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Cover illustration

Glasgow architect William F. McGibbon's (1856–1923) unsuccessful 1896 competition entry for the design of the Burns Memorial and Cottage Homes at Mauchline. The winning design by William Fraser, Glasgow, was built between 1896 and 1898.

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Richard Oswald of Auchincruive

“Who was Richard Oswald?” The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, asked this question in 1839, while examining Anglo–American treaties. This is a somewhat surprising question considering the rôle Oswald played in British and American politics in the 18th Century. Oswald was the British peace commissioner during negotiations in Paris to end the American War of Independence: this earned him the title of “Peacemaker.” he also had a varied career as a merchant, slave–trader and adviser to the British government.

Richard Oswald was the son of a minister from Thurso. He was initially a Glasgow–based, and latterly a London–based, merchant involved in trading with Africa and America. He was born two years before the Act of Union in 1707, which had opened the way for entrepreneurial Scots to pursue business in an open and lucrative market. In 1748 the firm of Alexander Grant, Richard Oswald & Company purchased Bance Island, one of several islands in the mouth of the Sierra Leone River in the colony of the same name, where the Royal African Company had erected a fort. Oswald and his associates gained control of other small islands by treaties with native chiefs and established on Bance Island a trading station for factors in the slave trade.

By 1763 his wealth was greatly enhanced by being a Government contractor for the British army, and his appointment as Commissary–General to the allied armies during the Seven Years War (1756–1763). He added to his fortune and estates by marrying the daughter of a deceased Scottish planter, who had extensive land holdings in Florida and Jamaica. This allowed him to purchase Auchincruive at a time of recession in Ayrshire, and to complete the building of the mansion house designed by Robert Adam. Richard Oswald was an improving landlord actively working towards better agricultural practices and applying them at Auchincruive. He also made advances in horticulture, re–established the gardens on their present site near the River Ayr, and pioneered the construction of hot–houses for growing tropical plants. He was responsible for improvements in roads, and in local industries such as lime works, coal works and the salt pans at Maryborough.

Around this time he also accepted the offer of 20,000 acres in Florida, granted by George III, and entered into various partnerships in New Brunswick, Virginia, South Carolina and the Caribbean islands. In South Carolina he sponsored a number of his ex–army clerks to set up plantations. His Florida plantation was north of Daytona Beach, on the east (Atlantic) coast of the state. It proved to be a property not easy to develop as it was covered with thick vegetation, the soil was light and hungry, and the native Americans were – perhaps understandably – reluctant to relinquish a traditional hunting ground.

Through his plantation managers and his agents in South Carolina, Oswald sent a regular stream of orders and supplies. One of the conditions of the land grant was the employment of European immigrants. It was soon found impossible to secure such immigrants so permission was eventually granted to import slaves from Africa. There were five distinct plantations developed, growing rice, corn, indigo, sugar and oranges, and grazing cattle. Records suggest that by 1771 the plantations were beginning to give a modest return. The Oswald plantations seemed to have been little affected by the Declaration of Independence in 1776; however, due to the entry of the Spanish into the war,

and the continued difficulties experienced with the indigenous population, the British garrison was reduced, and Oswald ordered the abandonment of his plantations in Florida. Slaves and equipment were transferred to Georgia and South Carolina. Spanish control of Florida put an end to any plans to reopen these plantations.

Oswald was acquainted with many of the leading officials in the British Ministry, and had acted as an adviser on trade regulations and on the British response to the American Revolution. Lord North, serving as Prime Minister from 1770 to 1782, sought information from Oswald on several occasions. In 1777 Oswald visited Paris and became acquainted with Benjamin Franklin: the introduction had been made by Adam Smith, one year after the publication of his *Wealth of Nations*. Oswald was commissioned in 1782 to negotiate with Franklin, the intention being to find a satisfactory conclusion to the American War of Independence. Franklin, in his *Journal of Negotiations for Peace*, of June 1782, says: "Mr Oswald appears quite sincere", though later, in a letter, he states that "Mr Oswald is doing nothing, having neither powers nor instructions, and being tired of doing nothing has [asked] leave to return." This stratagem may have given Oswald the authority he sought, enabling him to conclude the settlement he desired: one that would leave as few seeds of resentment as possible. It would appear that he succeeded.

Oswald died in 1784, the year after the Treaty which ended the American War of Independence was officially concluded, and is buried in St Quivox Church, alongside his wife Mary. It was her funeral cortège, as it passed through Sanquhar, which led to an unfortunate incident concerning Robert Burns. Mrs Oswald had returned to London after the death of her husband, and it was there that she died late in 1788. Her cortège made its way north, for her burial in the churchyard of St Quivox, and arrived in Sanquhar, where the party planned to spend the night in Bailie Whigham's Inn. Burns was already happily ensconced there that night, ready for a social evening on his way from Ellisland to Ayrshire. When the funeral party with Mrs Oswald's body arrived, he was forced to leave and brave the "terrors of the tempestuous night", and ride further on through the wild hills and moors to the next inn. When he had recovered he sat down and wrote the less-than-flattering "Ode, Sacred to the Memory of Mrs Oswald of Auchincruive." Burns, however, was more enamoured of a later lady of Auchincruive, Lucy Johnston (first wife of Richard Alexander Oswald), and he wrote a song-poem in her honour, "O Wat ye Wha's in Yon Toon?"

Many men of letters, such as Burns, thought that military contractors made inordinate profits by taking advantage of the Government, and Burns savagely satirized Oswald as a "plunderer of armies." Benjamin Franklin, on Oswald's death, paid tribute to him in these words: "It is unlucky I think in the affairs of this world that the wise and good be as mortal as common people, and that they often die before others are found fit to supply their places." Today, Richard Oswald is still remembered in Florida. The Mount Oswald plantation is now the Tomoka State Park, where there is a commemorative stone dedicated to his memory, while there is also an island on the Florida Keys named after him.

Merry Graham

“our friend poor Oswald is no more”

George Oswald, younger son of Richard Oswald of Auchincruive, died of consumption in Toulouse in March 1763. The writer Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), was with him at the end, and recorded his passing in letters to Richard Oswald and his business partner, John Mill.

When Richard Oswald died in 1784 he left an estate worth £500,000, including Auchincruive in Ayrshire, Cavens in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, and a trading empire controlled from his counting house in Philpot Lane, London. To his nephews John and Alexander Anderson went the trading business, including his majority interest in a slaving ‘factory’ on Bance Island, in the mouth of the River Sierre Leone. Auchincruive passed to his widow and then, on her death in 1788, to his nephew George Oswald (1735–1819), a merchant in Scotstoun, who was succeeded by *his* son Richard Alexander Oswald (1771–1841).

Richard Oswald’s marriage to Mary Ramsay was childless, but by an earlier marriage to Agnes Barr he had two sons: Richard, christened 29th April 1733 in Glasgow; and George, christened 25th September 1739 in Edinburgh.¹ They are described by Hancock, in a comprehensive analysis of Oswald and his associates, as illegitimate.² However the entries in parish records for the christenings record the names of both parents, and Oswald acknowledged and supported Agnes and the children.³ Although no record of his marriage to Agnes Barr has been found, by the facts stated above they were legally married, and his sons were legitimate.⁴ But they did not survive him, and his estate passed to their more fortunate cousins.

Early in 1763, George, the younger son, was in Montpellier taking a dubious cure for consumption.⁵ According to Percy Fitzgerald, Sterne endured the same treatment: “They almost poisoned him with a succession of what they called *bouillons refraichissants*, the elements of which were ‘a cock *flayed* alive, and boiled with poppy seeds, these pounded in a mortar, afterwards passed through a sieve.’ There was besides to be present one crawfish, which should be a male one. This was *de rigueur*, a female crawfish being likely to be fatal!”⁶ Mrs Sterne, “comparing notes with the Scotch physician at Toulouse, told him of an unhappy English youth named Oswald, son to a merchant, who had fallen victim to [the] caprices [of charlatans in Montpellier]. The young man, in the last stage of consumption, took his *bouillons refraichissants*, for above a month with the worst results; and on his complaining was told precisely as Mr Sterne had been told,—‘Sir, the air of this place is too sharp for your lungs.’ ‘Then,’ said the other, ‘you are a sordid villain to have kept me here.’” George Oswald left Montpellier for Toulouse, where he met the Sternes.

The Laurence Sterne who befriended the dying Oswald was by then a great literary figure, feted in the best society. The first four of the nine volumes of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* had appeared in 1760 and 1761, creating a great stir. But he too was consumptive, and in January 1762 he set off for the south of France for the benefit

of his health, and, after a long sojourn in Paris, eventually took up residence in Toulouse, where his wife and daughter joined him.⁷



L. Sterne

The first of the surviving letters was not the first in fact, for in it Sterne refers to “my last Letter.”⁸ It was written to John Mill at Philpot Lane on 24th February 1763, when Oswald’s case was already hopeless. At that time Richard Oswald was engaged in managing his bread ‘magazines’ in Germany during the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763), having won, with the assistance of the Earl of Bute, the contract for the supply of bread and bread wagons to the Army. Government contracting during that conflict was very profitable, and Oswald made a fortune, for which Burns later scathingly labelled him a

“Plunderer of Armies.”⁹ Oswald received the fifth of Sterne’s surviving letters while in Bremen, on 7th April 1763.

In letters 2 and 4 Sterne declares his intention of making a friend of Mill on his return to England. This is an example of his “delightful art in attaching strangers.”¹⁰ He was later entertained by Oswald himself at the latter’s London home.¹¹

As ‘Mr Yorick’, Sterne published an account of his travels entitled *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, (1768). This was composed of anecdotes, real, imagined and borrowed, but none relating to the death of Oswald. In letter 4 Sterne reveals something of the tale that could have been told, with the recovery of Oswald’s possessions from his lodging “out of the hands of Villany & extortion” involving opposing files of “muskettiers”.

Complete transcriptions of Laurence Sterne’s letters follow. They have been numbered 1 to 5 in chronological order for the purposes of the present article.

Letter 1

To Mr Mill, Philpot Lane, London, Angleterre.
Toulouse Feb 24 1763
Sir,

I have this day return’d from Mr Oswald, whom I have been with ever since my last Letter; and should not have stirrd from him now, but that some business unavoidably called me away. Since that letter he is so much worse, that tho’ his Physician had told me when I took him into the Country, there was nothing further to be done for him, yet I could not refrain desiring a Consultation of the Faculty last Sunday in the Country, as I thought it would be a Consolation to all his friends that nothing was omitted, as likewise to Mr Oswald himself that he had not been a wanting to himself. It gives me the greatest concern, that I can write you no better account than what I am going to do, which is, that the Issue of this Consultation was hopeless—One, the Professor of Physic in the University, who is a very able man, says it is impossible this poor Creature should recover—his lungs being quite wasted & gone & every other Symptom of the last Stage of such a situation, hastening upon it—I shall return to him tomorrow, & attend him (I dare say) while he lives—He is sensible of his danger tho’ not without hopes at Intervals—He has desired me in case he dies, to take care of securing his effects—& after that to give all his wearing apparel whatever, & 20 Guineas to his Domestick [who has] taken great Care of him during his Illness.—His watch, he has desired me to wear for him as long as I shall live—which be assured I shall do—but only on one Proviso—That I am desired also by his father to do so.—I thought it fit to pre-acquaint you with this—& to assure you, whatever you direct, shall be faithfully executed.—This Letter is wrote unknown to Mr Oswald—

I have the honour to be, with the sincerest Condolement, Sir,
Yr most humble & Obedient Servt,
[signed] L. Sterne.

Letter 2

To Monsr Mill, Philpot Lane, London.

Toulouse March 2d 1763

O my dear Sir, our friend poor Oswald is no more—he breath'd his last in my arms last night at eleven o'clock, and a few hours before he died desired I would write you a Letter full of acknowledgements and thanks for all your kindnesses to him—as strong as you can, my dear Sterne, said he, grasping my hand, & you will not write more than I feel upon that head. He beg'd you would bid adieu for him to all his friends—but made me promise I would write a Letter myself to his father, which I should have done by this post, but that, I have been up with him four nights, which with the agitation of Spirits & of Business, & the anxieties which the Curé [he has Curè] has inhumanly caused me, have brought on a spitting of blood (tho' slight) with a fever, wch I suppose will give way to a few days rest with my family. The next post you may expect a very long Letter with an Acct. of the expenses wch this worthy Soul's Catastrophe has occasioned—These have been high these last 30 days—he has left what [remains] in his purse to his Servant, with a request to his father to pay him 20 Guineas—for his great Attention to him during his Illness—I do the Man no more than strict Justice in saying he has attended him since he came to Toulouse with great Assiduity & fidelity—& wth an appearance of great attachment, which made our poor friend take the Liberty of promising his this recompense—with his Wardrobe—which is not very considerable, & excepting a few pair of laced Ruffles which he purchased 2dhand at Florence—will not produce (I hope) too much for him.

To this, our friend has made a Donation of ten Guineas to a very worthy creature (notwithstanding [he] is a popish priest)—in recompense to the great & I'm sure undisguised concern he had all along shown for him in his Illness—when Ever I was from him, the young fellow was never from his bedside, & did him every office his Wants required, in a Way which shew'd, his Service came from his heart—This young fellow I shall love & honour for the goodness of his disposition, & the great fellow feeling he shew'd to our friend—the longest day I live—& I assure you had he not fallen into Better hands—I would have recompensed him myself. This is all, our friend has left me in trust—except, as I told you, my engagement to wear his watch for his sake to my death—and his Sword whilst I was abroad—which I shall do, because I think it an honour to wear a mark of any good Soul's friendship—but another Condition will be wanting—which I mentioned in my last.

And now my dear Sir, after condoling most cordially with You on this Occasion, Suffer me to hope—That in losing one friend in him—I may gain one in You—Our friend gave me and raised in me this Desire—& if you will not let me be yr friend—I shall lead you a sad life—& count you

like Mistress on my return to England, till I make you accept of me, to be quiet by me.

I am with the truest Esteem
My dear Sir
Yrs [signed] L. Sterne.

Letter 3

The address of the following has not been not preserved. Clearly it is to Richard Oswald.

Toulouse March 4 1763
Sir,

It is with all imaginable concern That I inform You of what will give you so much anguish of heart—the death of Mr Oswald your Son, who as he drew near his end, laid this burden upon me, That the moment I closed his eyes, I would write to you, and return thanks to You on his part for all your Kindnesses and tokens of Affection to him—upon which he desired me particularly to say, “That never did a Son leave a Father behind him with a warmer feeling of how much he owed you on this head, Than he did.” He wish’d me to add, That for any indiscretions by which he had ever given you pain, he beg’d your pardon a thousand times, and was assured your affection for him would forget them.

As he was far from those who loved him, I found myself the more attached to him throughout his Illness, and would have done any thing in the world to have saved him—but his Lungs were gone—& all I could do, was to prolong his Life a few weeks, & beguile him of some painful & melancholly hours.

It will be some, nay, a great consolation to You, That he bore his Illness like a Man and like a Christian—with the greatest fortitude and Resignation—and at last recd the notice from me of his situation without any emotion—but that of Religion—God’s will be done (he said)—I pray God, the same thought my comfort You, my dear Sir, for I cannot conclude with a better Impression.

I am with the truest Regard, Sir,
Yr most obliged & most humble Servant
[signed] L. Sterne.

Letter 4

The address of the following has not been preserved. It is presumably to Mr Mill, Philpot Lane.

Toulouse March 5 1763
My dear Sir,

I am just got well enough to thank you for your most obliging Letter, which I recd not till the day after I forwarded my last to you, indeed you over-rate any Service I have done to poor Mr Oswald—I had a disposition,

and a very strong one, to have befriended him, for I never knew a person I felt myself more attach'd to in so short an acquaintance as I did to this worthy creature—but I am not to be thank'd for this—& if I was I am doubly rewarded by the good Impression it has given me to any one Man of honour & humanity—I ran no risks, dear Sir, with you—nor wth his Father, I am sure.

It will be a consolation to all who loved him to know, that he died in the manner in which a religious parent would wish a virtuous Son—so long as there remaind the least probability of Life—knowing how much depended on cheariness of heart, I kept the Danger of his condition from him—but when this menagement could be of no longer Service to him—I felt I could not answer it either to him or myself, if I did not deal truly with him—a dismal Task indeed! at least so I found it, to be the Messenger of Death to one we love. He recd the news in such a manner as would put Philosophy wth all its Cant, to the blush—“God’s will be done”, my good friend, said he without any emotion, but that of religion—& taking hold of my hand, he added that he was more grateful for this last act of friendsp & thank'd me more for it, than for all the others he had recd—he then gave me Directions a 2d time abt the Donations I mentioned in my last and of writing immediately to his father & You—after which he spent the day in Devotion—& expired without pain, as I sat by his bed side, at eleven that night. He desired he might be open'd—& that I would be present—for which he gave me a reason wch bespoke the best of hearts—the Shot he had recd between his Lungs & Stomach, had sometimes raised Queries, whether that might have been the cause of his death, by laying the foundation of some Abscess in those parts—& he wish'd to have it clear'd up—That in case it was not so, the Gentleman might be freed from the Load of supposing himself the Instrument of his Death—He was open'd by the Professor of Anatomy in the presence of the attending Physician & myself & it appeared plain the gun shot would had no Connection with his Malady—which was intirely in the Lungs, the whole of 'em being full of abscesses—the right Lobe almost entirely skirrous¹²—& both of 'em adhering to the pleura, to the greatest degree that the Physician & Surgeon had ever seen—so that twas a miracle how he has lived at all, these last 3 months; & I'm persuaded had it not been for the greatest attention to himself—& some care of his friends for him, he had been at rest from his Labours six weeks ago.

In some evening's chit chat with you (for I flatter myself with many)—when the atmosphere is heavy, & the heart is too heavy too, for lighter stories—I'll tell a long one (which by the way I dare not write) of the dangers & vexations I encountered in snatching his effects out of the hands of Villany & extortion—I had a file of musketters sent to take me in durance—I escaped by a by way to the Town house, & made a shift to tell my Story so well, That I marchd back with a 2d File, to dislodge the first—

(“more I say not—else more would I say, of the Battles I have been obliged to Fight since our retreat in the Country agst a brace of fiery Ecclesiasticks—of the barbarity & insults shewn towards me, in my attempts to have him buried—but all cruel actions begin in the name of the Lord”) as they did.

I have conquer’d all, at last, & our friend is laid at rest, in the best manner our Situations would let me.

I am enabled to send you an acct. within 2 or 3 guineas at least of what is expended.—The Physician was the most intractable—as fees are low here, he would have thought himself not ill paid by a french man, with ten or twelve Guineas—& when I came to negotiate with him—he talked of nothing less than 30 Louis—They think the english are made of money—I have brought him down to 20 Guineas—he has attended 3 Months for it—‘tis full enough—but more what I have laid out beyond what Mr Oswald gave me Cash for, is in a little Compass, & is as follows.

	£	S	D
For his Country house	6	10	0
For Lone of a Cow for one month	1	0	0
To the Professor of Anatomy	2	2	0
A Voiture & Courier	0	18	0
Funeral expences	4	10	0
Other incidental Expences	1	5	0
Domestick’s Bill for Wood &c	1	0	10
Bill for Spaw Water	0	18	0
The Apothecary’s Bill	5	0	0
Gratification to the Farmers Wife	0	12	0
	<u>23</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>0</u>

N.B. These all pd.—& every debt else, except a very few small ones, the whole under 40 Shills.

There is due, I find for Wages to his Servant	10	10	8
Legacy to him	21	0	0
Donation to Abbé [he has Abbè]	10	10	0
Olean			
His Physician	21	0	0
	<u>63</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
		<u>86</u>	<u>15</u>
			<u>0</u>

This is all (except some very trifles) which is wanting to clear our poor friend with this side of the world, of which I would not have been in so much haste to have sent you the account, but that his Domestick is necessarily detain’d here from returning to Italy, & at Mr Oswald’s expense till he is enabled by the receipt of his wages &c to depart, which he cannot

do till I receive money from you, for which I could not take the Liberty of drawing, till you was apprized of the particulars, & upon what Scores the Summ was wanted.

As his Servant has taken possession of his Wardrobe—the Inventory of what remained is a very short one—consisting of a gauze bed Curtain to keep off Muskettos—a morocco pocket book silver clasps—an Ettuy¹³ of fish skin, and a post Chaise, which tho' it cost him 20 pounds is a very sorry one, & will not, as I'm informed be sold for more than six guineas—with these, there are abt 80 english books—tho' I believe not so many; & if upon Computation they will bear the expence of Voiture to England, & of Duties at the Customs house, I will bring with me—in the mean time as my wife & daughter are in Distress for a few english books, having brought none with them, If Mr Oswald will give them leave to read and take care of them till our return, 'twil be taken and acknowledged as our obligation. What the post Chaise sells for, I will order my bookseller to pay into yr hands.

If you cannot think of a quicker way of transmitting the money—In case tis paid to Mr [Scloin?] & Foley Bankers (I know not in what street)—with a Line to Foley rue St. Saveur in Paris¹⁴—to remit the money directly to me here—it will find its way & enable the Italien to find his way also to his own Country—I wish to God I was in my own too—that amongst the many other pleasures & advantages I propose, I might have that of making myself known to You—for I am dear Sir, with the highest esteem for your Character & Virtues

Yr most obliged & faithful
[signed] Lau. Sterne.

Letter 5

The address of the following letter to Richard Oswald has not been not preserved. On page 4 of 4 is written and circled, “received at Bremen the 7th April.”

Toulouse March 18 1763

Dear Sir,

I have this moment recd the favour of yours of the 26 of Feby, and before this comes to your hands you will have recd from Mr Mill a number of melancholy ones, all directed to him, from my Ignorance how to direct to You, and not caring to ask a question of poor Mr Oswald which might awaken a suspicion, that I was writing to you unknown to him—Most gladly would I have saved this al-worthy Creature for the great Love I bore him, and for the pity I bore to those, who I knew must love him still more—But He, my dear Sir, who loved him more than Father or Mother, or the tenderest of friends, has thought fit to order Things otherwise—his will be done—it is the only Consolation under the many heart-felt Losses of this kind we are smit with in this Turbulent Passage—& devoutly do I pray to Him who directs all our Events that you my bear up against this, & recover the wound,

if possible, without a Scar: I say if possible—because your Loss is truly great & scarce retrievable—for unless my good will towards him has misled my Judgement of him, He was a Treasure of all that was good & virtuous in a young heart—inflexibly honest in his Sentiments—of great Truth & plainness in his words—hated every Thing that look'd like equivocation,—or that was mean or Meanhearted—He has a just [——?]¹⁵ of Religion, with an Abhorrence of Vice & whatever was debauch'd or savour'd of profess'd Libertinism, So that I have seen him often a Check, but always a Lesson to those of twice his Years. Had God spared him, he had agreed to live with me, so long as he staid in these parts—my House had room enough in it for so good a soul, and my Wife who loved him as if had been her own Son, would have nursed him with the tenderest care—but alas!

What you entrusted me to sift out concerning his elder Brother, I had been prompted to do myself, from this natural Conclusion (for he had told me the Story)—That You would be anxious, when Providence withdrew this Staff from you, to have the Other restored to you—he often talkd to me abt this unfortunate Step of his Brothers, taken upon some sudden disgust, and perhaps in from a wrong Judged Valliancy of Temper, than other motive—He gave me the same Account of his Disposition, that you have done, said he was a just & honest man—but intractably an Enemy to himself. The last Day of his Life which I spent entirly alone with him,—I wish'd him to recollect what pass'd between his Brother & him, when he bid him farewell,—& particularly to tell me what place he first went; he told me he was as much in the dark about that,—and of what were his Views & Destination, as you were. That the Day he left London, his Brother came into the Counting house to him, & shaking him wth some emotion, by the hand,—said “God bless you, George—but as for me, You will never see me more.”—Still, dear Sir, I trust in Providence, that the bitterest Portion of this Prediction is fulfilled; and that whenever or wherever he shall come to hear how cruelly You suffer for the Loss of George—he will fly to your Arms to comfort You. Pray consider with yourself, if I can be of any kind of Service to you in this affair in this part of the world: In two Months, I shall be at the celebrated Spaws of Bagnyars upon the Confines of Spain,¹⁶ where there is all the Summer a Confluence of people from all nations—it is by a multitude of Enquiries & Trials, that more entangled Things have been unravell'd—If to his Name, I had an exact Description of his Person—I would not leave a Stranger unask'd, or one unemploy'd on his return home, to aid us in this search—& I do assure You, Sir, it would not be a short Journey that would stop me in my attempts to find out this poor stray'd sheep, and bring him back to the fold.¹⁷

I return you my acknowledgments for the kind Things you say of me—but in truth, there deserves no more to be said of it, but that I acted here, and hope I ever shall do so, only as I wish others wd act by me or

mine, in like distress – & that is with humanity. I valued your Son, & shall ever honour his memory—but that is another affair.

The Stile in which You found it necessary to write to him upon his pecuniary Transgressions—I see gives You pain; and nothing shews a kind & paternal temper so strongly, as these Strokes of Nature & goodness in your Letters—I assure you, dear Sir, he considered them in the light they deserv;—as the truest tokens of the tenderest Love and most ardent Wished for his Wellfare; & I am confident, the only pain he felt, was the Consciousness of the pain he had given You—he had a heart at once open to conviction—& upon that point, You wd never more have been disturbed, for he had too much Sense to be long a property to Fools, and too much honesty of heart & penetration to continue a Dupe to Knaves—Your Seasonable Letter rescued him only a little earlier from both than he might have done it himself, & this was not one of the least Tokens of Yr Love with wch his heart was penetrated, when he begg'd me to thank you for all your Benefits to him

Adieu, dear Sir, I have the truest Compassion for yr Loss, for I am with the highest Veneration of your good heart and principles.

Yr faithful & most humble Servt,

L. Sterne.

P.S. The Credit of £100 wch yr Son had leave to make use of in Decr I suppose is the same, you mentioned to him in a letter, a most cordially & fatherly one,—which he recd and sent to me abt ten days before he died. I took the Liberty to ask him, what he had done with the money—he told me it had been spent many many months before—I suppose, from his Servant's Acct in his Journey from Italy to Montpelier—his Expenses there,—Physicians, Apothecarys, Chaise, a Present of Claret to Capt Jonings Sister &c &c—all wch is the more likely because he [2 or 3 words lost at torn fold] wth no more than 5 or 6 Louis d'ors in his Pocket—so not one halfpenny of that £100 ever reach'd Toulouse—In short he owed it—& had borrowed the money before he got the Credit—& the Moment he recd the Obligation from You, he discharged his Obligations to others with it. As his last Month or six Weeks was very expensive—he was inclined to have outgone, his Appointment—but I had my reasons agst his drawing for more than usual especially, as I believed my purse would be large enough for us both, for the time he would have Occasion. All his papers I seald up the day before his last, & as I shall possibly be in England as soon as You, shall deliver them safely into Yr own or Mr Mill's hands.

David McClure

¹ Information from old parish records according to www.familysearch.org, 21st December 2001.

- ² Hancock, David, *Citizens of the World: London merchants and the integration of the British Atlantic community, 1735–1785*, (Cambridge, 1995).
- ³ Hancock, *Citizens*, page 64, note 54. Although Richard Oswald’s association with Agnes Barr ended when he moved to London in 1746, his support of her and his sons continued into the 1760s.
- ⁴ Leneman, Leah, “Wives and Mistresses in Eighteenth-century Scotland,” *Women’s History Review*, Volume 8, Number 4, (1999), pages 671–692. An irregular marriage constituted by mutual consent was binding under Scots law.
- ⁵ George Oswald was suffering from pulmonary consumption; i.e. pulmonary tuberculosis.
- ⁶ Fitzgerald, Percy, *The Life of Laurence Sterne*, third edition, (London, 1906), page 262. The portrait of Sterne is taken from this book (“Vincent Brooks, Sculpt.”).
- ⁷ Fitzgerald, *Sterne*, pages 246–247: “[The Sternes] were lodged delightfully, just outside the town, in a stately house, elegant, charmingly furnished, built in the form of a hotel, with a court in front, and opening behind on pretty gardens laid out in serpentine walks, and considered the finest in the place. These grounds were so large and so much admired, that all the ladies and gentlemen of the quarter used to come and promenaded there on the autumn evenings, and were made welcome. Inside, there was a fine dining-room and a spacious reception room—‘quite as spacious as Baron d’Holbach’s at Paris;’ three handsome bedrooms with dressing-rooms, and two good rooms below, dedicated to Yorick [Sterne]—where he wrote his adventures.”
- ⁸ National Archives of Scotland, GD213/53, Oswald of Auchincruive, miscellaneous letters 1764–1784. This, the second of three bound volumes of letters, includes five letters from Laurence Sterne: two addressed to Richard Oswald and three to his partner, John Mill.
- ⁹ Hancock, *Citizens*, pages 68, page 239. Robert Burns, “Ode, Sacred To The Memory Of Mrs. Oswald Of Auchencruive,” 1789.
- ¹⁰ Fitzgerald, *Sterne*, page 251.
- ¹¹ Hancock, *Citizens*, page 68: “His guest list in London included Laurence Sterne, James Boswell and Benjamin Franklin,” though not necessarily together.
- ¹² Schirrhous: covered with hard excrescences. In pathology, a scirrhus is a hard, firm, and almost painless swelling or tumour.
- ¹³ Ettuy: an etui or etwee; a case for small items, such as needles, toothpicks etc.
- ¹⁴ Fitzgerald, *Sterne*, page 251: “He had an invaluable banker in Paris, Mr Foley, of the firm of Panchar & Foley, who was to him more a warm friend than a mere banker.”
- ¹⁵ Word indistinct, but could be ‘scape’, meaning ‘view’, generally of scenery (though here, religion).
- ¹⁶ Bagnères-de-Luchon is a spa in the Pyrenees, about 90 miles from Toulouse. It is in France, but situated in an angle of the border, so that Spain can be seen on three sides of the town, and at the closest point is about three miles distant.
- ¹⁷ Other letters in the same letter book (GD213/53) throw some light on Richard’s fate. According to the NAS catalogue, “three of [Michael] Herries letters (1766) are to Richard Oswald Jr. and his companion (tutor? nurse?) John Ainslie at Brussels, when young Oswald was travelling on the continent for his health. One written to Richard Oswald Sr. from London (June 1768) reports on a visit to “Dick” at Brompton; his bad health, loss of sleep, nervousness etc; his consent to cupping and its apparently beneficial effects when performed. It seems likely that he died soon after this.”

Hugh Pollock: The First Mr Enid Blyton

– An Update

My article on Hugh Pollock, which regular readers of *Ayrshire Notes* may recall in the last issue,¹ has prompted some further research on his life. When I last wrote, I knew neither the date of his birth, nor the date of his death. These I can now supply, together with some other supplementary information.

Hugh Alexander Pollock was born on the 29th July 1888 at Garfield Villa, Hawkhill, Ayr (now 27 Hawkhill Avenue), the house in which his parents – William Smillie Pollock and Jessie Smith McBride, who had married on 29th April 1886 – lived before moving to Bellevue Crescent. Interestingly, the entry in the register gives the child's name as 'Frederick': a change to Hugh Alexander is made in the 'Register of Corrected Entries' in October 1888. It is not possible to ascertain whether this was a mistake on the part of the registrar, or whether there was a desire within the family to change the name of the baby.²

Pollock's marriage with Marion Atkinson has also thrown up an oddity in the records at General Register House. It was known that they had married at the Hotel Dalblair, Ayr, on the 9th October 1913, but the indexes at Edinburgh showed that they had already been married 'by declaration before a sheriff' in Edinburgh on the 1st March of that year. Pollock, who was 24, gave his address as the Windsor Hotel, St Vincent Street, Glasgow, while the 19-year-old Atkinson gave her address as 1 Merrylee Avenue, Newlands, Glasgow.³ It has to be assumed that this was a marriage contracted in the face of opposition from one or other of the families involved.

It is probable that the opposition came from Atkinson's family. Her father, William Atkinson, was something more than a farmer. He was a potato merchant, with interests in a number of farms in and around Ayr, but, more pertinently, he was strongly involved with the Christian Brethren. In his later years he moved to Prestwick, where he gifted to the Brethren the hall in Main Street, Prestwick, which they still use for worship. Mr Atkinson died in 1931.⁴

Hugh Pollock and Marion Atkinson had two children – both sons. The elder, William Cecil Alexander Pollock, was born in 1914 and died in 1916: the younger, Edward Alistair was born in Prestwick in 1915 and died in August 1969. Known as Alistair he is the half-brother who Imogen Smallwood met at a family wedding in Ayr. He farmed Burnbrae Farm, Symington: Jimmy Whyte, Minute Secretary of the AANHNS, worked on a neighbouring farm as a student, and recalls Alistair Pollock as being a typical former RAF type, complete with fair hair and blue eyes.⁵ The connection with Enid Blyton was well known locally.

Hugh Pollock's marriage to Marion Atkinson broke down during the Great War, when she left for another man. We now know that, in November 1929, she contracted a second marriage, with William Andrew, of Barcully Farm, Kirkmichael, and that they had moved to Muirhouse Farm, Monkton, where they were living when she died in Ballochmyle Hospital in December 1959.⁶

And, finally, we have confirmation that Hugh Pollock died in Malta. He died on the 8th November 1971 at the David Bruce Royal Naval Hospital, Mtarfa, and was buried in the Mtarfa Military Cemetery, Rabat.⁷ The author would be happy to commission a photograph from anyone who happens to be visiting Malta.

Rob Close

- ¹ Rob Close, 'Hugh Pollock The First Mr Enid Blyton', in *Ayrshire Notes* 21, Autumn 2001, pages 20–23.
- ² General Register House [GRH], Register of Births 1888, Registration District 612 (St Quivox), entry no.45
- ³ GRH, Register of Marriages 1913, Registration District 685/4 (Edinburgh), entry no.146.
- ⁴ His obituary is in *Ayrshire Post*, 6th November 1931, 9c. Discovery of his connection with the Christian Brethren movement in Prestwick came through ongoing research for *Historic Prestwick*. (AANHS, forthcoming) Another of his daughters, Elizabeth (died in 1959) was Lady Gibson, the wife of Robert Gibson, Lord Gibson, who was MP for Greenock from 1936 to 1941, and Chairman of the Scottish Land Court from 1941 to 1965.
- ⁵ His father also had fair hair and blue eyes.
- ⁶ GRH, Register of Marriages 1929, Registration District 584B (Kirkmichael), entry no.3; GRH, Register of Deaths 1959, Registration District 604 (Mauchline), entry no.345.
- ⁷ Public Registry of Malta, Inscription no.2527, 1971. I have a copy of the certificate supplied by the Public Registry Office in Valletta.

Sawney Bean, Scotland's Cannibal King

Bennane Head, just over three miles north of Ballantrae, looked peaceful in the autumn sunshine. With Ailsa Craig to the north sitting in a mill-pond sea it was hard to imagine that this was once an area to be avoided at all costs. Stories abounded of people vanishing without trace – of legs and arms being washed up on deserted beaches. This was an area that was almost depopulated owing to the evil of one man, Sawney Bean.

Alexander Bean – to give him his proper name – was born in East Lothian, about eight miles from Edinburgh. The son of a hedger and ditcher, work of any kind – far less hard work requiring him to be outside in all weathers – was not for Sawney Bean. Resentful of authority, sullen and prone to idleness, it was never his intention to follow in his father's footsteps. As soon as he was able, Sawney ran away to South-west Scotland and settled in this remote part of the kingdom. For company he took with him a woman as undisciplined and vicious as himself. His 'wife' is unnamed in any reports or papers written about Sawney and his eventual family.

Over the years there have been many doubts raised regarding the authenticity of the story of Sawney Bean. The time of the birth is variously given as the late 14th or the late 16th Century. This confusion probably arises because of confusion between James I of Scotland, and James VI of Scotland (James I of England). Other criminologists and historians carry their scepticism further, stating that Sawney Bean, like Robin Hood, existed only in legend and fable. However, there is a general opinion that Sawney Bean did exist,

and lived in the late 16th to early 17th century, during the reign of James IV. The Ordnance Survey have been sufficiently convinced to show his cave-home on current maps, clearly marked about one mile north of Bennane Head.

Certain mass murderers and serial killers have acquired fame or notoriety from relatively few murders. It is the sensationalism that goes with the crime. Jack the Ripper, probably the best-known example, can be credited (if that is the word) with certainty with only five deaths. More recent murderers such as Jeffrey Dahmass, Ted Bundy and Peter Sutcliffe killed more.¹ Their combined efforts pale into insignificance, however, when you consider that Sawney Bean operated in the Ballantrae area for over 25 years and may have been, with his expanding family, responsible for the deaths of as many as 1,000 people.

In Bean's case he and his wife started their career of crime as a duo. As the years passed she gave birth to eight sons and six daughters. The next generation, of eighteen grandsons and fourteen granddaughters, were all the product of various incestuous relationships. The total number of the clan at the time of their capture was forty-eight. When Sawney and his wife began operating in the Ballantrae area, simple murder and robbery would probably have been sufficient. Thus much have realized at some point that their victims could also be a ready supply of food. Why waste it? After the killings, the unfortunate prey was then borne off to their home in the cave, where the body was butchered, and the surplus meat preserved for future use.

Sawney and his wife would have had only a rudimentary education, if indeed they had any at all. Nevertheless as the family expanded and the children grew up and became an active part of the gang, they developed murder and abduction into a fine art. So efficient was this killing organization that up to six people on foot could be attacked simultaneously. They did, however, limit their attacks on horsemen to *two* victims. Their back-up system blocked off any escape route for their fleeing victims, making death a certainty for those ambushed.

Probably what frightened the local inhabitants most in that superstitious age was not so much that people were being killed, for they did not know that for a fact. It was that they had simply vanished. Superstition in that era was such that witches and warlocks were imagined everywhere. Old women could be, and were, put to death for living alone and having a cat (especially a black cat) as a companion. Adding to the terror was the fact that from time to time along the coastline arms, legs and other body parts were being washed up. Was this the surplus meat being disposed of because it was going off?

Naturally, these disappearances had not gone unnoticed. Periodically the King's men would carry out searches of the area, even along the foreshore. Although people were aware of the huge cave at Bennane Head, they could not imagine anyone living inside. After all, the entrance was several feet under water twice a day, and the pitch-black cave flooded back quite a distance inside. How *could* such a place be habitable?

Apart from the cave, there were two other factors that worked in the Sawney Bean family's favour. They never mixed with anyone outside their own circle. And they never attempted to sell any object they had acquired, however valuable it might have seemed. They knew that its recognition would have led them to the gallows.

As the disappearances continued, so did the alarm in the area increase. The disappearances were still not classed as murders, as no bodies had ever been found. No one could possibly have imagined that the missing people were being eaten!

Innocent people had been arrested and executed over the years – on some occasions merely because they had admitted to being the last person to see a certain victim alive. Innkeepers in the district also came under suspicion and several were hanged because the missing person had spent his last night in a particular hostelry. The authorities thought that draconian justice was the answer to the problem. However, all the accused went to their death swearing their innocence, while innkeepers sold or abandoned their properties. The authorities now found themselves facing another problem: a whole area of south-west Scotland was being depopulated, causing inconvenience to travellers. People would not travel in a district where they could not get board and lodging for themselves, nor have their horses taken care of. Magistrates decided after a meeting that they would rely on God's help to solve the problem, as their own efforts were not having any success.

Government spies were sent out periodically to survey the area: many never returning. Those who returned did so without any information that could help the authorities in the slightest. From time to time there must have been sightings of children playing on the foreshore at low tide, but any close investigation would no doubt have resulted in the disappearance of the investigator.

Despite a lifestyle more suited to the earliest cave-dwellers made, in their case, even more severe by the constant and regular flooding of the cave, the Beans not only survived but seem to have thrived in these appalling conditions.

Even with their elaborate ambush system which allowed no escapees, something – sometime – somehow would go wrong. It may have taken a quarter of a century for a mistake to prove fatal, but in the end it did happen. Returning from a nearby fair, a couple mounted on a single horse were attacked by the gang. The woman was dragged from the beast, had her throat cut (some of the gang were sucking her blood as it pumped from her body) and was then stripped and disembowelled, while her horrified husband fought for his life. There is little doubt he would have met the same fate had not a party of twenty horsemen, returning from the same fair, arrived on the scene. For the first time the hellish family found themselves at a disadvantage. They broke off the attack, scattered and made their way back to the cave.

The husband told his rescuers what had happened. The body of his wife was found a little way off where it had been dragged and abandoned. The party took the unfortunate man to Glasgow, where the Chief Magistrate of the city listened to his tale. Immediately a message was sent to the King. Over the years the list of missing persons had grown longer without any success by the authorities in finding a solution. Here, finally, was proof that the gang lived locally and that cannibalism might be involved.

King James IV decided that the matter would have his personal attention. After four days of discussion with his advisers, a body of soldiers with the king at its head set off for Galloway. It had been decided to include local volunteers, whose knowledge of the area would be invaluable. Led by the lone survivor, the party, which numbered around four

hundred, made for the locality of the attack. They were supplemented by a pack of bloodhounds. This time, nothing was being left to chance.

Despite intensive searching of the region, no trace of any dwelling capable of housing such a large number of people could be found. While the shore was being searched yet again, it seemed almost certain that Sawney and his family would once more have escaped detection, had it not been for the bloodhounds. Stopping at the cave's entrance they would go no further. Howling and yelping the dogs advanced a little way into the cave and refused to come out when called. Torches were brought and, with swords unsheathed, the king's men cautiously made their way into the darkness of the cave. These people, they knew, killed without mercy, so great care was taken as they advanced into what turned out to be a mile-long cave system. Eventually they cornered and apprehended the gang in the main living area of the cave. They were horrified by what they saw: round the walls, arranged in neat rows, were the limbs of men, women and children. Bones were stacked in one of the smaller caves that ran off the main passage.

Clothes, watches, pistols, swords – in fact the rewards of twenty-five years of murder and plunder – were all lying there. Gold and silver coin was also heaped against the wall, this being of no use to such a self-sufficient group. The plunder was carried away and the body parts (it was estimated that the remains of thirty-seven different people were hanging on the cave walls) taken out and given a Christian burial.

As they were marched to Edinburgh word of their infamy went before them. Crowds of people turned out to see this tribe of cannibals who had eluded justice for so long. There was to be no trial. The king dispensed with judge and jury, personally condemning the whole family to death, and ruling that the Bean family had put themselves beyond the due process of law. They were taken to Leith, and the sentence carried out the following day. The men were dismembered, arms and legs being cut off while they were still conscious, and they were left to bleed to death. This process lasted for several hours and was witnessed by the women and children. Afterwards they were divided into groups and burned to death on three huge fires. Contemporary reports said that the family showed no sign of remorse, regret or repentance. But why should they? Sawney Bean's children and grandchildren had grown up knowing nothing but murder and cannibalism. They looked on other human beings merely as a source of food. While abhorrent to us, that was the normal way of life for these unfortunates.

Was this a fitting end to the family? It may have seemed so in the early 17th Century, but in modern times such retribution makes one feel uneasy.²

George Wade

¹ The Gloucester-born editor of this journal would also put in a word for Fred and Rose West. He would also recommend Andrew O'Hagan's book *The Missing*, which, in a very readable manner, brings together the horrors of Gloucester, the predations of Bible John, and a childhood in Irvine New Town.

² Revelations from the Balkans reveal just how closely barbarism lies beneath our civilized veneer. The editor must also admit that, with regard to Sawney Bean, he is firmly in the camp of the disbelievers, but relishes a good story as much as anyone.

The Kilmarnock Junior Flute Band

The following is a transcription of a court report which appeared in the Ayr Observer of 5th February 1833. The case was heard in the Sheriff Small Debt Court, Ayr, at that time the only court in the county with the power to hear debt cases such as this, on the 31st January of that year. At a time when we take universal suffrage, and elections, for granted, when the 2001 General Election created new records for low turn-outs and voter indifference, and when election days are only holidays for those fortunates such as some primary school teachers, whose schools are requisitioned as polling stations, it is interesting to have this insight into the first election held in Kilmarnock after the Great Reform Act of 1832. In this election, Captain John Dunlop of Dunlop defeated James Campbell of Craigie. The suffrage at that election may have been far from universal, but it was a first step in the right direction.

The language of the transcription is, in places, convoluted, and the meaning not always unambiguously clear; however, an image emerges of a populace en fête, with both electors and non-electors celebrating this democratic advance. One can visualise the people of Riccarton – both those with a vote, and those without – marching together behind the bands provided by Captain Dunlop's Election Committee, and celebrating this historic occasion in the Commercial Inn. £100 seems to be a lot of money to spend on musical accompaniment, especially when the opposing candidate, James Campbell, appears to have spent nothing on music and 'had got the benefit of Captain Dunlop's music for nothing'.

Rob Close

The Kilmarnock Junior Flute Band versus Captain Dunlop's Election Committee.

This was an action for payment of £8 for playing in the interest of Captain Dunlop on the day of nomination and day of election. Two of the members of the band, which consists of twenty young men, attended in support of the claim, and six gentlemen of the Captain's committee in support of the defence. It was denied, on the part of the committee, that the pursuers were employed by them to 'discourse sweet sounds' and a written statement in the following terms was read in their behalf –

'We engaged three Bands to whom we have paid £100 for music, during the Election, so much for sound. These fellows of the £8 demand were only boys learning, and not entitled to the Musical franchise at all. They never had cheek enough to apply to us and as for us applying to them, 'twas out of the question. Well then, they applied to the Non Electors who, you saw, supported us, and to these Non Electors these children in play said that if they could in any way introduce them, they would be most willing to blow out a few airs in the best way they could, provided they got a little countenance to assist them in paying for a new bass drum, value about £2 10s. On this, these Nons said they might play, without consulting our Committee, and they did play to the Non Electors, who offered them 40s to

assist in paying for their new bass drum, but you will notice none of our committee ever had any hand in their employment. It is all a device of the Campbell faction to affront us, if possible. The two Nons are in attendance, and will swear to the above facts, so that if these Nons were to pay 10s more than they offered, they would be paying the whole price of the bass drum, whereas the bargain was that they were only to help to pay it. At all events we shall be quit of it, and let these bands of note fly to the Nons'.

In answer the pursuers admitted that they had not been employed directly 'but they had been asked by a non-electors in the confidence of the committee to play the Riccarton people to Kilmarnock', and after that they averred that they had been employed by Mr Wallace, one of the committee, to play to the Nons in the Commercial Inn, and they had accordingly gone there, and Capt. Dunlop and deputations from his committee, visited them during the night.

Mr Wallace stated in reply that they had promised to send the non-electors a band so soon as they would fix upon a house where they were to meet in the evening, and when a message came to him that they had met in the Commercial Inn, and he being applied to by one of the pursuers to know where they were to play, he, under an impression that they belonged to one of the bands engaged by the committee, told them to go to the Commercial Inn. He knew nothing about the players as 'music was the same to him as any other kind of noise', and they had more music offered to them than they could take – 'none of the committee knew nothing about the junior band, no more than the sun is below the earth'. He again averred that they were employed by the non-electors, and that the two persons who had employed them were then present.

One of the non-electors was brought forward and, having been sworn, said that he believed the pursuers had come to play wholly in and through his advice, that some time previous one of the band applied to him to get them employed to play at the election, stating that they did not expect much payment, but something to defray the expense of a bass drum, and he communicated this to Mr Morton, one of the committee, who said that he could not take it upon him to employ them, but he had no doubt that the committee would allow them something if their case was laid before them. That, from what passed, the witness had as much confidence in the committee as that they would cover the expense of the drum, and he desired the band to play the Riccarton people to Kilmarnock, although he did not consider himself expressly authorised to do so. That, after the affair was over, the Committee gave him £2 to give to the band, but which sum they refused.

Mr Ephraim Muir, a witness on the same side, corroborated the foregoing witness in the principal statement. He had spoken to Mr Wallace on the subject, who said that he knew nothing about the junior band, and that they were over run with music and *volunteerly* music too.

Mr Morton admitted that he had been spoken to by the first witness on the subject, but as the matter had never come regularly before the Committee, he considered that what was said were mere words of course.

The Sheriff asked if Mr Campbell's party had not employed some of the bands? – Mr Wallace answered that Mr Campbell had got the benefit of Captain Dunlop's music for

nothing, which had cost about £100. The Sheriff asked the pursuers how long they had played in the Commercial Inn? – Answer, ‘All night, till 2 in the morning’. Sheriff – You would get your whistles wet? – Yes, we got 16s worth. The Sheriff then asked if they had any evidence to prove more direct employment by the Committee, as it did not appear that they had substantiated their claim; and none having been offered, he dismissed the case, expressing an opinion that they were very well off with the £2 which had been offered them, and which Mr Wallace remarked, on leaving the bar, would still be given.

Book Review

Jean Aitchison, **Servants in Ayrshire 1750–1914**

AANHS, Ayrshire Monographs 26, Ayr, 2001, ISBN 0 9527445 5 4, £5.00, 144 pages.

Jean Aitchison has been a well known face in archives and libraries in Ayrshire and beyond for many years, en route to her M.Phil. The AANHS has been fortunate to share the fruits of her research, in this handsome and affordable publication. Many aspects of servitude are explored here, including the dynamics of the master–servant relationship, the mechanics of hiring and firing, and conditions of service.

A glance at the copious references shows that the author has trawled a diverse range of sources exhaustively, including acts of parliament and the general assemblies of the Church of Scotland and Free Kirk, estate and family papers, tax records, published diaries and lives of servants and families or individuals they served, and newspapers. Most of these would appear obvious sources of information to researchers in the subject, and, in other circumstances, might provide a view of servants largely from employers and the authority of the church and state. However, the indefatigable author has extended her study to less obvious sources such as burgh records, poetry and song, kirk session minutes, oral history recordings, and poorhouse records. As a result she is able to convey something of the experience of servants in the wider world, migrating and emigrating, committing crime, suffering illness and poverty, and pursuing leisure and literacy.

The monograph is amply illustrated, competently indexed, and contains useful appendices, including a list of employment agencies extracted from postal directories, 1845–1915; the rules and regulations of Ayr Female Friendly Society, 1804–5; tables of wages and prices from first two Statistical Accounts and the Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws in Scotland, 1844; and transcripts of servant tax returns in the National Archives of Scotland, 1787–8.

Rob Urquhart

Notes and Queries

Smith's Close

In his review of *Street Names of Ayr*, David Smith mentioned that neither the author nor he had been able to find Smith's Close, Ayr, with which we adorned the cover of the last issue. This has now been identified as 40 High Street, long the property of John Smith (c.1812–1887), brewer in Ayr. We also miscalled the etcher, who is T Bonar Lyon (1873–1955).

Ayrshire Bibliography

Again we appeal for contributions to a proposed bibliography of Ayrshire. Many smaller booklets, especially church guides and the like, do have an interest beyond their immediate market. Please let us know what is available in your area.

Poverty in Ireland and the state of clothing in Scotland

In her recently published work, *Servants in Ayrshire 1750–1914* (reviewed on page 24), Jean Aitchison mentions the problem of Irish vagrants on the post road between Portpatrick and Glasgow at the end of the eighteenth century. The following note concerning the wretchedness of the Irish poor, throws some light on the condition of the clothing of the population of Scotland, or at least the author's low opinion of it. It comes from *Encyclopædia Britannica*, supplement to the fourth, fifth and sixth editions (1816–24).

The dress of the people is so wretched, that, to a person who has not visited the country, it is almost inconceivable. Shoes or stockings are seldom to be seen on children and often not on grown persons. The rags in which both men and women are clothed are so worn and complicated, that it is hardly possible to imagine to what article of dress they have originally belonged. It has been observed that the Irish poor never take off their clothes when they go to bed; but the fact is, that not only are they in general destitute of blankets, but, if they once took off their clothes, it would be difficult to get them on again. Their dress is worn day and night till it literally falls to pieces; and even when it is first put on, it is usually cast-off clothing; for there is not one cottager out of ten who ever gets a coat made for himself. A considerable trade has long been carried on from the west of Scotland to Ireland, consisting of the old clothes of the former country, and to those who know how long all ranks in Scotland wear their dress, there is no more convincing proof of the poverty of the latter country can be given.

Covens and Covenanters

As part of Dumfries & Galloway Local History Week, a conference is to be held at Easterbrook Hall, The Crichton, Bankend Road, Dumfries on Saturday 11th May, entitled "Covens and Covenanters: Witchcraft and Religion in South West Scotland." The cost is £11 (or £18 including lunch). Booking forms may be obtained from the conference secretary, Mrs Hazel Glover, 2 Marwhirn Cottage, Moniaive, Dumfriesshire DG3 4JE.

Ayrshire Federation of Historical Societies

Annual General Meeting 2002

The Federation's Annual General Meeting for 2002 will be held on Sunday 19th May 2002, in Beith. Our hosts are the Beith Historical Society. The meeting will begin at 2.00 p.m., and the day will probably include visits to the Auld Kirk in Beith, and to the work of restoration and conservation which is due to begin in the centre of Beith this spring. Besides this, and the routine business of the AGM, there will be the usual opportunity for the exchange of information, news, problems and gossip.

We look forward to seeing many of you there, and encourage you to take this opportunity to spend a day in the Valley of the Garnock. Travellers from the south of the county might consider visiting Dalgarnen Mill on their way to Beith. Further details will be sent to members, and member societies, in due course, but we hope that you will keep the day free, and be able to attend.

One of the highlights of the day will be the annual presentation of the John Strawhorn Quach to someone who has made a noteworthy contribution to local history in Ayrshire. The Committee has made a decision: come along and decide whether you agree with us. It may not be Pop Idol or Big Brother, but it's as close as we get!

Conference 2002

Following the success of our Conference in October 2000, the Federation has agreed to hold another Conference in October 2002. The venue will be the Walker Hall, Troon, and the date, Saturday, 26th October 2002. Confirmed speakers include Michael Moss from Glasgow University, Charles McKean from Dundee, Elaine McFarland from Caledonian University, Elspeth Reid from Falkirk, and Ayr's Alastair Hendry. The chairman will be Sheriff David Smith. The cost of the day will be £10. Book now with Rob Close. A flyer is enclosed; please use this to badger your friends into coming along.

Diary for 2002–2003

The diary for the Winter Season 2002–2003 will appear in the next issue of *Ayrshire Notes*. Secretaries of all societies are encouraged to send syllabuses to Rob Close. Address on inside front cover.

Diary

- AANHS Ayrshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. Meetings in Carnegie Library, Ayr, at 7.45 p.m.
- CSD Catrine Sorn & District History Society. Meetings in A M Brown Institute, Catrine, at 7.30 p.m.
- KCCS Kyle and Carrick Civic Society. Meetings in Loudoun Hall, Ayr, at 7.30 p.m.
- KDHG Kilmarnock & District History Group. Meetings in Kilmarnock College at 7.30 p.m.
- LDHS Largs and District Historical Society. Meetings in Largs Museum at 7.30 p.m.
- L(MS) LDHS, Marine Section. Meetings in Largs Museum at 7.30 p.m.
- LNAFHS Largs & North Ayrshire Family History Society. Meetings in Largs Library at 7.30 p.m.
- MHS Maybole Historical Society. Meetings in Maybole Town Hall, High Street, Maybole at 7.30 p.m.
- PHG Prestwick History Group. Meetings in 65 Club, Main Street, Prestwick, at 7.30 p.m.
- SHS Stewarton Historical Society. Meetings in St Columba's Church Hall, Stewarton, at 7.30 p.m.
- WKAS West Kilbride Amenity Society. Meetings in Community Centre, West Kilbride, at 7.30 p.m.

March 2002

Mon 4th	MHS	tbc	Ayrshire Mansions
Mon 4th	L(MS)	John Baxter	Seabed Surveys around St Kilda
Mon 4th	KCCS	Rob Close	The Architects of Ayrshire
Mon 4th	SHS	Iain Middleditch	Preserving History through Models
Tue 5th	KDHG	David Munro	The Voyage of the <i>Scotia</i>
Thu 7th	PHG	tbc	
Tue 12th	LNAFHS	Lesley Cooper-White	Watt Library (Greenock) Records
Thu 14th	AANHS	Nigel Price	Plant Collecting in China
Tue 19th	KDHG	Janet McBain	From Here to Posterity
Thu 28th	LDHG	Elaine Edwards	Kittochside – the Museum of Scottish Country Life

April 2002

Mon 1st	L(MS)	Isobel Glasgow	The Firth of Clyde Forum
Mon 1st	MHS	Audrey Dakin	Preservation of Monuments and Stonework
Thu 4th	PHG	Alex Young	Glenburn 1914 – 1920
Mon 8th	SHS	John McGill	Loudoun Castle
Tue 9th	LNAFHS	Kevin Wilbraham	Ayrshire Archives

May 2002

Thu 2nd	PHG	members	Blether of 2002
Mon 6th	MHS	Gordon Riddle	Culzean

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NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY*

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