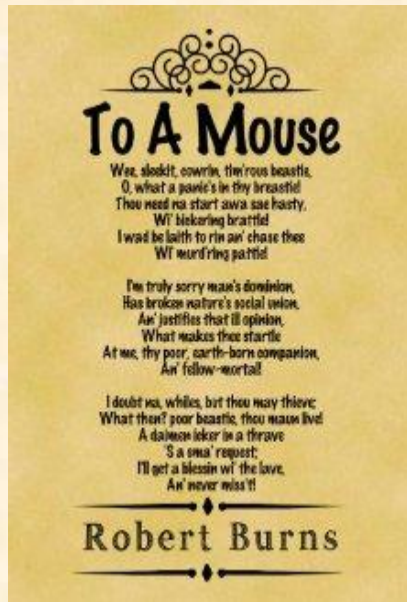
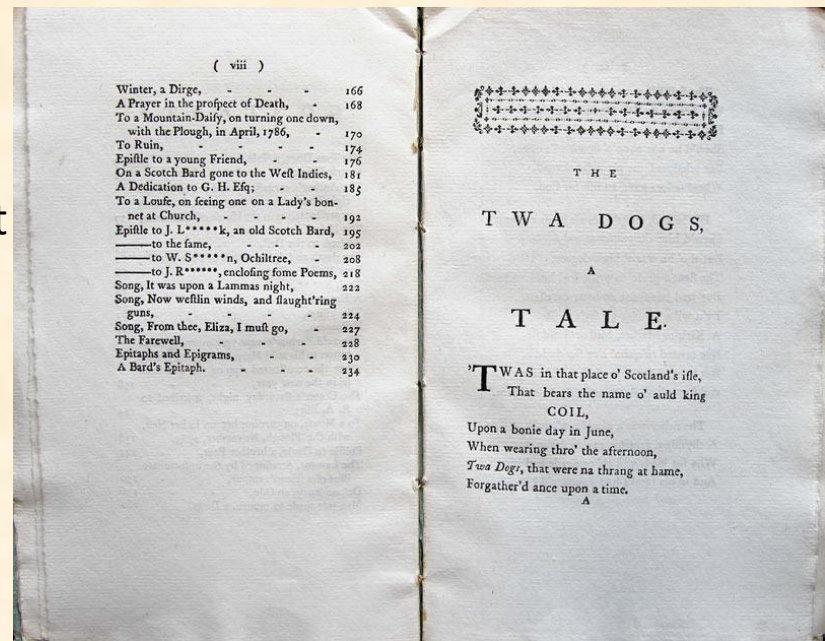
At about the same time, Burns fell in love with Mary Campbell (1763–1786), whom he had seen in church while he was still living in Tarbolton. She was born near Dunoon and had lived in Campbeltown before moving to work in Ayrshire. He dedicated the poems "The Highland Lassie O", "Highland Mary", and "To Mary in Heaven" to her. His song "Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary, And leave auld Scotia's shore?" suggests that they planned to emigrate to Jamaica together. Their relationship has been the subject of much conjecture, and it has been suggested that on 14 May 1786 they exchanged Bibles and plighted their troth over the Water of Fail in a traditional form of marriage. Soon afterwards Mary Campbell left her work in Ayrshire, went to the seaport of Greenock, and sailed home to her parents in Campbeltown. In October 1786, Mary and her father sailed from Campbeltown to visit her brother in Greenock. Her brother fell ill with typhus, which she also caught while nursing him. She died of typhus on 20 or 21 October 1786 and was buried there.



As Burns lacked the funds to pay for his passage to the West Indies, Gavin Hamilton suggested that he should "publish his poems in the mean time by subscription, as a likely way of getting a little money to provide him more liberally in necessaries for Jamaica." On 3 April Burns sent proposals for publishing his *Scotch Poems* to John Wilson, a local printer in Kilmarnock, who published these proposals on 14 April 1786, on the same day that Jean Armour's father tore up the paper in which Burns attested his marriage to Jean. To obtain a certificate that he was a free bachelor, Burns agreed on 25 June to stand for rebuke in the Mauchline kirk for three Sundays. He transferred his share in Mossgiel farm to his brother Gilbert on 22 July, and on 30 July wrote to tell his friend John Richmond that, "Armour has got a warrant to throw me in jail until I can find a warrant for an enormous sum ... I am wandering from one friend's house to another."



On 31 July 1786 John Wilson published the volume of works by Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish dialect*. Known as the Kilmarnock volume, it sold for 3 shillings and contained much of his best writing, including "The Twa Dogs", "Address to the Deil", "Halloween", "The Cotter's Saturday Night", "To a Mouse", "Epitaph for James Smith", and "To a Mountain Daisy", many of which had been written at Mossgiel farm. The success of the work was immediate, and soon he was known across the country.



Burns postponed his planned emigration to Jamaica on 1 September, and was at Mossgiel two days later when he learnt that Jean Armour had given birth to twins. On 4 September Thomas Blacklock wrote a letter expressing admiration for the poetry in the Kilmarnock volume, and suggesting an enlarged second edition.

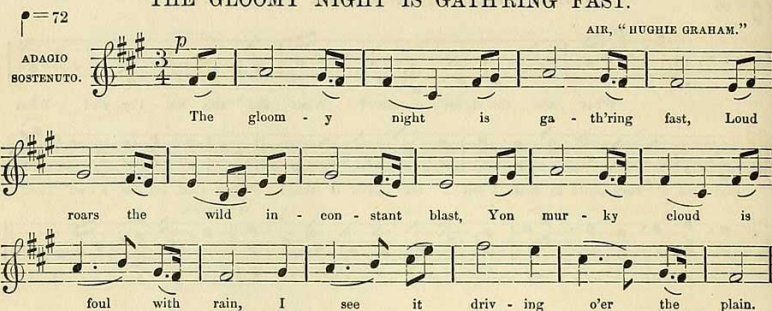


A copy of it was passed to Burns, who later recalled, "I had taken the last farewell of my few friends, my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Scotland – 'The Gloomy night is gathering fast' – when a letter from Dr Blacklock to a friend of mine overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The Doctor belonged to a set of critics for whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction."

THE GLOOMY NIGHT IS GATH'RING FAST.

AIR, "HUGHIE GRAHAM."

$\text{♩} = 72$
 ADAGIO
 SOSTENUTO.



The gloom - y night is ga - th'ring fast, Loud
 roars the wild in - con - stant blast, Yon mur - ky cloud is
 foul with rain, I see it driv - ing o'er the plain.

The hunter now has left the moor,
 The scatter'd coveys meet secure,
 While here I wander, press'd with care,
 Along the lonely banks of Ayr.

The autumn mourns her ripening corn
 By early winter's ravage torn;
 Across her placid azure sky
 She sees the scowling tempest fly:

Chill rins my blood to hear it rave—
 I think upon the stormy wave,
 Where many a danger I must dare,
 Far from the bonnie banks of Ayr.

'Tis not the surging billows' roar,
 'Tis not that fatal, deadly shore;

Though death in every shape appear,
 The wretched have no more to fear:

But round my heart the ties are bound,
 That heart transpierced with many a wound;
 These bleed afresh, those ties I tear,
 To leave the bonnie banks of Ayr.

Farewell, old Coila's hills and dales,
 Her heathy moors and winding vales;
 The scene where wretched fancy roves,
 Pursuing past, unhappy loves!

Farewell, my friends, farewell, my foes,
 My peace with these, my love with those;
 The bursting tears my heart declare;
 Farewell, the bonnie banks of Ayr.

"THE GLOOMY NIGHT IS GATH'RING FAST." "I composed this song," says Burns, "as I conveyed my chest so far on the road to Greenock, where I was to embark in a few days for Jamaica. I meant it as my farewell dirge to my native land."—*Reliques*. This was in 1786. It appears that this song was set to music by his friend Mr. Allan Masterton, a Writing-master in Edinburgh. Masterton's air is mediocre enough, and is singularly unvoiced and ill-suited to the words in the first part of the second strain. At that period, and long before, as well as long after, most of the amateur musicians in Great Britain were men who could merely play a little on some musical instrument, or sing a little, without any farther knowledge of music, or cultivation of their own musical capabilities, whatever these might be. Hence so many very indifferent Scottish melodies that infest our printed musical collections; mere imitations, and mostly affected and bad ones, of the better and more ancient Scottish airs; combining want of knowledge of musical composition with want of feeling and judgment.

The air to which Burns' words are given in this work, is found in Oswald's Caledonian Pocket Companion, under the name of "Drumion Duff;" in the Museum, vol. iv. it is set to the Border ballad, "Hughie Graham." We believe it to be an old Highland air, and that its original title was "Drumion Dubh," or "The Black Cow." Whatever its origin or its antiquity, it is undoubtedly Scottish, and is a very good and characteristic melody. For the old ballad of "Hughie Graham," see *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, vol. iii. edit. 1833.

We now return to Rizzio. From what we have already stated, and from what follows, we are inclined to believe that Rizzio's name was first connected with Scottish melody by his countrymen who were in England about the beginning of last century. We know that Italian music was then fashionable in London, and that Scottish song divided the public taste with it. Whether the flowing style of melody peculiar to the Lowland pastoral airs induced the belief that an Italian only could have written them, we do not pretend to say, but it is certain that Rizzio was first heard of as a composer in 1725, when Thomson published his *Orpheus Caledonius*. In this there are seven airs ascribed to Rizzio; "An thou wert mine ain thing," "Bessie Bell," "Auld Rob Morris," "The boatman," "The bush aboon Traquair," "The Lass o' Patie's Mill," and "Down the burn, Davie;" of these at least three certainly had not existed much above half a century, and the last was probably a very recent composition. Such is the earliest evidence in favour of Rizzio, and slight as it is, its authority is considerably lessened by the fact, that in the second edition of the *Orpheus Caledonius*, (1733,) Thomson, perhaps taking shame to himself for having been an accessory to the imposture, suppressed Rizzio's name entirely. (See p. 103 for a continuation of the subject.)

On 27 November 1786 Burns borrowed a pony and set out for Edinburgh. On 14 December William Creech issued subscription bills for the first Edinburgh edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish dialect*, which was published on 17 April 1787. Within a week of this event, Burns had sold his copyright to Creech for 100 guineas. For the edition, Creech commissioned Alexander Nasmyth to paint the oval bust-length portrait now in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, which was engraved to provide a frontispiece for the book. Nasmyth had come to know Burns and his fresh and appealing image has become the basis for almost all subsequent representations of the poet. In Edinburgh, he was received as an equal by the city's men of letters—including Dugald Stewart, Robertson, Blair and others—and was a guest at aristocratic gatherings, where he bore himself with unaffected dignity. Here he encountered, and made a lasting impression on, the 16-year-old Walter Scott, who described him later with great admiration:

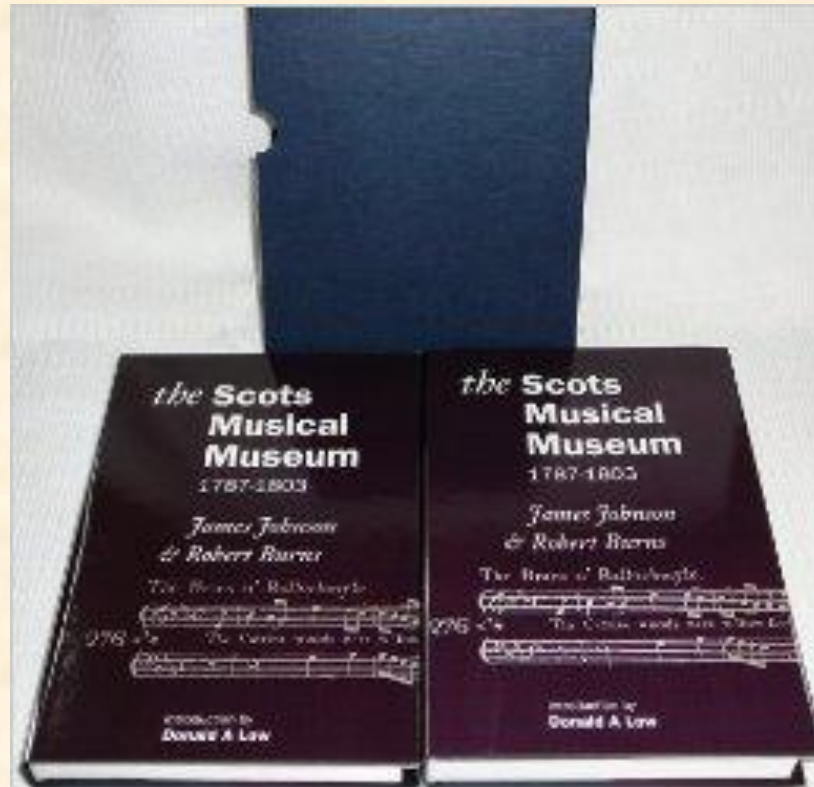
His person was strong and robust; his manners rustic, not clownish, a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity which received part of its effect perhaps from knowledge of his extraordinary talents. His features are presented in Mr Nasmyth's picture but to me it conveys the idea that they are diminished, as if seen in perspective. I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits ... there was a strong expression of shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark cast, and literally glowed when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time.

—Walter Scott

The new edition of his poems brought Burns £400. His stay in the city also resulted in some lifelong friendships, among which were those with Lord Glencairn, and Frances Anna Dunlop (1730–1815), who became his occasional sponsor and with whom he corresponded for many years until a rift developed. He embarked on a relationship with the separated Agnes "Nancy" McLehose (1758–1841), with whom he exchanged passionate letters under pseudonyms (Burns called himself "Sylvander" and Nancy "Clarinda"). When it became clear that Nancy would not be easily seduced into a physical relationship, Burns moved on to Jenny Clow (1766–1792), Nancy's domestic servant, who bore him a son, Robert Burns Clow, in 1788. He also had an affair with a servant girl, Margaret "May" Cameron. His relationship with Nancy concluded in 1791 with a final meeting in Edinburgh before she sailed to Jamaica for what turned out to be a short-lived reconciliation with her estranged husband. Before she left, he sent her the manuscript of "Ae Fond Kiss" as a farewell.



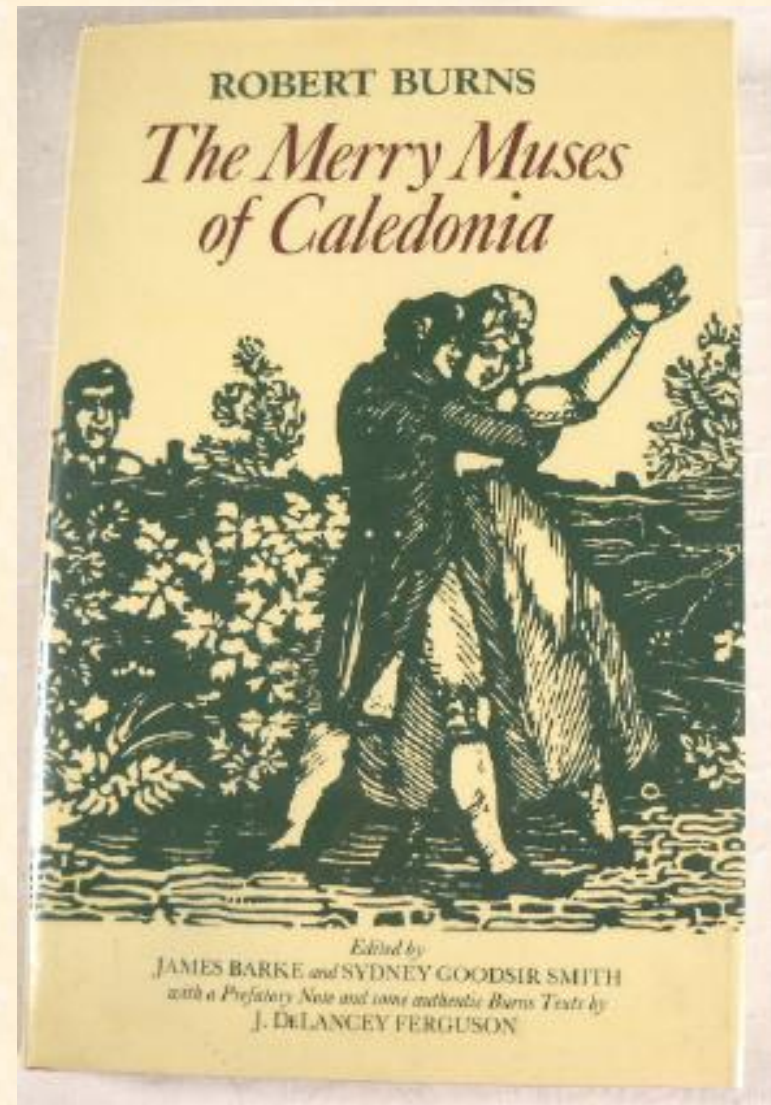
In Edinburgh, in early 1787, he met James Johnson, a struggling music engraver and music seller with a love of old Scots songs and a determination to preserve them. Burns shared this interest and became an enthusiastic contributor to *The Scots Musical Museum*. The first volume was published in 1787 and included three songs by Burns. He contributed 40 songs to volume two, and he ended up responsible for about a third of the 600 songs in the whole collection, as well as making a considerable editorial contribution. The final volume was published in 1803.





On his return from Edinburgh in February 1788, he resumed his relationship with Jean Armour and took a lease on Ellisland Farm, Dumfriesshire, settling there in June. He also trained as a gauger or exciseman in case farming continued to be unsuccessful. He was appointed to duties in Customs and Excise in 1789 and eventually gave up the farm in 1791. Meanwhile, in November 1790, he had written "Tam O' Shanter". About this time he was offered and declined an appointment in London on the staff of *The Star* newspaper, and refused to become a candidate for a newly created Chair of Agriculture in the University of Edinburgh, although influential friends offered to support his claims.

Burns also worked to collect and preserve Scottish folk songs, sometimes revising, expanding, and adapting them. One of the better known of these collections is *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (the title is not Burns's), a collection of bawdy lyrics that were popular in the music halls of Scotland as late as the 20th century. Many of Burns's most famous poems are songs with the music based upon older traditional songs. For example, "Auld Lang Syne" is set to the traditional tune "Can Ye Labour Lea", "A Red, Red Rose" is set to the tune of "Major Graham" and "The Battle of Sherramuir" is set to the "Cameronian Rant".



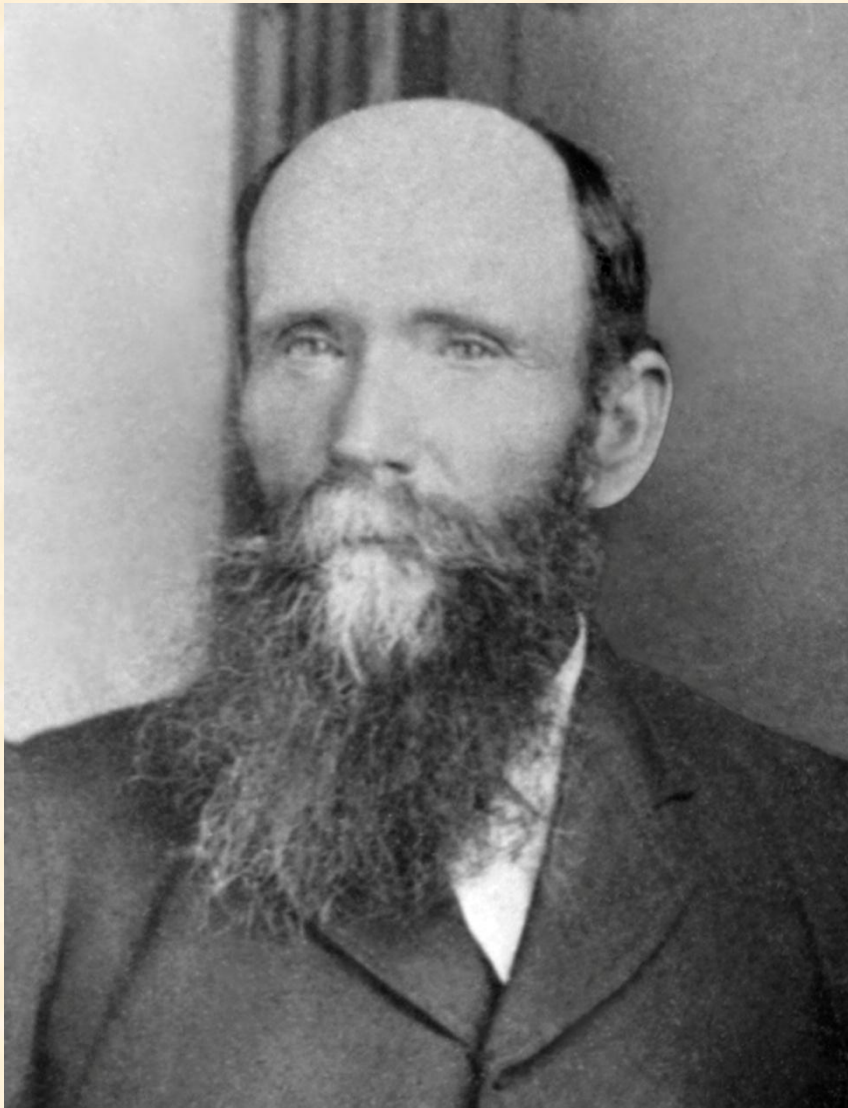
Burns's style is marked by spontaneity, directness, and sincerity, and ranges from the tender intensity of some of his lyrics through the humour of "Tam o' Shanter" and the satire of "Holy Willie's Prayer" and "The Holy Fair". Burns's poetry drew upon a substantial familiarity with and knowledge of Classical, Biblical, and English literature, as well as the Scottish Makar tradition. Burns was skilled in writing not only in the Scots language but also in the Scottish English dialect of the English language. Some of his works, such as "Love and Liberty" (also known as "The Jolly Beggars"), are written in both Scots and English for various effects.



Mauchline Holy Fair 1796

His themes included republicanism (he lived during the French Revolutionary period) and Radicalism, which he expressed covertly in "Scots Wha Hae", Scottish patriotism, anticlericalism, class inequalities, gender roles, commentary on the Scottish Kirk of his time, Scottish cultural identity, poverty, sexuality, and the beneficial aspects of popular socialising (carousing, Scotch whisky, folk songs, and so forth).

Scots Wha Hae	Slow March	Traditional
		
Robert BURNS		



The strong emotional highs and lows associated with many of Burns's poems have led some, such as Burns biographer Robert Crawford, to suggest that he suffered from manic depression—a hypothesis that has been supported by analysis of various samples of his handwriting. Burns himself referred to suffering from episodes of what he called "blue devilism". However, the National Trust for Scotland has downplayed the suggestion on the grounds that evidence is insufficient to support the claim.

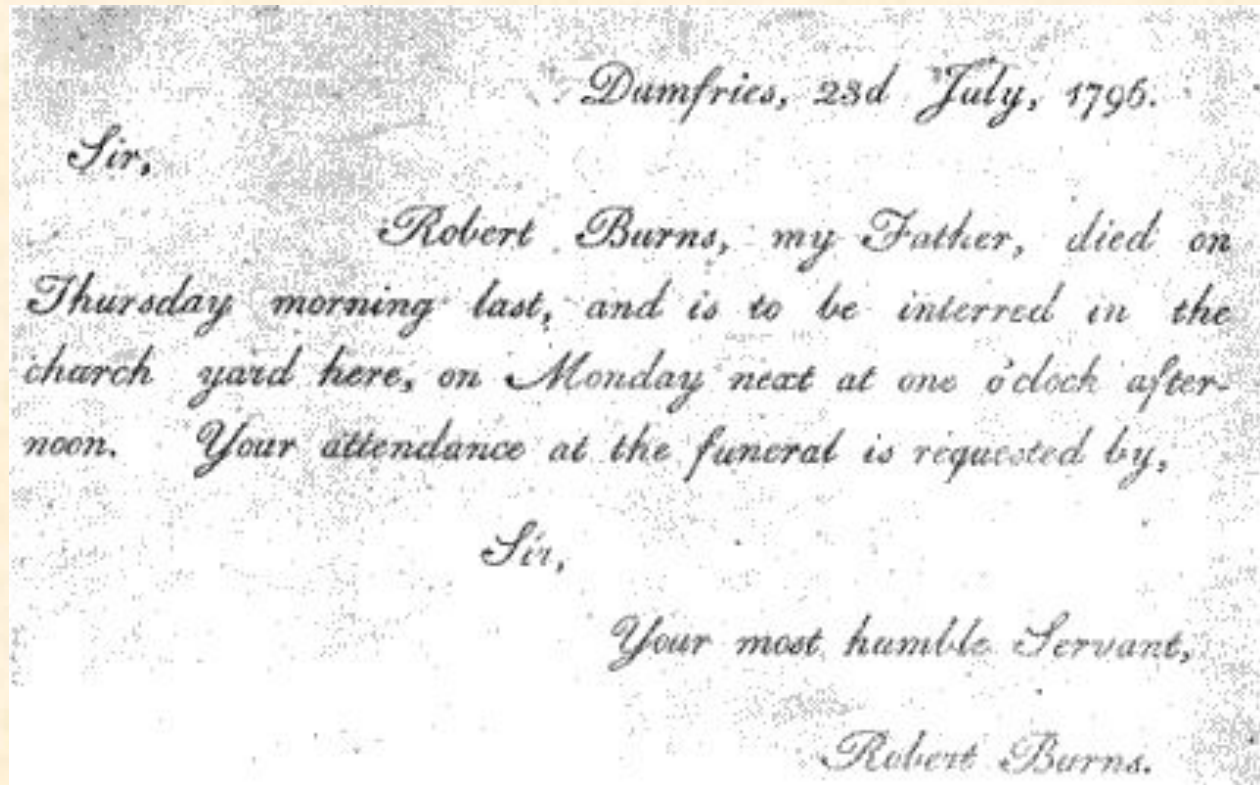
Burns's worldly prospects were perhaps better than they had ever been; but he had become soured, and moreover he had alienated many of his best friends by too freely expressing sympathy with the French Revolution and the then unpopular advocates of reform at home. His political views also came to the notice of his employers and in an attempt to prove his loyalty to the Crown, Burns joined the Royal Dumfries Volunteers in March 1795. As his health began to give way, he began to age prematurely and fell into fits of despondency. The habits of intemperance (alleged mainly by temperance activist James Currie) are said to have aggravated his long-standing possible rheumatic heart condition. His death followed a dental extraction in winter 1795.



On the morning of 21 July 1796, Burns died in Dumfries, at the age of 37. The funeral took place on Monday 25 July 1796, the day that his son Maxwell was born. He was at first buried in the far corner of St. Michael's Churchyard in Dumfries; a simple "slab of freestone" was erected as his gravestone by Jean Armour, which some felt insulting to his memory. His body was eventually moved to its final location in the same cemetery, the Burns Mausoleum, in September 1817. The body of his widow Jean Armour was buried with his in 1834.



Armour had taken steps to secure his personal property, partly by liquidating two promissory notes amounting to fifteen pounds sterling (about 1,100 pounds at 2009 prices). The family went to the Court of Session in 1798 with a plan to support his surviving children by publishing a four-volume edition of his complete works and a biography written by Dr. James Currie.



Dumfries, 23d July, 1796.

Sir,

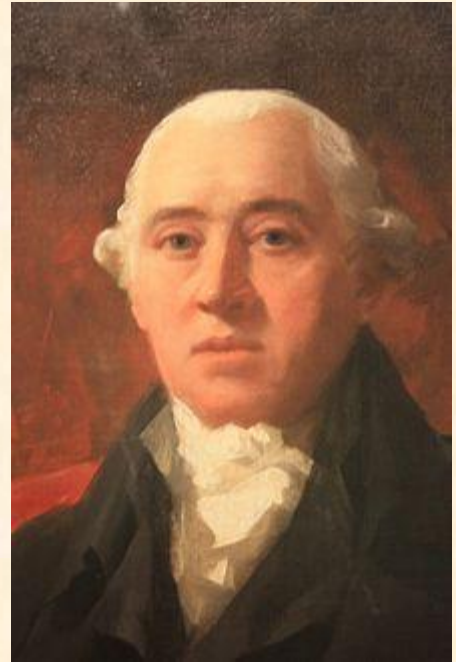
Robert Burns, my Father, died on Thursday morning last, and is to be interred in the church yard here, on Monday next at one o'clock afternoon. Your attendance at the funeral is requested by,

Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

Robert Burns.

Subscriptions were raised to meet the initial cost of publication, which was in the hands of Thomas Cadell and William Davies in London and William Creech, bookseller in Edinburgh. Hogg records that fund-raising for Burns's family was embarrassingly slow, and it took several years to accumulate significant funds through the efforts of John Syme and Alexander Cunningham.



Burns was posthumously given the freedom of the town of Dumfries. Hogg records that Burns was given the freedom of the Burgh of Dumfries on 4 June 1787, 9 years before his death, and was also made an Honorary Burgess of Dumfries.

Through his twelve children, Burns has over 600 living descendants as of 2012

