

Robert Burns and the University: Information Sheet

How to use this sheet

This information sheet gives a brief description of Robert Burns' connection with the University of Glasgow. Enquiries should be directed to the Duty Archivist, see contact details at the bottom of the page.

Robert Burns (1759-1796), internationally celebrated and Scotland's greatest poet, did not attend the University of Glasgow, due to financial circumstances, his father being unsuccessful as a tenant farmer. However, many of his family, friends and patrons, as well as many of the 'characters' in his poems did attend the University (date of matriculation given in brackets).

Family, Friends & Patrons

His eldest son, **Robert Burns, junior** (1802), the survivor of the first twins of Jean Armour.

The brother **Thomas Wallace** (1741) of his friend, Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop.

Patrick Miller (1743), the landlord of his Ellisland Farm.

Alexander Hamilton (1756), the brother of his friend Gavin Hamilton.

James Dalrymple of Orangefield, Ayrshire (1767), one of his early patrons and friends and a cousin of 14th earl of Glencairn on whose death he wrote the famous *Lament*.

Characters

William Auld (1728), "Daddy Auld" the minister of Mauchline, 1742-91.

William Dalrymple, MA 1740, the "Dalrymple mild" of *The Kirk's Alarm*, the minister of Ayr, 1746-1814 who baptised Burns.

The husband, **James M'Lehose** (1767), uncle, **John M'Laurin** (1738) and cousins **Alexander Craig** and **William Craig** (1758) of "Clarinda".

The father, **Claud Alexander** (1739) and brothers **Alexander Alexander** (1761), **Claud Alexander** (1765) and **Boyd Alexander** (1770) of "the Bonnie Lass o' Ballochmyle".

William M'Gill, MA 1753, the "Doctor Mac" of *The Kirk's Alarm*, the minister of Ayr, 1761-1807.

Stephen Young, MA 1770, minister of Barr, 1780-1819, the "Barr Steenie" of *The Kirk's Alarm*.

William M'Quhae, MA 1756, described in *The Twa Herds* as "that curs'd rascal ca'd M'Quhae", minister of St. Quivox.

Robert Duncan, MA 1770, minister of Dundonald, 1783-1815, the "Duncan Deep" of the *Twa Herds*.

James Oliphant, MA 1756, minister of Kilmarnock, 1764-73, mentioned in *The Ordination*.

Alexander Fergusson (1763), grandson of "Bonnie Annie Laurie", hero of the ballad of *The Whistle*, "So famous for wit, worth and law" and friend of Russian student Semyon Desnitsky.

Henry Erskine (1764), Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, 1788-96, and when superseded by Dundas of Arniston was lamented in Burns's Ballad *The Dean of Faculty*.

John M'Math, MA 1772, minister of Tarbolton, 1782-91, when demitted and enlisted as a soldier. Addressee of one of Burns's political epistles.

John Wilson (1768), the "Doctor Hornbook", schoolmaster, session clerk, grocer and medicine vendor at Tarbolton till 1793.

George Hamilton, MA 1775, minister of Gladsmuir 1790-1832, referred to in *Reply to a Reproof*.

Characters (continued)

James M'Kinlay (1773), appointed to second charge in Kilmarnock in 1786 (-1809) giving rise to *The Ordination*.

Ordination

William Tennant, MA 1778, brother of Charles Tennant of Rollox, Army chaplain, "the Preacher Willie" of *Letter to James Tennant, Glenconner*.

James Steven (1777), one of founders of London Missionary Society, minister of Crown Court London, 1787-1803, and Kilwinning, 1803-24 - "The Calf".

Richard Oswald (1785), husband of "Lucy" of the song *O What ye wha's in yon toun?*

James Peebles, MA 1801, son of "Peebles frae the Waterfit".

John Russell (1799) and **Alexander Russell** (1800), sons of "Black Russell" of the *Holy Fair*.

John Tennant (1808), son of "Wabster Charlie" of *Letter to James Tennant, Glenconner*.

James Smith Candlish, MA 1819, and **Robert Smith Candlish**, MA 1823, sons of Jane Smith, one of the "Mauchline Belles".

William Tennant (1816), son of the "Auchinbey" of *Letter to James Tennant, Glenconner*.

John Ronald, CM 1825, one of the "Ronalds of the Bennals".

The Burns Window at Glasgow University

A gift by the Marquess of Bute and a legacy from Charles Randolph, a partner in the leading Clyde shipbuilding firm of Randolph Elder of Govan, enabled the building of the Great Hall. To be named the Bute Hall, it was to be used for great University occasions such as examinations, church services, and graduations. Ascending the grand staircase to the Bute Hall the visitor today finds stained glass panels which have replaced the original clear glass over the years since it was built.

The centre west windows were designed in 1893 by Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833-98), English painter, designer, and illustrator. Trained by the Pre-Raphaelite painter, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Burne-Jones shared the Pre-Raphaelites' concern with restoring the purity of form, stylization, and high moral tone of medieval painting and design. The windows above the gallery in the centre of the west wall are two tiered and represent scientists and literary figures in the top and lower tiers respectively. The Physicists on top are: Copernicus; Galileo; Kepler; and Newton. The literary figures are Francis Bacon (1561-1626); Robert Burns (1759-96); Lord Byron (1788-1824); and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). The image of Robert Burns is holding a small posy of daisies, reflecting one of his best known poems, *To a mountain daisy*.